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## Methodological model for teaching written professional communication

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### Abstract

Despite the significance of the ability to write in the ET classes writing as a means of exploring and communicating ideas to achieve professional goals is the most ignored of the language skills. The article discusses how the application of genre-based pedagogy can transform the way ESP and EAP teachers teach written communication skills in Russia. It also suggests to structure writing curriculum around the genres of professional and academic communication. It describes a teaching strategy that systematically takes learners through the stages involved in training writing skills and enables them improve critical thinking through writing activities.

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### 1. Introduction

The innovative changes in Russia's higher education, in general, and teaching foreign languages, in particular have been brought about by a number of factors. The consolidation of the world economies and the integration of Russia into the global world has automatically meant more connections to other countries and more demands on

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communication skills. The country's joining the Bologna Process [A] has entailed establishing partnerships with many European universities, launching students' and teachers' exchange programmes.

The expanded use of technology has made written electronic communication a *sine qua non*, and thus, put extra demands on teachers, whose task is to assist their students to develop language competencies for participation in global information-oriented society in which written literacy is a fundamental skill.

The growing complexity of all spheres in people's lives has placed language proficiency with focus on writing skills among the most important elements in a specialists' professional repertoire. The ability to write and move with ease across discourse boundaries is an important requirement of successful professional communication. It gives graduate the competitive edge on the job market and therefore, is recognized as the value added to their qualifications.

The significance of writing can also be proved by the fact that international proficiency tests such as the International English Language Testing System (IELTS) or Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL) or BEC (Business English Certificate), LCCI (The London Chamber of Commerce and Industry) English for Business, CAE (Certificate in Advanced English), etc. take special account of the particular writing skills that the candidate will be expected to deal with in their professional life.

Along these lines we should not but mention the recommendations set forth by the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) [B] that worked out the European Language Portfolio, a collection of student's works, which not only promotes ownership of students' writing, but also provides mechanism by which students can assess their own strengths and weaknesses as writers (Murphy and Smith, 1992).

## 2. Problem statement

Paradoxically enough, being highly important professional skill writing has not been acted adequately or put in place in the English language teaching curricula in Russia. Traditionally, the writing assignments in the textbooks do not always provide students with information necessary to help them develop effective writing strategies. The purpose of the writing activity in Russian classrooms is to check grammar, vocabulary or syntax, in other words, to focus primary on language structure rather than on communicative writing strategies. As a result more often than not Russian students who demonstrate high level of theoretical and basic knowledge and high level of language competence are less prepared to present their ideas and express themselves in writing in a structured format (Bennett et al., 2006).

Let us, however, look at the problems not as a barbarian invasion which threatens the existing system of education but as the challenge that should be grasped and used to equate training with employment. What is needed is optimization of the traditional Educational strategy for foreign language acquisition in terms of structure, time, pace of studying and feedback. What is needed is a course in English Written Communication that would go beyond practicing particular writing skills that are often associated with ESP, i.e. correct use of language in terms of grammar, vocabulary and syntax, and focus on developing competences to help students master genres and strategies appropriate to their professional and academic specialization.

In what follows the foundations of the conceptual model, its rationale and methodology will be discussed in detail. Since the model to develop students' writing skills is based on genre theory and process approach, a brief overview of the notions in question is a must.

## 3. The concept of Writing and Language Competencies

Let us first consider the concept of writing and competences needed to be developed for effective written communication. V. Zamel talks of writing as "a process through which meaning is created" (Zamel, 1987, p. 195). According to D.P. Harris, writing is a productive and complex skill "requiring simultaneous use of different abilities which often develop at different rates" (Harris, 1977, p. 4). Thus, writing is considered as a linguistic competence, which requires writers to:

- have knowledge of structural organization of a written text, rules of paragraph development, coherence, etc;
- be aware of basic rhetorical categories like comparison and contrast, cause and effect, exemplification, etc;

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