

## **CLOP CLOP - You can lead a horse to water....**

... but you can't make it put together a successful piece of writing. The whole hoof thing and lack of opposable thumbs gets in the way of text creation in general and successful writing in particular. Language learners on the other hand, can be helped with this.

Within the literature on the subject, there are three main approaches to writing: Product, Process and Genre and a useful overview of all three is given in [Badger & White's article in the ELT Journal \(2000\)](#). Here the product approach is described more as written practice of a target language item or text type than developing the writing skill, though the control over what the learners write is gradually lessened as the learners demonstrate increasing mastery. Process approaches attempt to mimic stages of the natural process of writing: Hedge (2005) gives these stages as communicating, composing, crafting and improving. Process approaches invert the problem with product approaches, as the focus is on developing the writing skill rather than achieving mastery of a text type, though understanding of a given text type and its relationship to audience may form part of a pre-writing stage. Badger & White (2000) then describe genre approaches to writing, which they see as sharing aspects of the product approach, but differing in the view of language that is taken as genre approaches focus on the context and the audience for which writing is produced. Learners analyse a model for structure, form and language, before continuing in what is essentially a product approach. Their article then goes on to recommend, echoing their article title, what they term "A process-genre approach".

Within this approach, which they see as a synthesis of product, process and genre, any piece of writing needs to be firmly grounded in the situation or context in which it is created, and will therefore be created for a specific purpose. This then has obvious implications for register (i.e. formality and informality), specific language required (i.e. language of persuasion, discussion, recommendation) and of course structure and organisation (i.e. text type features – letters, reports, essays etc). Once the writer has considered these ideas, they adopt features of a process approach – planning, drafting and editing – before arriving at a "final" text.

This is emphasised as a cyclical process, where work done at any stage of the text creation will inform the creation process and possibly lead to revision of the text or reconsideration of a previous stage. There are also opportunities for input at each stage, either from the teacher, the learners or other texts that may serve as a model.

This is all highly useful for teachers to consider and to work with as an overall strategy to develop learners' writing skills, but is perhaps a little unwieldy for the learners themselves. It might be handy therefore, to provide learners with something simple to remember and to use as a guide when approaching a writing task, and on which they can build as their skills develop and their learning progresses.

With that in mind, the acronym CLOP might serve this purpose.

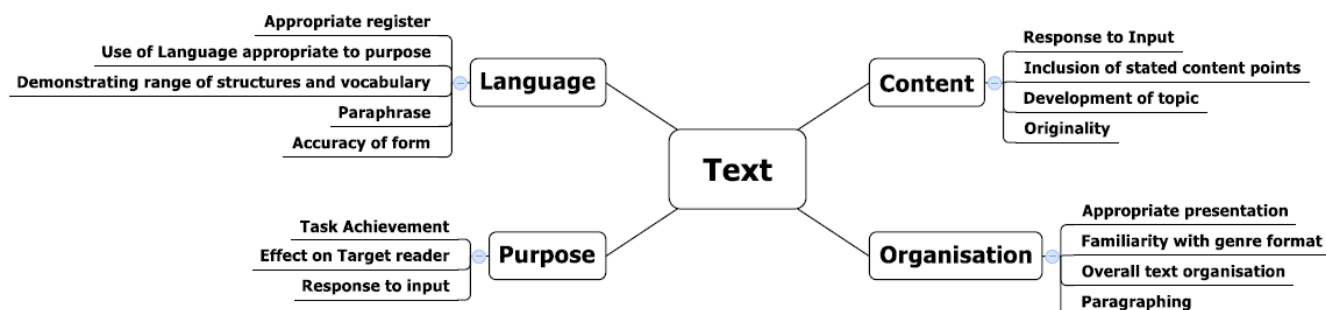
CLOP stands for: CONTENT, LANGUAGE, ORGANISATION, PURPOSE. Strictly speaking, it might be better as PCOL if we want to keep things in sequence, but that makes a poor and unmemorable acronym and we'd have to lose the horse metaphor completely.

In simple terms, Content asks learners to think about what they want to (or need to) write about. Language asks learners to think about any functions or lexis you might need to use. Organisation considers ideas such as paragraphing and overall text structure / layout. Purpose asks learners to consider why they are writing it in the first place – what do they hope their writing will achieve.



With lower level learners, this initially simplistic approach should help inform the creation of their texts in a way they can easily understand and work with. With higher level learners and with learners working towards language exams, the CLOP acronym can be used as a question analysis tool. Identifying the content points required in language exam tasks is often one of the areas learners fall down on, but once that is satisfactorily achieved, half the battle is over.

In their book, "[How to teach for... Exams](#)", [Burgess and Head \(2005\)](#) suggest a process approach be adopted overall, which is possibly superseded by Badger & White's process genre approach. Nevertheless, Burgess and Head do suggest a number of factors that learners need to take into account for exam writing. These can all be contained within the CLOP paradigm and have been included in the diagram as given below:



By familiarising learners with these ideas, in particular those of purpose and content, we can effectively help learners to raise their game sufficiently to create a successful text that achieves what is required of it.

From a classroom point of view, doing a CLOP analysis of target questions, for example those found in practice test books, should help learners understand what is required of their writing, identify relevant content and be able to present their writing in a structured and organised way, though additional work may need to be done on organisation, layout and language features relating to specific genres. If teachers ask their learners to do a CLOP analysis of a specific question, learners can then compare their ideas with the task specific mark schemes that are frequently given within the "answers" sections of test books, or at the end of past papers. This comparison, particularly where learners have mis-identified content points, may well help the learners along the path to a successful exam performance.

### Further reading / references:

Badger, R. & White, G. (2000). A process genre approach to teaching writing. *ELT Journal*, 54(2), 153-160.

Burgess, S. & Head, K. (2005). *How to Teach for Exams*. Harlow: Pearson Education Ltd.

Hedge, T. (2005). *Writing* (2<sup>nd</sup> ed.). Oxford: Oxford University Press.