CHAPTER III

THE WRITING PROCESS

3.0 INTRODUCTION

Writing by way of committing oneself to paper has acquired academic importance with (a) the universalisation of education, (b) the need to share our thoughts with the general public by contributing articles to newspapers, magazines, and writing books, and (c) to live as a responsible citizen - the need to write to the government and private agencies on personal and official matters. These have necessitated courses on writing and there has of late been a wealth of research on them. Courses on academic writing, on expository essays, reports, theses, etc. are designed, tried out, and modified. They are offered to fulfil the students' academic and social needs.

Writing is the cultivation of one's ability to control/sway other people's emotions/ideas. Maeve Bichy, a best-selling Irish novelist and short-story writer, recalled his writing experience in the class with the teacher in the 1988 BBC Radio Ulster series entitled 'Educating the Artist' with Jude Collins (1990:52). He enjoyed writing when he discovered that he could, have the
power, sometimes, to hold the people. When he wrote a good essay or if anyone in the class wrote a good essay and it was read out, it was very satisfying. He had felt elated at the thought of having impressed his fellow pupils. That was what had encouraged him to develop a love for writing.

3.1 THE NATURE OF WRITING

3.1.1 Writing is not just the result of "emotions recollected in tranquility" nor merely the best words put in the best order. It is also not a response to the stimulus of a nightingale singing in its "full-throated ease" when the writer would feel as "though of Hemlock he has drunk".

Such Wordsworthian and Keatsian notions of writing verse have influenced one's ideas on writing in general. Many thus see the ability to write as a gift one is born with. It is an art only a few possess and a magical wand one wields to "transport" (in the sense of Longinus) a reader. Writers are artists and artists are born. They are to be admired rather than followed. Dr. Samuel Johnson's definition of an essay as "a loose sally of the mind, an irregular, indigested piece, not a regular and orderly performance" has also enveloped the writing process in the smog of impracticability.
At the other extreme, we have notions of writing as a mechanical process - one needs only to follow certain rules of grammar and syntax to form sentences to convey the thoughts. Many a time instructions on writing mean only teaching the mechanics of framing sentences.

Whether writing is an art or a craft, the result of an inborn ability or a learned skill, it has an aura attached to it because of the nature of the written word. Moreover, it has to be learned in a formal situation because "it is primarily the result of knowing how to structure ideas on paper" (Brusaw et al. 1982). Further, it is produced in conformity with the conventions of the language and these conventions have to be learnt.

3.1.2 However, writing is not just an academic activity to fulfil learners needs, or just following certain conventions of language. It is a process of learning as well. Successful learning involves the features and strategies of "reinforcement and feedback" (Emig 1977:87-88). In this sense, writing is learning, for it is used to reinforce what has been learned and it serves as a feedback to the teacher. To the learners too it serves as "some tangible evidence that they are making progress in the language" (Bryne 1979:7), for the written product is readily available for review and redrafting. If "the thoughts are not precise at the first written
reformulation, they can be made so at a second attempt" (Woodford, in Ward 1968:14).

Jerome Bruner (quoted in Emig 1977: 122-28) posits three major ways in which we represent and deal with actuality: 1) enactive - we learn 'by doing'; 2) iconic - we learn 'by depiction in an image'; and 3) representational or symbolic - we learn by 'restatement in words'. In enactive learning, the hand predominates; in iconic, the eye; and in symbolic, the brain. In this sense, writing is a learning process, for

the symbolic transformation of experience through the specific symbol system of verbal language is shaped into an icon (the graphic product by the enactive hand)... Writing, through its inherent re-inforcing cycle involving hand, eye and brain marks a uniquely powerful multi-representational mode of learning.

3.1.3 In a sense, "Writing is the formulating of thought, the shaping of thought into sentences, and the arranging of thought into sentences on a page for the purpose of persuasion" (Neman 1983:1). It is more than the production of graphic symbols, for it requires some conscious mental effort. One has "to travel a long, long road from no writing skill at all ... before he is able independently to write meaningful sentences and well-organized paragraphs" (Corbin 1966:1).
As a process of learning, writing contributes to our understanding of any subject and, in a unique way, facilitates a writer's attempt to understand a particular subject. The following assumptions seem to underlie this view:

1) The process of writing entails some conscious exploration of the subject matter one plans to write about.

2) In carrying out this exploration, a writer begins both to improve his understanding of the subject at hand and to formulate assertions that may appear in the draft.

3) Finally, in exploring different subjects or even different sets of information within a given academic course, a writer may have to engage in somewhat different conceptual activities (Odell 1980, in Tate and Corbett 1988:104).

In the process of learning to write well, one increases one's ability to think clearly and logically, for this kind of thinking necessarily precedes, or coincides with, the writing of effective, well-organized prose. Furthermore, the act of writing puts one in touch with the ideas about a particular subject and provides a sort of
practice in exploring and ordering the thoughts (Neman 1983). In this way, writing is a process of thinking.

By teaching writing, one therefore strengthens the students' ability to think more logically and rigorously. Greater lucidity and accuracy in writing results from clarity and precision in thinking. "We think in words, and in writing we try to capture our thoughts. Writing is therefore a creative process" (Barrass 1978:11).

Woodford (in Ward 1968:17) strongly advocates a course in scientific writing as an essential component of every scientist's training. The object of a university training, he asserts, is not so much the acquisition of knowledge as the development of the power to think. One can strengthen scientific thinking by teaching scientific writing.

To add to this, in this age of science and technology, the art of writing has assumed a new dimension for scientists and technocrats. Writing helps them to observe. Observation is the basis of science and preparing a description like making an accurate drawing needs a sharp focus of attention to details. "Writing is necessary for precise description and is an aid to learn" (Barrass 1978:9-10). One needs accurate words to give a precise definition. It then follows that by delving into words, one trains the mind to clarify one's thoughts. To a scientist,
then, an essay is not a "loose sally of the mind", as Dr. Johnson put it, but a written account of a well-defined subject, clear, decisive, systematic, and comprehensive.

3.1.4 Writing is also an act of discovery, a way of generating ideas. The very act of writing can generate ideas and change our preconceived notions about the idea being written about. "It is only by engaging in the process of writing that writers ultimately discover what it is that they want to say" (White 1988:4). Writers develop their ideas intuitively as they write and create meaning during writing. Writing, therefore, is not a process which is smooth and linear, but is messy, convoluted and uneven. Writers write, plan, revise, anticipate, and review throughout the writing process, moving back and forth among the different operations involved in writing without any apparent plan (Hairston 1982:85). It is thus not a predictable act, for the end is a surprise and a discovery of meaning. Murray (quoted in White 1988:9) goes even further - he sees writing as taking on an existence of its own, and talks about encouraging a piece of writing to find its own meaning.

Writing is a process of discovery in another way too. We structure in words the thoughts and ideas that are already there implicitly and inchoately and bring them out as something tangible.
We see something new in our writing that comes upon us as a surprise. We see in our words a further structuring of the sense we began with ... and end up with a product ... that explicates or enlarges our experience. In this way, writing leads to discovery (Perl 1980 in Tate and Corbett 1988:117). It is "a serendipitous experience, an act of discovery" (Flower and Hayes 1981:377). It is "a way in which writers explore and clarify their thoughts and even discover new ideas" (Xiaochun 1990:35).

Writing is also a means of using language to discover meaning in experience and to communicate it. When ideas, thoughts, and experiences are expressed through writing, the language becomes more than a mere medium of expression. Writing moulds the thoughts that the writer experiences. Indeed, the written text that emerges to the view is not exactly the same as what the writer had conceived in the initial stage of planning and preparation. Ideas emerge, the focus shifts, and personal experiences get validated as the writing progresses. It is through the act of writing that "ideas are explored, clarified, and reformulated, and as this process continues, new ideas suggest themselves and become assimilated into the developing patterns of thought" (Zamel 1983:166).
3.2 KINDS OF WRITING

There are different kinds of writing. The college courses lay stress on writing tasks like formal and informal letters, general reports, laboratory reports, technical reports, case studies, summaries, general essays, textual summaries, etc.. One main constraint in the execution of these tasks is that of time. The students are required to do the writing within a specified time, whether it is in the regular weekly composition or in the examination. In both, there is the time-limit and, hence, always the sprint with time. Home assignments too are often required to be submitted on time.

Secondly, materials for the writing tasks are provided from various sources. In the case of laboratory reports, the students have to report the actual experiment done and there is a conventional format. The student has merely to fit the matter into the frame. With repeated tasks, the student experiences no difficulty. In letter-writing too, there is the format. Only matter and language are the student's. As for summarising, it involves the student's understanding of the original passage and the need for some language skill but not much of originality in writing.
Thirdly, the writing tasks are teacher-oriented and the teachers' prescriptions matter much. Teachers tend to grade high either matter or manner, or both. The language skill is graded depending on the teacher's personal views.

In all these tasks, the students do not have any problem with finding the content as it is inherent in the experiment done in the case of a laboratory report and, in other cases, the prescribed text provides it. For some project works, the data are collected and the student has only to document and interpret them. In letter-writing too, the content is specified and the student has to develop it within limits.

If the students have language skills and are provided with models or formats, the writing tasks do not appear to pose a problem. This is the reason for the teachers stressing the importance of grammar exercises and the provision of models, for word choice and sentence structures seem to matter much. The assumption is that once these two hurdles are passed, the passage is clear. Since students are hard pressed for time both in the submission of the home assignment and in doing the class work, organization of content into a pre-formulated pattern of writing, with practice, saves time.
To attempt such writing, students need to have the capacity to sift the relevant ideas for a particular writing task either from the text, or lectures, or brainstorming, or from a combination of these, and to arrange them in the proper order to make the text cohesive and coherent. Models and formats are only to be filled with the relevant data.

The academic, functional writing might be 1) Social: formal, informal, and semi-formal letters, 2) Academic: essays for examinations, precis, summaries, project reports, etc., and 3) Professional: reports of various kinds, seminar papers, journal articles, etc..

As against these academic exercises we have the reflective, expository, and persuasive writing where "style is the man" and where we hear the egocentric voice of the writer. Here "the writer discovers much of his or her thoughts during the writing process" (Hairston 1986:445). The content and form emerge as one writes. Formulas and models, if blindly followed, restrain the process of writing rather than aid the learners. Mere language ability does not ensure good writing, for the act of writing presupposes a need to write and an urge to say something (Orwell 1965 in Collins 1990). In this kind of reflective and speculative writing, "the writer has a set of ideas, and the form which best fits the purpose is the one that is
selected... the urge is as often to transcend the form, give it an individual treatment" (Collins 1990:52).

It would be too simplistic to say that the academic writing required of the students is only of the first kind. Students must be taught to work comfortably in both kinds of writing, to understand how the two types differ. Moreover, academic writing contains elements that would need some originality on the part of the students, and, similarly, in reflective and speculative writing the writers get ideas from other sources too (Hastings 1986).

Hence, the teacher of writing cannot be rigid in his approach to the writing tasks. He cannot fully rely on formats and organization of ideas into a coherent text or encourage students to 'discover meaning' for themselves in the writing process in free composition. Different kinds of writing need different processes and a student to develop 'a consummated skill' in writing must know what he is required to do for the particular task.

Apart from the students of English literature, who are required to attempt critical writing, the others in the colleges and universities use writing primarily to communicate with the wider world. It is therefore the task of the teacher of writing to teach academic writing, which is functional in nature.
3.3 THE WRITING PROCESS

3.3.1 Whatever might be the kind of writing required of the students, the teacher must find effective ways to impart the skill of writing. If writing is to aid learning, thinking, and be an act of discovery, the right processes must be built into the design of the writing programme, classroom strategies, and the selection of suitable materials. A study of how good writers write would help the teacher of writing to build the elements of an effective writing process into the classroom methodology. This leads us to the question of what good writers do to convey their thoughts effectively, what happens during writing in the mind of the writers, and what considerations weigh most with them.

Thinking-aloud protocols from both expert and novice writers have given us some idea of what transpires in their mind during writing. These "protocols include a transcript of tape recording made by writers instructed to verbalise their thinking process as they write, as well as all written material the writer produced" (Flower and Hayes 1980, in Tate and Corbett 1988:94).

Perl's (1980) views on the writing process based on the protocol analysis of thinking-aloud writing on the topic, "My Most Anxious Moment as a Writer" conducted by Anne, answer these questions. In the experiment conducted,
a group of twenty teachers, who were taking a course in research and basic writing at New York University in 1979, were told to compose aloud while writing on the above topic and the verbalisations were taped and analysed.

The major findings of the study were the following: Writing is not a linear process with a strict plan-write-revise sequence. There is a lot of backward movements which consist of a) a rereading little bits of discourse. (The rereading in not necessarily a syntactic one, but rather a semantic one as defined by the writer. It is also done to reassess the direction the writing is taking and to find out if the words have adequately captured the intended meaning.) b) a return to the notion of the topic. (Writers consistently return to their notion of the topic throughout the writing process. When struck anytime during the process, they use the topic or a key word in it as a way to get going again, i.e., reread the topic they were given, changing it to suit what they have been writing, or changing what has been written to suit their notion of the topic.)

The protocol analysis of the writing process has great implications for the designing and implementation of writing courses.

Writing thus does not start with putting the ideas on paper the moment the task is given. Even with mature
student-writers on a supposedly simple task, some amount of planning, organization, revision, and feedback goes into the composition. In any attempt at writing, the different constituent stages can be broadly grouped under three major phases - pre-writing, during writing or writing, and post-writing.

"Pre-writing activities may be taken as activities, whether mental or physical, engaged in specifically with the intention of producing a coherent written text with good content and logical organization" (Adegbija 1991:227). In simple terms, they refer to the activities that prepare the learner to face the written task. "It is the stage before words emerge on paper" (Flower and Hayes 1981:367).

Adegbija (1991:228) has found out through a questionnaire administered to the students that their pre-writing activities relate to

1) preparing their minds and thoughts for the writing task ahead of them;

2) tapping their repertoire of experiences, world knowledge, and those of others;

3) enhancing their prospects for producing a well-ordered, well-organized, fluent, and coherent text; and
4) equipping themselves with the linguistic tools for communicating exactly what they intend to communicate.

Thus, the pre-writing activities have "an inbuilt motivating power" (Ibid., p.232) and can help students see writing as an academic pleasure and motivate them to effectively perform writing tasks in their various disciplines in that they open the door to knowledge of what must be said and how it can be organized for effective communication (Ibid., p.234).

Pre-writing activity would mean mainly tapping the internal knowledge and attitudes of the learner if he has to write primarily from personal experiences, immediate observation, and a pre-selected context. But for many kinds of academic writing, the learner must master the strategies of collecting, synthesizing, and interpreting new information collected from various sources. The former requires independent thinking and developing a personal standpoint, while the latter is cognitively more demanding and requires greater skill for organizing the ideas.

3.3.2 The nature of content and the purpose for which it is meant will decide the tenor of the language and the genre. The same content for different purposes, be it to inform,
to persuade, or merely to report, assumes different forms of language and different formats.

Protocol analyses have shown that when writers begin to write, they are confronted by two questions: 1) Why am I writing this? 2) Who will read it? The questions lead us to the notions of purpose of writing and a sense of audience. The purpose and the audience are closely related: "Without an appropriate audience, much writing ceases to have a purpose" (Collins 1990:51).

Audience awareness assumes much importance because it influences the plan and directs the course of writing. Just as the spoken form of the language is an interaction between the speaker and the listener/s, the written form is one between the writer and the reader/s. As the speaker adapts his speech to the kind of audience he faces, the writer too must know about the readers he aims at reaching through his writing.

Unlike in speaking where the audience is always external giving the feedback, in writing the writer has to be his own audience to anticipate and understand audience reaction. When he rereads what has been composed, he views the composition from the readers' angle too (Wall 1982:12, in Ede and Lunsford 1984:158). The learner-writer must learn to distance himself from his own writing to view it from the audience perspective. Therefore, "writers, like
successful speakers, must analyse the audience's beliefs, traits, and attitudes, so that they could adapt their discourses to them" (Kroll 1984:172).

What would be the impact of a text on the reader if the writer does not have audience awareness is amply brought out by Kroll (1984:173). He quotes the following short paragraph from a college student's persuasive essay and states that the writer's failure to select the most convincing strategies stems from his lack of audience awareness:

The arguments against trapping wild animals for their fur, here in Iowa, are all based on emotions. Anti-trappers are convinced animals suffer intolerable and unjustified pain while in traps. I believe that, with their unsound reasoning, they cause all humans intolerable and unjustified pains. Let me tell you why their arguments are unsound.

By taking a hostile stance towards anti-trappers, the writer alienates the very readers he hopes to persuade. By being dogmatically judgmental, he will fail to convince even those who are open-minded. In writing, especially in persuasive writing, the writer's anticipation of audience response determines its effect.
The concept of audience awareness is further reinforced by the fact that the act of writing is a process of conveying information to the reader. It is a three-way relationship between the writer, thesis (writing), and readers, a relationship in which the writer tries to express ideas in such a way that the readers are persuaded to accept the writer's view of the subject, the thesis (Neman 1983:18).

In this interaction, the writer must anticipate the readers' difficulty in getting the information. The difficulties may be with regard to the matter or the manner of presentation. He should consider what the readers know and do not know, and what they are and are not interested in. His egocentric tendency, i.e., the assumption that the others already share the knowledge and views he has, may lead to a lack of clarity in expression and thought. The writer's familiarity with various genres, forms of writing, and ability to structure the information/content would help him to get the message across. "The writer's job is thus to facilitate the intake of information, designing a text so
that the readers will encounter few obstacles to their understanding and will thus comprehend the text with a minimal amount of effort" (Kroll 1984:172).

This emphasis on the need for the writer to be aware of and anticipate audience reaction should not lead us to view readers as mere receptors of information from the writer. The reader is not all the time a passive receptor of ideas given in the text. He actually constructs the text since "reading is an act of personal interpretation, evaluation and effective response" and "the meaning of the text is not on the page to be extracted by readers; rather, it is what results when they engage" (Dillon 1981:11).

Since writing is very much an audience-centred activity, the classroom teacher must take into consideration this aspect of writing in framing tasks. Raimes (1983) has shown that audience awareness makes writing tasks easier, since it gives focus and purpose to the learning activity.

What is perhaps very pertinent to the teacher of writing is the concept of what the author calls the 'felt sense'. Once a topic is given, it evokes a felt sense in the writer, i.e., the topic calls forth images, words, ideas, and vague fussy feelings that lie anchored in the writer's mind. When writer pauses, he is paying attention
to what is still vague and unclear — waiting for an image or word or a phrase to emerge.

This 'felt sense' may be termed a 'feeling of inspiration'. It is an area of experience from which we can evolve richer and more accurate descriptions of composing. It enables us to be creative and releases us from stultifying repetitive patterns. It allows us to create something new and fresh even when 'old words' or images are used. It deepens when we write on something that interests us.

Once the learner finds the topic, he has to generate ideas and organize them. He has to draw on his own repertoire of experiences and world knowledge about the topic and that of others. He may also get ideas by researching the topic, from books, periodicals, and magazines, from lectures, and through brainstorming and discussion with others. He would then have to sort out, synthesize, interpret, and organize the ideas thus collected.

For writing data-based reports, first-hand research through questionnaires and personal interviews will provide the required information. Here, the student-researcher should analyse and interpret data correctly using appropriate statistical tools and reasoning procedures (Applebee, Auton and Lehr 1981; Britton, et al. 1975;
Moffett 1968). He may also obtain and organize information from secondary sources. In this case, he has to evaluate the sources to judge their relevance, usefulness, and validity.

Before the students actually embark on the task to write, they must plan. Once the materials are collected, they must organize them according to a plan/outline, which is the most essential and crucial beginning of the writing process. Studies made on high school and college freshmen by Stallard (1974), Pianko (1979), Wall and Petrovsky (1981), and those reported in Krashen (1984:14) have shown that the "good writer plans more than the poor writer".

The plan has to be brief so that the mind can comprehend it as a whole and by the reading of the text, the readers too must be able to keep the plan in their heads. Further, it gives the writer a method of viewing the entire structure of the composition. It gives him a chance to think through the organization.

The plan and the composition it produces must be unified and must point towards the thesis. The thesis is like the whole pie or an apple. Every part of a composition is committed to explaining or supporting the thesis just as every divided portion of a pie or an apple is still part of the whole (Neman 1983:16-17).
Finally, planning is

a) like a blueprint, which gives the writer an overview of the text and where certain structural changes may be made, whereas changes are effected in the final draft with difficulty,

b) like a meter showing gaps in the writer's knowledge of the subject necessitating a further search for more materials, and

c) an act of retrieving and generating ideas from memory and picking up the relevant ideas from the notes garnered during the writing process.

Planning and outlining are necessary to help the writer stick to the task and to guide him in constructing the composition. They help to achieve unity of purpose and content, which any text must possess. They are also a bulwark against writing facts not relevant to the thesis or what the writer means to say.

A clear outline and a carefully worked out plan will give a good start to a writer. He knows what he wants to say when he begins to write. A good planning is also well reflected in the quality of expression since the writer can concentrate on the details of expression while writing (Dean 1953).
However, plans and outlines should not take away the writer's freedom to make changes later in the writing process. They are guides and can be modified during writing, if need arises, to accommodate more ideas that crop up (Dean 1953). They should not therefore cripple the writing process and arrest the flow of ideas. They are not "carved in stone", nor "chiselled in granite" acting like a millstone about the neck, holding the writer back from making changes (Beth 1983:26).

They, therefore, are flexible and changeable. They may have to be adjusted to accommodate the relevant ideas that might come up during the process of writing. Writing being a voyage of discovery and a probe into an idea, they must facilitate writing rather than hinder it. Moreover, theme and content suggest a shape as writing begins and develops. Hence, the writer need not to map out a precise itinerary very soon in the beginning (Irmschair 1979; Rose 1980; Sommers 1980; Neman 1983). It should also be noted that planning and outlining are not a one-off exercise, nor a unitary stage, nor are they only a pre-writing activity, but an ongoing act throughout the process of writing and also a thinking process which writers use over and over again during composition.

3.3.3 In the post-writing stage, it is the revision that creates the text: "Good writers revise more than poor
writers do" (Krashen 1984:15). There is also a difference in the way revision is done by the poor and the good writers. To the experienced writers, revision is an effort to "find the line of the argument" (Sommers 1980, quoted in Krashen 1984:15). They revise to make meaning clearer and more effective, i.e., they make content revision. Further, they utilise revision for invention and for rearranging large sections of their composition. They delay mechanical and word-choice changes to the second and later drafts. The "editing takes place mostly at or near the end of the writing process" (Lewitt 1990:4).

To the poor writers, however, revision is basically an "adherence to school-learned rules" (Sommers 1980, in Krashen 1984:15). Even when they make many drafts, the subsequent ones are renewed chances after a failed effort. They also focus more on form and less on content in revision. Too much concern for the correct forms "inhibits the development of ideas" (Perl 1979, in Krashen 1984:16). Moreover, they concentrate on a mere adherence to the conventions of grammar rather than on bringing clarity of meaning to their writing. Corrections with regard to grammar and the conventions of form in the initial draft break "the rhythm generated by thinking and writing", causing the writers "to lose track of their ideas" (Ibid., 16).
Revision or rewriting, as the words suggest, is 'seeing-again' or 'writing-again'. One 'sees' the writing again analytically to rephrase and reorganize the content for clarity and effective communication.

Thus, revision is the most important aspect of the writing process but it is also the least understood. It is often equated in the students' mind with mere error-correction and editing. The teacher's practice of taking up the red pen at the sight of grammatical and technical inaccuracies, relegating the other aspects like organization of content to the background, confirms their feeling. Errors of spelling and grammar are, no doubt, unacceptable, but their revision follows the revision of content. Editing is a part of revision and is like dishwashing done towards the end, while the revision of content is the real cooking, which goes to make a tasty dish (Lewitt 1990:2).

Only if there is concentration on the content, the writer will experience the freedom to experiment with ideas and style, and premature focus on neatness and error-correction brings out a dish appetising to look at but unsavoury to relish, a text perfect at structures but weak at the foundation of organization of ideas. This premature attention to errors would not only hinder the flow of ideas but develop in the learners a sense of reluctance to
discard corrected errors no matter how ill-fitting or inappropriate they are. The corrections develop an aura around the unwanted contents to be held as sacred (Murcia 1988; Shaughnessy 1979; Winteriud 1983; Keh 1991; Harris 1986; Sommers 1980). This early concentration on error-correction is due to the mistaken notion that good writing follows automatically from good grammar and adequate vocabulary.

Revision, no doubt, occurs throughout the writing of a work but what is being stressed here is that the revision of content for organization of ideas precedes the correction of errors in spelling and punctuation, and that mere editing or proof-reading is not revision. During the process of writing, writers "seem to change direction and, if necessary, to abandon earlier ideas or discover new ones". Thus the revision "is highly dynamic, multilevel, and recursive" (White 1988:11).

3.4 A MINOR STUDY

A minor study was made to understand the process involved in writing a short report of about 350 to 400 words by college/university teachers. The study was conducted on 36 participants from various disciplines and states during two Orientation Courses organized at the Academic Staff College of Pondicherry University during summer 1993.
During the course of 28 days, sessions on various aspects of education like motivation, educational objectives, adolescent behaviour, systems of education, creativity, micro-teaching, etc. were given by resource persons from various educational institutions. Each day began with the reading of a report on the previous day's proceedings by one of the participants.

Towards the end of the course, a questionnaire (Appendix - B) was administered to those who had the chance to read their reports to elicit their views on their experience of writing them. In the questionnaire, 14 questions related to the method of writing they had adopted. Of them, six were of the True/False type, one was a Yes/No question, and five were multiple-choice items with blanks in ten of them for the participants to give their views, if they would like to add something more. The last question was open-ended to find out if the comments substantiated the points made in the answers to the other questions or whether they gave any views of their own on their experience of writing.

Following are the views collected through the questionnaire from the two sets of participants of the Orientation Courses.
Except two, all the 34 participants endorsed the first statement: "To write the report of the proceedings, I first listened to the lecture carefully and took down notes, which I used to write the report later". It was also mentioned in the answers to the open-ended question by three participants that note-making was essential to write a good report. The views expressed thus reinforce the importance of note-taking as an important stage in writing a report.

In the case of 19 participants, the need to write the report and read it before an audience forced them to listen to the lectures more attentively than on any other occasion (Statement six). The need to write a report is thus a motivating factor in paying attention to a lecture and it sharpens one's listening skill. This was also confirmed by many participants in their open-ended question - "I was very much alert on that day and was a little bit tense"; "writing the proceedings forced me to listen to the lecture more attentively"; I had "the eagerness to listen better than in the other classes." The need to write may thus be viewed as contributing to the sharpening of one's listening skill.

To some participants, "compared to other days' proceedings, those of the day for which I wrote the report are clearer for the simple reason that I wrote the report
for that day" (Statement five). One participant wrote in his answer to the open-ended question: "while writing the proceedings, I have to recollect the classroom situation and concentrate on myself. It was interesting to find out that when I completed writing I understood the topic in the class in a better way." Another said that there was "better learning since we go through the notes once again and there is a critical analysis, a better understanding of the topic, a self-confidence."

As many as 32 participants confirmed their consultation with their colleagues - "besides the notes, I consulted friends too in collecting the points and then I wrote the report" (Statement four). It was reported by one that "any report, paper, etc. before going to be presented should be read by one or two persons just for the simple reason that they could find out some common errors in ideas, sequence, etc." To another, "it is a chance to consult my friends". Two participants suggested that "after making the draft, it may be shown to friends for improvement".

Again, 27 participants gave a positive reply to the question whether they showed their papers to any of their friends for suggestions to improve on them (Statement nine). In the case of four (Statement ten), the peers made no suggestions. Of the others, 14 stated that suggestions
were given to rearrange ideas, add or delete. For seven others only grammar mistakes had been pointed out. This goes to show that peer evaluation and peer suggestions are welcome and help in the writing process. This aspect of the writing process, that is, peer feedback, may therefore be exploited in the teaching of writing in the class.

One point worth mentioning here is that writing the report of the proceedings to read it at the commencement of the next day was a pleasant experience to many. This was revealed in the analysis of the various answers given to the open-ended question on their writing experience. Six participants considered the preparation and reading of the report a good experience - "Wonderful, I enjoyed"; "Enjoyed very much when I wrote the report"; "It is a pleasant task"; "I have pleasure in writing the report in a compact manner"; "It is really a good experience"; "An interesting experience". To one other participant,

it was an opportunity to know the manner and the way of writing the report. It had also produced a sense of responsibility in my mind. In fact, it was my first experience to report a lecture session. No doubt, it would always be a source of support in writing the reports of similar sessions in future.
3.5 CONCLUSION

The feedback on the teacher-participants' experiences and the analysis of the writing process made earlier have brought to the fore certain facts concerning writing. Writing is not to be considered as a mere transfer of phonetic substance into the graphic one, or a mere recoding of one's thoughts in print. It entails several stages, chiefly grouped under three phases, viz., pre-writing, writing, and post-writing. The pre-writing phase includes selection of topic or subject, generating ideas on it through brainstorming, listing of points, planning, and outlining. Note-making is an important means of storing and retrieving information, and facilitating writing. A felt need and purpose motivate one to write, and, along with a sense of audience, set off ideas in the mind. Even actual writing may sharpen and stimulate one's thinking on a topic. Peer evaluation and suggestions give one's writing the perspective of an audience and help the writer to look at and review the content from the reader's point of view. Finally, though writing is a laboured activity, it can also be made a wholesome and pleasant experience for the learners at least in the classroom, and the role of the teacher of writing is therefore of crucial importance.