

CAN INTERACTIVE JOURNAL WRITING  
MAKE A DIFFERENCE?

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## CHAPTER I

### EXPLANATION OF PROJECT

#### Introduction

When we look at composition classes designed for both American and international students, journal writing is very often found as part of the curriculum. One main reason journals are used is to provide a convenient, consistent place where learners can experiment with thoughts and words. Although journals are frequently used, there has been little agreement on the best way to integrate them into a composition curriculum. Spack and Sadow (1983) describe a specific kind of journal writing, "interactive journals," as a valuable means to establish a dialogue between students and teacher, and between the individual student and his fellow classmates. In designing my thesis project, I decided to make "interactive journals" a core part of my curriculum for an intermediate composition course. An instructor using this technique distributes a "Teacher Response" letter in order to provide a forum in which the students can share ideas. This letter contains excerpts from the student journals and the teacher's own response.

#### Statement of Problem

In their 1983 article, Spack and Sadow state that they do not know whether the use of interactive journals improves ESL student writing. In order to evaluate a teaching method, stressing interactive journals,



I designed a study to measure change in student writing. My hypothesis is that writing three journal topics per week during an eight week course will facilitate improvement in both length and fluency of student writing. Fluency, in my definition, is the students' ability to express themselves clearly in written English. By placing emphasis on the ideas and content present in their writing, rather than mechanical problems, my teaching goal was for the students to see writing as a way to discover meaning.

### Classroom Setting

From January 4th to March 8th I taught a writing class at the English Language School at the University of Tulsa. I presented this composition course to intermediate and advanced students who were almost ready to take the TOEFL exam. I started with twenty-one students, who at Level IV were next to the highest level in the school. The students came from 12 different countries, including India, Oman, Saudi Arabia, Japan, and several Latin American countries. In this multilingual setting, the need for English was strong since it was the one common language. On the four days per week that we met for fifty minutes, they also attended four other classes: structure, listening/speaking, vocabulary (in a computer lab), and reading.

I split these students into two groups, so I had twelve students for the first hour, and nine students for the second hour. We were fortunate to have a small seminar classroom where the students and I could sit together around one long table, so I was able to conduct the class as an informal workshop. Classes met Monday through Thursday. These international students were highly motivated to succeed. Five of

them needed English competence in order to begin study at Spartan School of Aeronautics. A strong motivator for the rest was to pass the TOEFL exam as soon as possible. If they passed the TOEFL exam with a high enough score, they could skip Level V classes, the highest and final level at this school.

Although the first session of 1988 at the English Language School was scheduled for ten weeks, it turned out that I had only eight weeks or 32 days of actual instruction time. Because of the compressed, intensive nature of this writing course, I elected to concentrate on one main teaching technique which was interactive journal writing. Other elements I included were:

Topic sentence	Controlling idea
Concluding sentence	Narrowing a topic
Use of article adjectives	Writing under time pressure

The basic scope of my course was to instruct these students how to express ideas in paragraph form and how to use organizational techniques, such as a "topic sentence" and a "concluding sentence." The main objectives of this course were to foster a positive attitude towards writing and to increase the length and fluency of the students' paragraphs.

#### Presentation of Chapters

In Chapter II, I will present a review of literature pertaining to interactive journal writing, the way students write, and to my teaching philosophy. Chapter III describes the teaching procedure I used at the English Language School. In Chapter IV, I explain the writing study I designed to measure the length and fluency of 15 students, my sample

group. Changes in the fluency of these writers are shown by scores on a 20 point evaluation scale, with the grades assigned by three independent raters, graduate students at OSU. A chart is used to give the differences of length in three writing samples, from the beginning, middle, and end of the course.

To look more closely at individual performance, I look at three students as a Case Study in Chapter V. Their total writing for the eight week course is studied using the following criteria:

1. Their previous composition training
2. Their attitude towards journal writing
3. The length of their journal entries
4. The average time spent per journal entry
5. Effect of journal writing on fluency, based on scores on three writing samples

In Chapter VI, I present an evaluation of my teaching procedure by the students and the teacher. Chapter VII contains my conclusions and observations.

## CHAPTER II

### THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

#### Introduction

In order to adequately prepare for the teaching part of my thesis project, I did a great deal of reading about the writing process and problems faced by both American and international student writers. Some of the most helpful articles were written by Donald Murray (1978, 1982); Ann Raimes (1978, 1985, 1987); Vivian Zamel (1982, 1985, 1987); Ruth Spack and Katherine Sadow (1983); Elizabeth Stokes (1984); and Linda Blanton (1987). All of these authors stress certain important themes: the difficulty of writing in a first or second language, the value of learning to write well, the importance of positive feedback, and the realization that writing is a complex process which requires a valuable commodity, TIME.

#### What is Writing?

First, it is important to look at a definition of writing. Donald Murray, a writing professor and an author in his own right, has written many articles on writing and the writing process. He describes writing this way:

"The most accurate definition of writing, I believe, is that it is the process of using language to discover meaning in experience and to communicate it" (1978, p. 73). In his articles, Murray states over and

over that all writers, even professional authors, do not know what they are going to say until they go through the discovery process of writing.

In order to discover meaning through writing, learners have to do some thinking, using written words as their tool. Janet Emig (1977), an English teacher who has also done a good deal of research on writing, states that writing is a complicated activity which involves the hand, eye, and brain all working together. Emig points out some important distinctions between writing and speaking. When discussing the differences, I define speaking as conversation among friends, while writing is formal and expository. Emig cites several learning theorists (Luria, Vygotsky, and Bruner) as support for her strong conviction that writing uses the higher cognitive functions of analysis and synthesis more than other forms of learning (p. 122).

In order for intermediate writing students to better understand what is involved in writing, it is helpful to discuss in detail how writing and speaking differ. We can see one major difference between the two ways of communicating by realizing that when speaking your listener is usually present, while in writing your audience is not. When you are conversing with a listener, you are able to repeat and clarify if the other person has trouble understanding. When using written words, the writer must strive for the specific words which will convey his meaning clearly, because oral feedback is usually not possible. Comparing the two ways of communicating, speaking is far easier than writing because you can undo mistakes right away in order to express yourself clearly. Writing, by contrast, must be accurate, well-organized and clear. To write well takes inspiration, time, and a

good deal of revising. Students need to be allowed sufficient time in order to analyze a topic and then synthesize new thoughts and words.

### Why Should We Teach Writing?

Although learning how to write is a difficult, time-consuming process for both the students and the teacher who is attempting to guide them, it is a necessary skill in both academic and everyday life. For recent immigrants to the United States, the kind of written English they need is extremely practical, such as how to apply for an identification card or for a job. This kind of English is often called "survival English." The students in my writing class had need for a more formal kind of writing instruction, in which they will have to analyze and synthesize information. Many of my ESL students at the University of Tulsa had plans to study at an American college. These international students need certain academic writing skills to express themselves clearly in English. In addition, several prominent writing researchers are certain that learning how to write is a way to improve our thinking process, in our first or second language (Emig, 1977; Murray, 1978; Raimes, 1979). Ann Raimes believes that rather than denying writing or sliding quickly over it in ESL classrooms, we should instead adopt

...a new model for second language teaching, one that emphasizes writing, that acknowledges the value of writing for generating language, and that sees writing...as an effective way to generate words, sentences, and chunks of discourse and to communicate them in the new language (1985, p. 252).

English as a Second Language learners studying in the United States are faced with a large challenge when we ask them to do all of the following tasks: organize ideas in a direct, linear English way, write something with meaningful content, and express themselves in

grammatically correct English. But, it is important for both the teacher and the student to not be scared off by the enormity of the task. One of the problems unique to international students is that the rhetorical pattern from their native language may not resemble the linear organization pattern we look for in English expository writing. For example, two of my most advanced students, a young man from South America and a woman from Japan, were both experienced writers in their first language. Early on in the course, the Latin student had trouble making just one main point in his paragraphs. The Japanese writer who had experience as a newspaper reporter in Tokyo had a large, varied English vocabulary, but she hated the constraints of two criteria of expository English, organization and coherence; the Japanese rhetorical style she was accustomed to was very different from the English linear system.

Although it takes a good deal of time and practice on the students' part, it is possible for ESL teachers to help their students begin learning how to write English well. Writing should ideally be taught in an informal workshop setting where interesting content receives first and primary attention. By learning about the process of writing which involves several stages, students can learn ways to make their writing more clear and accurate at a later, editing stage.

#### Process and Product

#### Content and Form

Donald Murray (1978) provides a description of the writing process and discusses the many steps involved in producing a polished piece of writing in his influential article, "Internal Revision". Murray

explains that both students and professional writers need to go through three stages which he calls "prevision," "vision," and "revision." One of his main points is that writers sift back and forth between the three stages, for example they may do some revising while still in the first prevision stage. Zamel (1982) states, "If [...] students learn that writing is a process through which they can explore and discover their thoughts and ideas, then product is likely to improve as well" (p. 207). In order for international students to write English well, it is helpful for them to learn that composing is a complicated process which requires time, thought, and sometimes inspiration. After the student produces interesting content, there is plenty of time to correct surface errors such as grammatical and spelling problems (Raimes, 1985; Zamel, 1983; Blanton, 1987; Spack and Sadow, 1983).

Another professional author, Alan Ziegler, describes a five step writing process based on his own writing experience and research (1981).

Ziegler's five steps are:

1. PREWRITING: Gathering ideas, often done outside the classroom.
2. EXPLORATORY WRITING: Brainstorming; free writing.
3. DEVELOPMENTAL WRITING: Shaping of the first exploratory draft. (Murray's "internal revision").
4. EXTERNAL REVISION: Pay attention to conventions of mechanics and style.
5. LAST LOOK: Let writing sit for a period of time in order to get some detachment. (pp. 33-35)

Often it is difficult for ESL students and teachers to go through the first three steps above because they are overly concerned with step 4, correcting the written form. It is extremely important that international students in particular be given enough time for their composing and revising. If the student is overly concerned with



components of "form" such as transitions and prepositions, he or she will not be thinking about how to express something meaningful. My ESL students had little opportunity to utilize step 5 because of the compressed nature of an eight week course.

#### Time and Treatment of Error

Given the fact that writing in a second language is even more difficult than writing in one's first language, it is extremely important to establish a classroom atmosphere of trust and security in which students' anxiety about writing is reduced (Taylor, 1983; Blanton, 1987). One principal way a teacher can increase the students' confidence in their own abilities is by not worrying about surface errors until a final editing stage of the writing process (Zamel, 1983). In his well-known writing about second language acquisition, Krashen (1982) states that a second language learner is apt to make errors on grammatical structures that he has learned or knows only superficially. On the other hand, a student's acquired knowledge is automatic and represents structures he or she is able to use accurately. Often composition teachers waste their time repeatedly correcting the same international student errors, and to no avail, because the students have not yet acquired these structures.

A critical element in reducing the number of errors that ESL students make while writing is TIME. Given the opportunity to do several drafts, with the first one focusing on content and ideas, ESL students can find some of their own errors at an editing stage, and they can also utilize help from their classmates or teacher.

Since international students are facing the double-barreled task of learning a second language and attempting to write in this second language, they need much more time than American students. When ESL students are allowed sufficient time, either in class or at home, they are able, "...to take advantage of this extraordinary generative power of language" (Raimes, 1985). All writers who are not rushed have experienced the way their own words can lead to new words, new thoughts, and new directions.

Another main point that composition teachers need to stress to their international students is that improvement in the craft of writing requires a great deal of time, perhaps many months. Linda Blanton states that teachers need to allow their students "...to perceive the development of their ability to write as the multi-faceted, gradual, and organic process that it is" (1987, p. 112). Often ESL students get frustrated by making many surface errors and by their temporary inability to express themselves clearly. In order to increase students' confidence in their own powers of creating and thinking, we need to lessen their fear by allowing them to achieve success. All students, and especially international students, need to receive much positive reinforcement for their writing efforts. One way to give students large doses of praise and encouragement is to establish "interactive journal writing" as an important part of the curriculum (Spack and Sadow, 1983).

#### Using Interactive Journal Writing in a Workshop Setting

Although it is possible to use interactive journals in a standard classroom, it is more effective to provide an informal workshop setting

for the writing. If the instructor has a small number of students and sufficient space to conduct her writing class as a workshop, this atmosphere allows the teacher to function as a fellow writer, rather than as an authority figure. Many authors recommend an informal workshop as an ideal way to teach composition (Murray, 1982; Ziegler, 1981; Blanton, 1987; Stokes, 1984; Zamel, 1987).

Alan Ziegler, in his book The Writing Workshop (1981), states that oral feedback during a class period while work is in progress is much more effective than written comments on a student's paper. By discussing a piece of writing together, the student can explain what he is trying to say in a given sentence and the teacher can offer suggestions when needed. Ziegler, an author himself, believes that it is important for teachers to let students know that they have final say over their own content as it represents their own thoughts and feelings.

Murray (1982) explains that through discussion (in workshop or conference), a teacher can help the student focus on his own writing process and on the direction he wants his writing to take. In this way, the responsibility for working and learning is shifted directly to the students. In a student-centered classroom, the students are enabled "...to learn not because the teacher demands it of them, but because they need to in order to accomplish their own goals" (Taylor, 1983, p. 85).

Interactive journal writing, as described by Spack and Sadow (1983), provides a way for students to receive positive feedback from the teacher and response from their fellow students. The interactive journal involves students writing in their journals several times per week and the teacher responding in two ways. She makes positive

comments in each student journal and then writes her own weekly "Teacher Response" letter. This letter has two distinct sections. In the first section, she can respond to anything in the student journals or relate one of her own experiences. In the second, the teacher publishes excerpts from various student journals.

By composing this weekly letter, the teacher can accomplish several purposes. First, all the students are motivated to work hard because they may be published. Also, they are writing for an audience of their peers as well as the teacher. In addition, by composing her response, the instructor becomes part of the community of writers. Since the teacher is committed to this interactive journal, the students take the whole project more seriously. Spack and Sadow (1983) explain,

We believe that the teacher journal adds a dimension to the English class which inspires students to take the journal assignment seriously, as it is part of a pact made between the teacher and the students... (p. 587).

Finally, by giving frequent journal assignments and then commenting on them positively but not grading them, the teacher can lessen the students' fear of the teacher as an authority figure and their apprehension about learning to write.

For students at this intermediate to advanced level, I believe that an effective curriculum should consist of much ungraded journal writing and a smaller quantity of more formal, evaluated writing.

#### Formal Writing and Evaluation

Although in the first four sections of this literature review I have explained the need for students to write freely without fear of grades, part of the writing class curriculum needs to consist of more formal work which conforms to standard expository written English. As

much as the current thrust in the English as a Second Language field is towards fluency and real world communication, some researchers, including David Eskey at the Univ. of Southern Calif. (1981) and Marianne Celce-Murcia at UCLA (1988), feel that writing teachers also need to require formal accuracy. If students' sentence structure errors are serious enough to prevent communication, then they need to be shown ways to find and fix these errors. Eskey points out that if international students have the goal to study at an American college or university for several years, their writing needs to be understood by more people than just their ESL teacher.

There are many theories about the best ways for composition teachers to correct international student papers. One approach that many ESL teachers follow is to mark all the student errors. Research conducted in Japan by three ESL teachers shows that detailed correcting of every error does very little to improve student writing (Robb, Ross, and Shortreed, 1986). More importantly, a written product covered with red ink is terribly discouraging to a student writer. As Celce-Murcia states,

Let's remember that not every error needs to be corrected on every paper during the editing stage. Such overkill can discourage students and impede progress in the long run (1988, p. 3).

The other side of the spectrum advocates never marking errors since the students' writing will automatically improve after much practice. This laissez-faire approach also has its drawbacks because most students do not spontaneously improve certain deep-set errors without some teacher help in finding the errors and explanation of the correct form. Therefore, I believe that a middle ground offers the best approach, that is a combination of ungraded and graded writing.

In deciding the best way to evaluate my students' formal writing, I devised a brief analytic scoring scale of five categories, totaling 20 points. The five categories I used were:

CONTENT:	6
VOCABULARY/SYNTAX:	4
ORDER/ORGANIZATION:	4
COHERENCE:	4
MECHANICS: (Punctuation; Spelling)	2

My goal was to present the students more specific information on the strong and weak areas of their writing. In order to help the students learn how to revise their own writing, I gave them a Grading form for each of seven formal writing assignments. In the second half of the course, the students had an opportunity to revise their first draft with help from this form (Appendix B). In this way, it was possible to use the Grading Form as a teaching tool as well as an evaluation instrument.<sup>1</sup> By assigning 6 points to "Content" and 2 points to Mechanics," I emphasized to the students the paramount importance of thinking and ideas.

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<sup>1</sup>I am indebted to Dr. Richard Batteiger, Director of Freshman Composition, O.S.U., for his suggestion to use the Grading form in two ways.

## CHAPTER III

### TEACHING PROCEDURE

#### Introduction

As stated in Chapter I, my main teaching objectives were to foster a positive attitude towards writing and to increase the length and fluency of student writing. To provide a broad opportunity for the students to get comfortable with English, I assigned three journal topics per week. In addition to receiving positive feedback on their entries, the class as a whole received a Teacher Response letter once a week. This interactive journal method contributed a great deal to the overall quality of the students' journal writing. Moreover, in a class of international students from several different countries, the teacher's letter can facilitate the exchange of cultural information from various parts of the world.

While teaching the January-March session, I was fortunate in having two small classes which contained students from 12 different countries. Having small classes, I was able to conduct each class as a writing workshop where the students wrote a fair amount during class time, and I could give individual help where needed.

## Course Description

### Using Journals:

From the first day, I talked to the students about the difficulty of writing well and about the way that we can consider writing to be a process that requires a great deal of time. In order to get the students comfortable with writing in English, I decided to make interactive journal writing a vital part of the curriculum. First, I told them that I would be looking for interesting content and ideas in their journals. I explained that at the end of the course I would look for the required number of journal entries assigned, three per week, and for evidence of strong effort put forth. Also, they were told that the journal component, determined by number of entries and overall quality, would be equal to one-third of the course grade. In order to encourage the students to write freely and creatively in their journals, I did not assign a grade to any individual entry until the end of the course. Rather than making grammar and spelling mistakes, I made positive comments about ideas well-put, or I included questions which I would like to ask. I was careful to make my comments positive and encouraging, and I corrected only a few sample errors.

The second way that I encouraged serious work in their journals was by writing a "Teacher Response" letter once a week for seven weeks. After reading quickly through their journals which were submitted once a week, I wrote several paragraphs to the students describing my feelings and reactions to the class. Then, for the remainder of the page, I included excerpts from five or six student journals. I corrected only a few sample errors in their journals, but then published a corrected



version in my newsletter (Appendix C). In their article about interactive journal writing, Spack and Sadow (1983) explain, "...our major concern is to make it possible to read one another's ideas without the mistakes..." (p. 581). In other words, it is important to remove errors in order for students to easily read writing produced by their classmates. In any case, the entries that I chose were not riddled with errors to start with; rather they were clear, perceptive samples of writing which contained a few minor problems.

When the students saw excerpts from their journals published, they were very aware that they were writing for an audience of their peers as well as the teacher. They were subconsciously thinking of this class audience, rather than writing in a vacuum (Spack and Sadow, 1983). I am convinced that knowing that their journal entries might be published was an important motivating factor encouraging the students to maintain good quality consistently.

For this group of students, the most effective use of journals was a combination of two assigned topics and one "free choice," for a total of three entries per week as the course requirement. Working with another group of students, a different combination of topics might be more effective. One topic per week focused on their own writing or something about the English Language School they were attending. The second topic was much broader. Sample topics were: "Marriage or Divorce in Your Country" and "How it Feels to be an International Student in the U.S." For the "free choice" entry, the students had the opportunity to write about any topic of their choice. I feel that this combination of two assigned topics and one free choice gave a good deal of variety to the kinds of thinking and writing the students were asked to produce.

Journal Topics:

In order to enable the students to think about their writing process and about the difficulties of writing well, I assigned two topics for the first week of class:

Week 1:

Entry #1: In order to think about how you write, please answer the following questions: (some derived from Ann Raimés, 1987):

- 1) Did you study composition in your native language?
- 2) Did you study composition in English?
- 3) Is writing easy or difficult for you?
- 4) How often do you write letters home?
- 5) What language do you dream in?
- 6) When you write in English, do you mainly plan and think in English or in your 1st language?
- 7) Which language do you prefer to write in? Why?

After writing answers to the above questions, I had the students revise by writing an organized paragraph called, "How I Write."

Entry #2: "Speaking compared to Writing": As a class, we made a list of ways that speaking and writing are different; then I appointed pairs of students to work together based on language background and writing ability. Assignment: Write a paragraph in which you compare speaking and writing.

Week 2:

Entry #1: Discuss your feelings about working with a partner to improve your writing. Do you like this method of learning? Why or why not?

Entry #2: In my country there is a funny SUPERSTITION that is known by everyone...

Week 3:

Entry #1: Write about one of your classes at the English Language Institute, THIS SCHOOL!

Entry #2: Describe the content of a TV news program or a magazine article and give your reactions.

(For a complete listing of all the journal topics assigned, see Appendix C.)

Formal Writing and Grading Forms:

Discussion and Explanation:

As explained in Section A, I placed a great deal of emphasis in this course on interactive journal writing in order to get the students comfortable with composing freely in English. In addition, I assigned more formal, mostly in-class writing for the paragraphs I wished to grade. My teaching objective was for the students to produce two different kinds of writing, informal journal writing at home, and more formal writing during the class period, seven times during the eight weeks. (See Figure 1, p. 23.) By assigning journal entries, I was striving to get the students accustomed to writing English comfortably, without apprehension about grammatical accuracy. Also, there were no imposed time limits on journal entries written at home. On in-class assignments, by contrast, the students needed to pay close attention to including a topic sentence and clear organization, while avoiding

mechanical problems. Although I advocate allowing international students sufficient TIME to compose in English, they also must produce text under time pressure in an exam situation.

I evaluated seven writing assignments during the eight week course using a 20 point grading scale. The 20 points were divided into five categories so that the students would know which areas of their writing were strongest and weakest. I modified the English Language School's existing grading form and point values to better fit my teaching philosophy and objectives (Appendix B, H). The existing categories worth four points each were: Unity, Order, Coherence, Completeness, and Clarity. My five categories are:

CONTENT:	6
VOCABULARY/SYNTAX:	4
ORDER/ORGANIZATION:	4
COHERENCE:	4
MECHANICS:	2

Since in my teaching philosophy content and ideas are far more important than spelling and punctuation (Murray, 1978; Raimes, 1979; Zamel, 1983), I assigned six points to the "Content" and only two points to "Mechanics."

#### Graded Assignments:

The seven writing assignments graded according to the 20 point Grading Form were:

1. Write a well organized paragraph about one of these large topics: (J. Reid, p. 13)
 

computers	newspapers	adult education
agriculture	nuclear power	jewelry
electronics		
2. Write about your "Living Situation in Tulsa."
3. Write a paragraph called "My Best Friend."

4. Describe an object that is important to you, and explain why it is important. (Time Limit = 50 mins.)
5. Revised journal entry
6. Revised journal entry
7. Final Exam: In an organized paragraph or essay, describe a city that you know well. (Time Limit = 50 mins.)

Assignments #5 & #6:

In order to reinforce that writing is a process requiring time and effort, assignments 5 and 6 were revisions of earlier journal entries. I asked the students to select two journal entries that they considered well-written. The purpose of these assignments was to show the students that by using their entries as a kind of "prewriting," they could revise the entries and then submit the new version for a grade. Some people were able to select their own entries, while others wanted me to choose their best writing. As part of this process, I gave most students in-class help with revising sentences, organization, and grammatical problems.

<u>Weeks</u>	<u>Monday</u>	<u>Tuesday</u>	<u>Wednesday</u>	<u>Thursday</u>
Jan. 1	11 <u>Sample #1</u>	12	13	14
2	18	19 (Teacher Response #1)	20	(Started Grading Form) 21 Assignment #1
3	25	26 Assignment #2	27	28
Feb. 4	1	2	3 Assignment #3	4 Worksheet on Articles Read Essay, "Treasures"
5	8 (Prewriting)	9 <u>Sample #2</u> Assignment #4	10	11
6	15	16	17 Assignment #5	18
7	22	23	24	25 Assignment #6
8	29	(Mar.) (Prewriting) 1	2 <u>Sample #3</u> Assignment #7	3 Course Question- naire

Figure 1. Course Calendar (Jan. 11-Mar. 3, 1988)  
8 Weeks Writing Instruction. English Language School,  
University of Tulsa.

## CHAPTER IV

### A STUDY OF WRITING

#### Description of Study

In designing my study to measure change in length and fluency of student writing, I was fortunate in several ways. First, I had a relatively large group of students to work with—21 students who were highly motivated to do well and who came from diverse cultural backgrounds. Secondly, the curriculum director permitted me to conduct the class exactly as I chose. Finally, in order to adequately and reliably rate the writing samples, I needed to find trained readers willing to help with my project. Among my colleagues at OSU, I found three composition teachers familiar with ESL writing who graciously donated their time and expertise.

I selected three writing samples. Sample #1 shows the students' writing upon entering the class, Sample #2 their writing at midpoint, and Sample #3 presents their writing on day #31. Before review by the raters for scoring, samples were typed to eliminate the influence of handwriting, and samples were identified by number, not name.

#### Topics for Sample Writing

The topics given were standard ones often used in ESL classrooms. For Topic #1, the students were given the following sentence to complete and develop:

1. (January 11, 1988): "I have chosen to study in the United States because..."

This subject was appropriate because one-third of the students had just arrived in America or had been here for a very short time.

Topic #2 asked the students to:

2. (February 9, 1988): "Describe an OBJECT that is important to you."

I assigned this topic to encourage the students to focus on a specific, concrete subject. This task was considerably harder than Topic #1, because the students were called on to create their own topic sentence.

Topic #3 asked the students to:

3. (March 2, 1988): "Describe a CITY that you know well."

(This assignment was also their final exam.) Here again, the students needed to create their own topic sentence. I allowed one day of prewriting before Samples #2 and #3.

#### Testing Procedure

##### Sample #1:

In order to get a writing sample as early as possible, I assigned the topic #1 on the second day of class. Before the students began, we did some brainstorming on the chalkboard. After we finished brainstorming, the students were permitted to write for 50 minutes, one class period. I gave these directions:

"Write a well organized paragraph, and be aware that your content is more important than your grammar and spelling. Begin your paragraph by completing the topic sentence written on the board."



Sample #2:

To provide the students some concrete input to deal with this abstract topic, describing an object, I handed out an essay called "Treasures" by Joan Costello (Raimes, 1987, pp. 212, 213). We read aloud and discussed parts of this essay. I wanted to give the students the opportunity to try prewriting before producing an assignment to be graded and to confront the task of creating their own topic sentence. By this point in the course, Week #5, we had talked a good deal about the importance of a topic sentence and the elements it contains.

Sample #3:Prewriting:

On March 1st, I brought in eight large, color photos of cities around the world. After identifying their location together, we brainstormed on the board terms describing life in a large city. I cautioned the students to narrow their focus since they could not describe all aspects of a city within 50 minutes. At the end of class, I collected the prewriting produced. The students were asked to use their handout on paragraph writing (Appendix A). I told them to go through the six prewriting steps before composing their exam.

Exam Day:

I told the students that this was their final exam, worth two grades when computing their final course grade. I put the following suggestions on the board:

"Pick one city that you have visited and know lots about. Remember to include:

Title	Supporting Details
Topic Sentence	Concluding Sentence

### Rating Sessions

The three raters evaluating the writing samples were all ESL writing instructors at Oklahoma State University. (See Appendix G for more complete information.)

#### First Rating Session, Jan. 15, 1988:

I began this first session by explaining to the three raters the Grading Form and its five categories which total 20 points (Appendix B). There were 18 student samples, so I assigned 12 samples per reader. Each sample was read by two raters and recorded on a large sheet. If the scores from the two raters were 3 or more points apart, the third reader was asked for another opinion; the third reader did not know the scores given by the other two raters. If one reader gave a score of 9 and the second reader 7, then the student's final score was averaged to 8. Before assigning any scores, the raters were instructed to scan their whole stack in order to see the range of writing ability. This first rating session lasted one and a half hours.

#### Second Rating Session, Feb. 12, 1988:

Before starting their rating, the three readers warmed up by looking at four sample paragraphs, titled "My Best Friend", which had been written the previous week. This grading session lasted one and a half hours.

Third Rating Session, March 17, 1988:

The raters began this Thursday evening session by reading paragraphs the students had written as a separate final exam required by the English Language School. This rating session lasted two hours.

Results and Interpretation

Score (Table I)

Although I began the course with 21 students, by the end of the eight weeks there were 15 of the original group remaining. Therefore, the main results I report are the scores earned by these 15 students.

To find the average performance for this group of 15, we can look at the mean score listed on Table I. The change in mean score from Sample 2, 8.7, is an improvement over the mean of Sample 1, 7.8, but not a significant improvement. I speculate that the reason not much change happened between Samples 1 and 2 is that this time period represented the beginning of the course when the students were adjusting to a new course and a new teacher. There were 16 class days between these first two samples. Another probable reason the scores on Sample 2 are not higher is that the task for Sample 2 was harder; the students had to come up with their own topic sentence for Sample 2, while for Sample 1, they were given a topic sentence to complete and develop.

By looking at the T-test results on Table I, we find that there are significant differences between the mean scores of Sample 3 and Sample 2, and between the mean scores of Sample 3 and Sample 1. I believe that the students had improved by the end of the course because they had done

TABLE I  
SCORES AND TEST RESULTS

---

15 Students, 3 Samples

	<u>Sample #1:</u>	<u>Sample #2:</u>	<u>Sample #3:</u>
Range	4--13	4.5--14	6--16
Median	7	8	11.5
Mean	7.86	8.65	11.27
Stand. Deviation	2.704	2.234	2.704

Comparing Samples 1 & 2: T test = 1.161

p = 0.265

Comparing Samples 2 & 3: T test = 3.377

p = 0.004

Comparing Samples 1 & 3: T test = 3.026

p = 0.009

---

a great deal of writing. In addition, they had become more used to organizing written English and writing under time pressure.

Examining the distribution of scores shown by the Range, we can see that these scores represent a wide range of writing ability, between 8.5 points on the low side (Sample 2), and 10 points on the high side (Sample 3). This wide range indicates that the 15 students performed at very low to high levels, because of English proficiency and previous writing training.

Also on Table I, we can find results for the median student, who produced writing scored right in the middle of the distribution of 15 scores. From Sample 1 to Sample 3, the median performance changed from 7 to 11.5 points, 4.5 points. This 4.5 points represents a 22.5% improvement over the eight week course. (See Figure 2.)

Looking at Figure 2 we also find data for the lowest score and the highest score from January 11th to March 3rd. The lowest score moved from 4 points on Sample 1 to 6 points on Sample 3. The highest score changed from 13 to 16 points. I interpret the results shown on Figure 2 to mean that the median group of students profited most from this interactive journal writing approach. Looking at the individual students more closely, the most advanced writer stayed at the same level, 13, 14, 13, while two low-ranked students' scores either remained the same or decreased from Sample 1 to Sample 3.

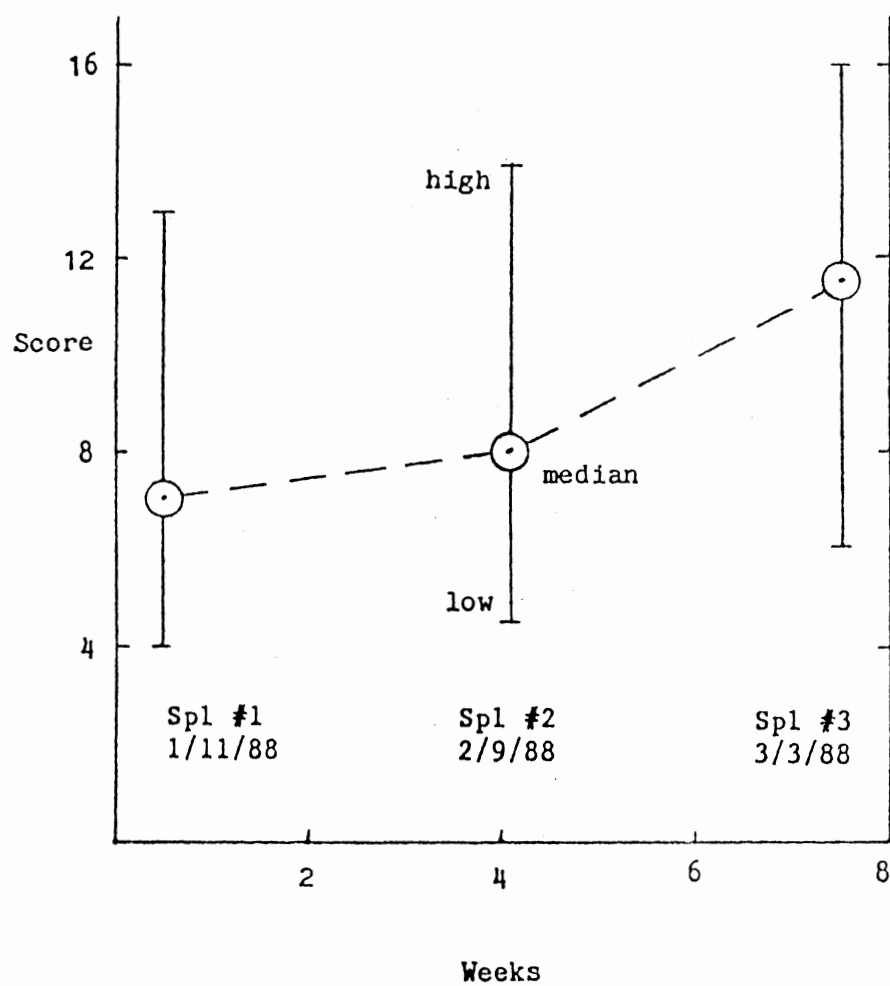


Figure 2. Writing Scores for 15 Students  
(3 Samples over 8 Week Course)

Length (Table II)

As well as looking at change in score, it is useful to consider the increase in overall length shown by many students (See Table II). Although the mean length changed by only 5 words from Sample 1 to Sample 2, there is a difference of 85.4 words between Sample 3 and Sample 1; this represents an average increase of over 60 percent. In addition, by looking at the T-test information on Tables I and II, we find that comparing the length and the scores between the samples yields the same kinds of results; that is, there are significant differences between the mean scores and mean length of Sample 1 to 3 and Sample 2 to 3, but the differences between Sample 1 to Sample 2 are not significant.

Examining the median scores compared to the mean scores, we find that the middle (or median) student performed just slightly higher than the average student. For example, the median length of Sample 3 was 6.3 words shorter than the mean length because of one extreme high score. The most advanced student's length was 380 words, not typical of the total class performance, since the next longest piece was 295 words. Therefore, the mean is skewed slightly higher than the median performance.

It is interesting to notice that the range between the lowest and highest length increased with each sample, as did the standard deviation. For the last sample in March, there is a huge range of 300 words between the lowest and highest length and a large S.D. of 78.2 words. The range found in Sample 1 is 110 words, compared to 300 words in Sample 3, so the amount of variation in length has changed substantially since Sample 1. This seems to indicate that the most advanced students are writing quickly and fluently, while the lowest

TABLE II  
LENGTH & TEST RESULTS

---

15 Students, 3 Samples

	<u>Sample #1:</u>	<u>Sample #2:</u>	<u>Sample #3:</u>
Range	94--204	48--250	80--380
Median	128	133	213
Mean	133.9	144.7	219.3
Stand. Deviation	33.7	51.8	78.2

Comparing Samples 1 & 2: T test = 0.865

p = 0.422

Comparing Samples 2 & 3: T test = 6.794

p = <.001

Comparing Samples 1 & 3: T test = 4.218

p = <.001

---



students are still having trouble producing under time pressure. It seems likely that the median and advanced students are more equipped to produce longer pieces in an exam situation than the lowest students. Next, I will explore the correlation of score to length.

#### Correlation of Score to Length (Figure 3)

As discussed in parts 1 and 2 of Results and Interpretation, I discovered from the T-test results that there were significant differences in both score and length between Samples 1 and 3, and Samples 2 and 3. When comparing score to length, I found that although generally the longer pieces received a higher score, this was not always true. I made scattergrams to determine the correlation between length and score in the three samples. I found mixed results:

Sample 1: Corr = 0.097	Little or no correlation
Sample 2: Corr = 0.819	Quite strong correlation
Sample 3: Corr = 0.512	Moderate correlation

In order to average out distracting performance factors such as test anxiety or poor health, I also made a scattergram showing the sum of individual scores and lengths for the three samples. As a result of this leveling, the correlation for this pooling was:

Samples 1, 2, & 3 = 0.822	Quite strong correlation
---------------------------	--------------------------

I decide to focus my attention on the Sample 3 scattergram for two reasons. First, the correlation is moderate, between weak and strong, and therefore puzzling. Second, I chose Sample 3 because it measured writing produced at the end of the course and mostly presents the highest scores and greatest lengths. Using the median scores for length

and score to form two dividing lines, I divided the data into quadrants representing the four categories found in Figure 3.

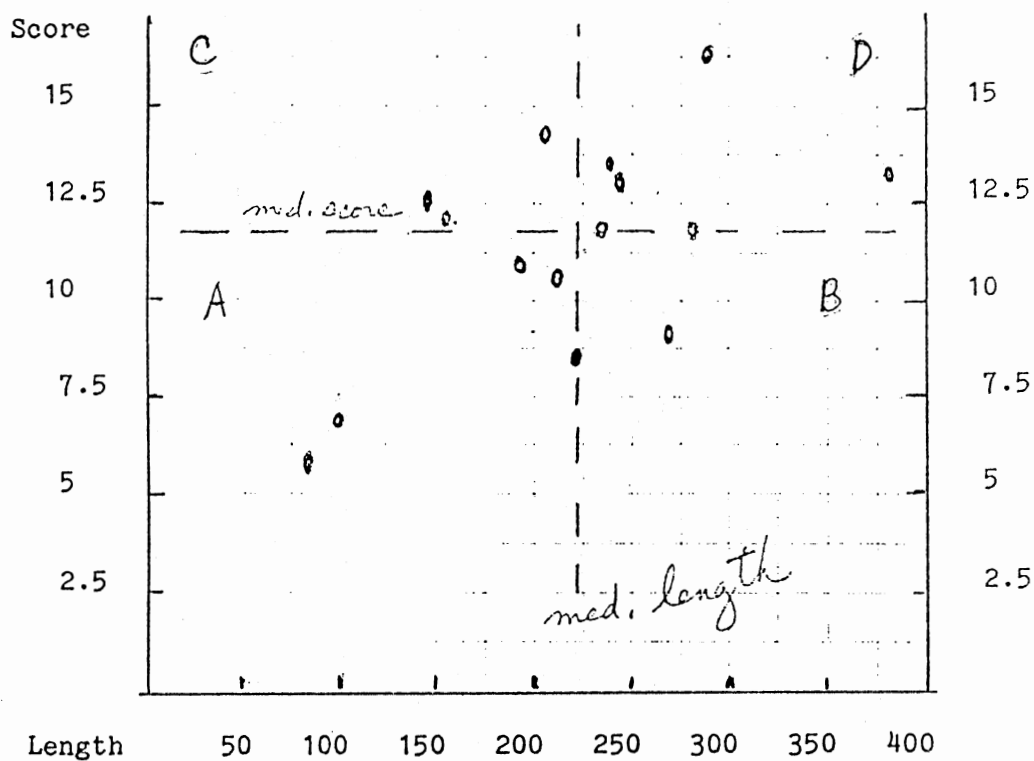


Figure 3. Correlation of Length and Score,  
Sample #3: 3/3/88

Using the median scores for length and score, we can divide the data into 4 quadrants which represent 4 categories:

A. Low Score, Short

4

B. Low Score, Long

2

C. High Score, Short

3

D. High Score, Long (& Median)

6

Interpretation of Figure 3 Data:

1. Longer is not always better-- Two students had high lengths: 295 and 249, but low scores: 9 and 8.5.
2. Sometimes a higher score can be achieved in a small number of words. Two relatively short samples: 153 and 144 were rated: 12 and 12.5
3. There seems to be an optimum length for this kind of descriptive assignment. With the exception of one student who wrote 380 words, all the five students who earned a score of 13 or above wrote between 200 and 300 words.
4. The two students who achieved the median score of 11.5, also wrote in this optimum range with word counts of 230 and 277 words.
5. It seems impossible to achieve a high score with a very low word count. The two lowest scores: 6 and 7 had correspondingly low word counts: 80 and 100. In other words, writers need to convince readers that they are knowledgeable about the topic, and in order to demonstrate competence they must write a certain number of words.
6. There are 9 students found in a combination of categories C and D who achieved a median or higher score; 9 out of 15 total students represent 60% of the class.

Comparing Journal Writing to  
Timed In-Class Writing, 7 Students

As an addendum to my research study, in April I decided to have the raters score two samples of journal writing, one from Jan. 24: Early,

and one from Feb. 25: Late. The course was over, so that instead of having writing samples for 15 students, I had pieces from only 7 students, those I was considering for a case study. The seven students I selected were representative of low, middle, and high performance.

To compare revised journal writing to timed in-class writing, I will present scores from a Feb. 25th journal assignment and scores from Sample 3, produced on March 3rd.

Explanation of J1. 2 Task:

For this assignment, the students could choose any journal entry they were proud of, and, after revising, submit it for a grade. Of the seven students chosen, three wrote on a "Childhood Memory" and one wrote on "Marriage," both assigned topics. The remaining three submitted "free choice" topics. When looking at the rating, I find that the student scores were not necessarily higher if their topic was "free choice" rather than an assigned topic. The three students who described a "Childhood Memory" all received a mean score or above, so this topic seems to be an assignment which involved them personally as writers.

TABLE III  
SAMPLE 3 COMPARED TO JOURNAL 2

---

	<u>Sample 3: (Mar. 3)</u>	<u>Journal 2: (Feb. 25)</u>
Range =	7--16	9.5--16.5
Len. Range =	80--380	168--306
Mean Len. =	232	265
Mean Score =	11.7	12.3

T-Test for Length:  $T = .996$   
 $p = .358$

---

The T-test results given above indicate that the means of these two types of writing are not significantly different. Contrary to my expectations, the mean Journal 2 score was only .6 points higher than the mean score for Sample 3. The difference of 33 words in the mean word count between journal 2 and Sample 3 shows an increase of 12 percent in journal writing. We can see that the lowest score for Journal 2 is 2.5 points higher than the Sample 3 lowest score, which indicates that the journal writing starts at a higher level. Also, the shortest length for Journal 2 is 168 words, fully twice as long as the shortest Sample 3 piece.

There were several reasons that I thought the revised journal entries would receive higher scores. First, the students had more than one chance to write up and polish this material. Also, they had the opportunity to compose without time pressure. Thirdly, they had access to in-class help from me to fix organizational and mechanical problems.

Despite my predictions, we can see from the T-Test results that the Journal 2 assignment and Sample 3 seemed to elicit writing of about the same mean length and nearly the same quality. One strong reason for this similarity is that the samples were produced just one week apart, although one at home, and the other in-class under time pressure. It seems that by the end of the course, most students had better adjusted to writing in an exam situation.

When we look at the range of length, we find a big difference between the shortest pieces. The shortest Journal 2 entry is fully twice as long as the shortest Sample 3 writing. I conclude from these numbers that even the weakest students were able to produce longer pieces at home.

Interrater Reliability:Sample 1 Rating: (1/15/88)

How many cases need a 3rd reader?          6 out of 18

Interrater Correlation averaged =          .595

(Spearman Brown Prophecy Formula)  $r = .815$

Sample 2 Rating: (2/12/88)

3rd Reader needed?                                  4 out of 17

Interrater Correlation averaged =          .677

(Spearman Brown)  $r = .863$

Sample 3 Rating: (3/17/88)

3rd Reader needed?                                  2 out of 15

Interrater Correlation averaged =          .639

(Spearman Brown)  $r = .842$

Journal 2 Rating: (4/15/88)

Discussing Differences:                              3 out of 7

Interrater Correlation averaged =          .845

(Spearman Brown)  $r = .942$

Note: To obtain a final correlation coefficient for the three raters, I have used the Spearman Brown Prophecy Formula. As Henning explains (1987, pp. 82, 83), if a composition is scored by more than one rater and the final score is determined by pooling the raters' scores, then the final correlation needs to reflect the number of raters. (In this case, the number of raters is three.)



Looking at these statistical results, it appears that the results of my experiment containing three samples and a rated journal entry exhibit interrater reliability. When one rater did not arrive at a score within three points of a 2nd rater, then a 3rd reader was asked to arbitrate the difference. Since writing samples are always difficult to evaluate fairly, it is important to have at least three raters in this kind of study.

#### Concluding Remarks

I have examined the results of this writing study in several ways: score, length, and correlation of score to length. The mean score from Sample 1 to Sample 3 changed by 3.4 points which is a significant difference. The median student showed even more improvement from Sample 1 to Sample 3, 4.5 points. Since these 4.5 points represent 22.5% of the total 20 point score, I conclude that my interactive journal curriculum was effective for the median or average students.

Upon looking at the length of Samples 1, 2, and 3, I found that the range increased a great deal in Sample 3, from 80 to 380 words. I conclude from these numbers that the journal writing technique enabled many students to write longer pieces, but that the least proficient still had trouble composing under time pressure. When I looked at the journal writing of 7 students in more detail, I discovered that even the least advanced students managed to write longer pieces at home.

Finally, looking at a correlation of score to length, I found that usually longer pieces received higher scores but this was not always true. By combining the student results shown in quadrants C and D on Figure 3: "High score, short" and "High score, long and median," we see

that 9 out of the 15 total students achieved a median or higher score. Nine out of 15 represents 60% of the class, so more than half the class achieved significant improvement in score during the eight week course.

## CHAPTER V

### THREE CASE STUDIES

After looking at the class progress through eight weeks time, in this chapter I will describe three individual students who represent very different abilities and language backgrounds. These three students do not demonstrate average progress, but rather their scores fall below and above the 22% increase in score achieved by the median student in the class of 15 students. I will examine the effectiveness of my teaching method for these three students.

Since writing is a difficult process which requires much time and the combining of many other language skills such as reading and communicating, it is hard to know what really goes on when students write. At several points during the course, I asked the students to answer questions about their attitude towards journal writing or about their own writing progress. I will look at the three students in terms of the following questions:

Previous writing training

Attitude towards journal writing

Length of journal entries

Average time spent per journal entry

Effect of journal writing on scores assigned by three outside  
raters

### Introduction of Three Students

I have selected one student who made virtually no improvement (bottom third), K.T.; one student who made dramatic progress, A.K.; and a third student, L.F., who started high on sample #1 and then regained this score on sample #3 after dropping on sample #2. (See Appendix F for the text of all samples for these three students.)

<u>Age</u>	<u>Home Country</u>	<u>Writing Instr. &amp; Attitude</u>
1. K.T.: 30	Japan	Some in both Japan and the U.S., but writing is hard for him; he recognizes that he has a negative attitude.
2. A.K.: 18	Malaysia	Has studied English and Eng. comp. all her school life, 12 years; she feels good about her Eng. ability because she made good grades in English at home.
3. L.F.: 24	Venezuela	Has studied comp. in his science courses in high school and college. Most recently, he has studied tech. writing. He likes to write letters & has a good attitude towards writing.

#### The Teacher Response Letter:

During the eight weeks, all three students' journal excerpts appeared at times in the Teacher Response letter. I published K.T. once, A.K. three times, and L.F. twice.

#### Portrait of K.T.

K.T., an earnest, 30 year old solar energy engineer from Japan, had been in the U.S. for nine months and at the English Language School for three months. He attended university in Japan. While he was an intelligent, conscientious student, it often seemed that K.T. felt imprisoned by the inability to express himself in English.

Samples #1, 2, & 3: (Scores: 6 8 7)  
 (Length: 174 104 100)

Judging from the rating scores, K.T. shows virtually no improvement in either length or score from Sample #1 to Sample #3. After completing the topic sentence fairly well for Sample #1, K.T. proceeds to wander away from the topic and give the reader a lecture about American misuse of oil energy. Like Sample #1, Sample #2 was also difficult for K.T. because he had trouble choosing a topic; he initially wrote about a friend, but I said this was not acceptable as a description of an object. The "old red jacket" topic proved to be something he could handle, and although there are many errors, K.T. did manage to stick with this subject. For Sample #3 also, he stayed with the "city" topic; similar to the style found in Sample #2, K.T. writes simply and uses uninspired vocabulary. Looking at the word count of these three samples, we find that K.T.'s longest sample was on January 11th, at the start of the course.

Early & Late Journal Samples: (Scores: 14.5 9.5)  
 (Length: 276 248)

In contrast to his timed in-class writing samples, K.T.'s at-home journal entries were much longer and usually had much more of interest to say. His January journal entry, "Accident happens three times" described in good detail how this Japanese proverb came true for him during one past year. His word count on this early journal was 100 words longer than his in-class writing samples. His late journal writing concerns "AIDS" has a catchy beginning, "Be careful, the Aids

live in your neighborhood." After wandering around some in the middle, this entry ends with quite a strong conclusion.

#### Summary:

Comparing K.T.'s rated journal entries to the rated samples, both the content and length improved when he was free to spend more time. Part of his need for time stems from the fact that K.T.'s English oral proficiency was quite low for a student in this intermediate class. Also, he explained in several free-choice journal entries that writing was hard for him and that he did not like writing in either English or Japanese. One interesting, additional fact about K.T.'s journal writing is that he was aware of communicating to me as his audience. Several times he would ask me a question or offer an apology to conclude his journal entry. He was one of the very few students in the whole class to be cognizant of a specific audience.

#### Content of Journal Writing & Attitude:

Although K.T. often complained about having to write three journal assignments per week and said that he required more time than the other students, he consistently showed good effort and did not shy away from difficult topics. Some examples of his "free choice" entries are: religion; comparing family systems in America and Japan; America's place in the world. In addition, in several entries, K.T. explained that the writing process was difficult and frustrating for him. When asked what he disliked about the writing class, K.T. responded: "I couldn't understand about improve writing." On the journal questionnaire (Appendix C), he reported spending at least three hours per entry, with

the time varying according to the topic. He liked the free choice option and felt positive about the way the journals were not graded.

To sum up, it was disappointing but not surprising that K.T. did not show much improvement from Sample 1 to Sample 3. He is a good example of a beginning writer who can produce much better content when given control over his topic and a great deal of time.

#### Portrait of A.K.

A.K. is an eighteen year old girl from Malaysia who had only been in the U.S. for two weeks. She spoke English quite fluently and had studied composition for years in her country. A.K. was extremely conscientious and attended class every day. She initially disliked the writing class because it was much work, but then she felt positive about both the class and writing.

<u>Samples #1, 2 &amp; 3:</u>	(Scores:	5	9	16)
	(Length:	160	155	287)

A.K.'s Sample #1 received a low score because although it includes many details, it is not written in paragraph form. Also the content would have been more convincing if she had narrowed her focus. By Sample #2, A.K. was writing a standard paragraph that contained details and a concluding sentence. The topic sentence is confusing. A.K.'s score for Sample #3 is skewed to the high end because of the effect of prewriting and lots of advance work done at home. When she entered class on exam day with pages written out, I collected them and told A.K. that she needed to do more than copy them over; apparently she had done so much preparation work that she had virtually memorized her text! The

fact remains that A.K.'s Sample #3 writing is extremely descriptive and persuasive as an invitation to visit Singapore. Samples #1 and #2 are almost the same overall length, but Sample #3 is close to twice as long.

Early & Late Journal Samples: (Scores: 15 10)  
(Length: 268 281)

A.K.'s two journal entries are both over 250 words long, similar to the length of Sample #3. Her early journal entry describes longhouses in Malaysia. She provides many interesting details in a well organized, clear form. There are some mechanical errors but they do not prevent communication. A.K.'s late journal entry consists of five paragraphs that explain the origin of her three nicknames and her reaction to them. The conclusion is confusing and seems to be contradictory.

Summary:

Comparing A.K.'s rated journal entries to the rated samples, her journal writing is generally longer, shows better organization, and covers the topic more completely.

Content of Journal Writing & Attitude:

A.K. conscientiously kept up with her journal assignments and selected some interesting topics for her "free choice" entries: suicide; reasons for attending college; how pressures affect me." On the journal questionnaire, she reported that she preferred "free choice" topics and that she spent two or three hours on each entry, if the topic was easy. When asked about her reaction to seeing her own words in the "Teacher Response" letter, A.K. wrote: "When I saw my journal entries published



I felt very happy." She saw journal writing as a good way to improve composing.

In conclusion, of these three students, A.K. showed the greatest change and progress from Sample 1 to Sample 3. I believe her improvement stemmed from two factors: first, she had a great deal of writing training before taking this class and was accustomed to composing in English; second, A.K. worked very hard in her journal and received class recognition three times in the Teacher Response letter.

#### Portrait of L.F.

L.F. is a twenty-four year old petroleum engineering major who planned to get a Masters degree in the U.S. His spoken English was halting and not fluent. He missed seven classes out of the 32 total, sometimes wearying of the intensive nature of this language school.

<u>Samples #1, 2, &amp; 3:</u>	(Scores: 12	9.5	11.5)
	(Length: 138	133	277)

L.F.'s Sample #1 is clear and well organized into three paragraphs. It contains a number of errors typical of Spanish speaking students. His Sample #2 starts out well, but then its coherence is weakened when he digresses to another topic. L.F.'s Sample #3 is especially interesting to consider. It is quite a sophisticated essay about how he simultaneously loves and hates Caracas. Unfortunately, he included it all in one huge paragraph which does not work well as an organizational technique. Ironically, L.F. had already written about Caracas as a free journal entry in January. The earlier, much simpler treatment of the subject would have received a higher rating, I feel sure. L.F. missed

class the day before the exam, so he had only one class period, rather than two, to prepare. He shows no change in total word count from Sample #1 to Sample #2, but his third sample is fully twice as long as the previous two.

Early & Late Journals: (Scores: 9 12.5)  
(Length: 73 306)

L.F. was not inspired to write at length on the early journal entry topic, "Describe a Custom or Superstition in your Country." His short entry, only 73 words received a low score of 9. Its content is dull and contains errors. L.F.'s late journal entry presents a far different picture. He describes a memorable childhood experience visiting a region called, "Maruco." L.F.'s writing here is well organized and clear and provides many vivid details. The whole essay would have been improved if he had started with his final paragraph which explains the visit's significance.

Summary:

L.F.'s rated journal writing corresponds well with his Sample #3 performance both in score and overall length. He expended much effort on his journal writing, so the early journal entry is not a good example of his composing ability.

Content of Journal Writing & Attitude:

L.F. made very good use of his journal to explore a variety of topics. For his "free choice" entries he often wrote on technical subjects: a petroleum reserve, nuclear energy; also, he included an

application for T.U.'s Masters degree program in his journal. On the journal questionnaire, L.F. explained that he could see advantages of both assigned topics and free choice entries. He was positive about the way his entries were not graded but contained comments and corrections.

He wrote:

I like that my entries come back to me checked and reviewed on the same piece of paper and in the same place the mistake was made because they are a valuable study material for the following homeworks.

L.F. stated that he spent several hours per journal entry throughout the course. He explained that although the writing got easier for him, he was inspired to work hard at the end of the course, so that he spent more time rewriting and fixing grammatical mistakes.

To conclude, although his scores from the outside raters do not show this, I saw L.F. make a large amount of progress during the eight weeks. (For an example of his more polished writing, see p. 87). He is representative of the two or three most advanced writers who enjoyed the challenge of writing well, even though composing is difficult and time-consuming. Letter #6 (Appendix D) represents the only time I printed a student's entry in its entirety. L.F.'s description of his dog (see 57) was outstanding enough to warrant this special treatment. Of the three students described in Chapter V, there was the least amount of difference between L.F.'s journal writing and his in-class timed writing. I believe that this greater ease of producing writing stemmed from the fact that L.F. was accustomed to writing in an academic setting.

### Conclusion

In summary, for K.T. this interactive journal method was not an effective way to enable improvement in writing fluency, but it did help increase his word count in at home journal writing. The main reason that K.T. did not improve more is because he was lacking in oral English proficiency. Judging by the rating scores, A.K. made the most improvement of the three students, so this method seems to be an effective one for her. The journal writing worked well for A.K. because she had already had a good deal of composition training in Malaysia and she was willing to work extremely hard. According to his coherent responses on the course questionnaire and from my own observations, L.F. was the most able of these three to take advantage of the whole teaching package I presented: interactive journal writing, grading forms, and opportunity for revision.

When trying to answer the last question I posed at the start of this chapter, I find mixed results. Since K.T.'s sample scores stayed low and his length decreased from Sample 1 to Sample 3, it seems that his conscientious journal entries did not improve the quality or length of his in-class sample writing. A.K., on the other hand, shows dramatic improvement in both length and fluency from Sample 1 to Sample 3. Judging from her questionnaire responses, writing journal entries in an interactive way did facilitate considerable improvement for A.K. L.F.'s Sample 3 was twice as long as Sample 1, but his score only changed by .5 point from Sample 1 to 3, staying between 11 and 12 points. So, it appears that L.F.'s journal writing facilitated improvement in overall length.

Of these three students, K.T. represents an example of an ESL learner who was not helped by my journal writing curriculum. The short period of eight weeks time was not sufficient to overcome K.T.'s two major obstacles to writing well: low oral English proficiency and a negative attitude towards writing.

A Postscript:

These three students each took an achievement test at the end of Level IV for placement at the English Language School. Out of a possible score of 100 points, 20 points for each of five classes, A.K. achieved 83 and L.F. 84. K.T., by contrast, for whom English was often a struggle, scored 64 points. A passing grade is 70 to 75, so K.T. was asked to repeat Level IV. A.K. had plans to study at Rogers State College in fall 1988. During the summer L.F. informed me that he was able to begin his Masters program at the University of Oklahoma after earning a 550 score on the TOEFL exam. We can see by these disparate after course plans that these students were indeed individuals with very different abilities.

Samples of "Best" Writing:

For the last question on the course questionnaire, I asked the students to decide which item of all their writing they considered to be the "best." I agreed with a good number of their selections. I am including three pieces here which represent the best of these three individuals' writing.

#1 K.T.: I am presenting a journal entry about a vivid childhood memory for K.T. (This was not his selection; he said he would like to write more about America.)

#2 A.K.: "My best work is Chinese New Year. I spent a lot of time writing this paragraph. With its vocabulary words, tense and I have to arrange it in orderly. It takes nearly 5 hours."

#3 L.F.: "I consider my best work the paragraphs about my dog. Because I worked hard over it and, the most important thing was that I felt inspirated when I wrote it."

## Best Writing Sample for K.T.

February 21, 1988

## Childhood

When I was a child about ten years old. I usually played with my friends outside until sun set. We didn't have any homework and in my neighborhood, there still was a lot of nature to play. Then it was an enjoyable place for us, I usually didn't have enough money or toys, and my parents didn't buy any toys for me; therefore, when I needed some toys, I had to make them by myself. One day, I made a big kite by myself, I spent a week to make that kite because it was so big. It was about six times the size of the others. As soon as I flew that kite in the park, it flew up quickly. Ten minutes later, it seemed like a small bird in the sky, and it was much higher than the other kites. It was a special kite to me, because it was a handmade kite. After this experience I got confidence to make toys. Besides my kite, I also made a bow, a fishing rod, a water gun, a small house, a small boat, etc - . I thought it was so fun. However, nowadays, children's life style have changed, and my neighborhood does too. I can't see any children outside in my neighborhood playing anymore; Instead, most of the children are playing inside the house and they don't know how to make a toy by themselves, because they already have enough toys to play with them.

## Best Writing Sample for A.K.

February 21, 1988

## Chinese New Year

Chinese New Year is one of the most important festivals in my own country. And this year the Chinese New Year fall on 17th of February. On that day Chinese all over the world celebrate this important festival, in memory of the old monster which was a dragon in China. The Chinese believe that there was a monster called "year" who would come out at that time to eat people so to prevent the monster from killing people, they made a loud noises to frighten the monster away. They chased the moster away by hitting empty tins and drums. Finally they came to make fire crackers in order to commenorate or frighten the monster away.

We also believe that in the first day of the New Year we are not allow to sweep the floor, or scold people. And we also have to hide the knives and knives represent a bad omen. We don't sweep for the first day because it means we sweep away the wealth of the following years. Parents don't scold their children because it will bring back luck to their family. On the 1st day of the Chinese New Year parents give their children "Ang Pow". Ang Pow means pocket money for the New Year. And the money is usually put in a red pack, because red color means happiness. Only the person who haven't marry would receive "Ang Pow".

During the new Year days we visit our friends and relatives and we also receive pocket money from our relative. While visiting friends or relative we have to say "Gong Xi Fatt Chai" because it is our tradision and "Gong Xi Fatt Chai" means happy and prosperous New Year.



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Page Two

A.K.

Chinese New Year lasts for fifteen days. It means people can visit their friends or relatives within those fifteen days. But most people they liked to visit their friends or relatives on the first three day. Because we only have three days public holiday, and very few people would like to visit their friends or relatives on the following day. On the New Year day Chinese always have cakes, sweets and food. Which prepare for their relatives and friends who come to visit them. On the fifteenth day we have a big feast where the who family gathers together talking and joking while the children are having their fun.

## Best Writing Sample for L.F

February 23, 1988

My Dog

The more wonderful kind of pets are the dogs. They are loyal, serviceable, lively and lovely. I have a femal, German Pointer short hair kind that has given (to my family) very pleasant moments. I bought her when she was only a few days born; in those days, she could sleep into a shoe box. Now, three years later, she is about thirty five inches in height, she has typical of her raze sad eyes, stong legs with hard claws, and large, hanging black hears. Her name is Bussy. With nobody can explain its providence. Bussy is white with so many little black spots that she looks grey when is looked from a distant in addition, she has three big black spots next to the rear legs. Her tail is short and she moves it with elegance.

Our dog is as another person in my house. She sleeps on a common bed with mattress, pillows and blanket. In the morning, after she gets up, she comes down the stairs and drinks coffee and milk, goes out to run studirly and to pursue birds and cats; and later she comes back to the bed for a few minutes more. Bussy is such a tame dog that she never has bitten anyone. She only growls behind the fence of my house, and it has been sufficient to keep away the strangers. In some occasions, she leaps that fence and runs away toward the hill adjoin my house, where she spends many hou sniffing and roaming.

When anyone arrives home, she jumps over the person putting her front paws, usually dirty, on his clothes, moving simultaneously and frantically her tail. I remember today those moments with nostalgia, but

February 23, 1988  
Page Two

L.F.

at the time that she does it, it is difficult for us to abide that conduct.

Now, we don't have any pet here in Tulsa, and for this reason we remember our dogs every day. All their actions, even though they made us angry, become today funny remembrances.

## CHAPTER VI

### EVALUATION OF TEACHING PROCEDURE

#### Introduction

Before I had the opportunity to teach this intermediate ESL writing class, I had had experience teaching elementary children, including bilingual first and second grade, and international adult learners who had much less formal schooling than the TU students. Given that I was planning to describe the course content as part of my thesis, I tried to evaluate my instruction while still teaching the course. My original purpose in asking questions about the students' writing experience and attitudes was to gain more information about them as writers. An unexpected benefit of this technique was my discovery that an active examination of the learning process can be a valuable teaching tool. By asking the students to look closely at their own writing process, the students were able to realize that writing is a craft that can be learned (Murray, 1978; Blanton, 1987).

#### Student Evaluation

1. Two specific journal assignments, given weeks #4 and 5, were designed to focus student attention on the journal writing process and their attitudes towards writing and revising. On February 8, the students responded to six questions concerning journal writing (Appendix C). Four questions which provided the most information were:

#1: "How do you feel about writing in your journal?"

Positive: 10                      Negative: 6

#2: "How do you feel about the "Teacher Response to Students"?"

All 15 students answered that they enjoyed reading my weekly letter; also, some students reported that they were motivated to work harder in order to be published.

A.H. (Japan): It is good because I can know about student's thinking (for example, customs, dreams, etc.) and I can get many information.

Note: It was especially rewarding to get this positive response from A.H. who was quite compulsive about writing perfectly, so he tended to spend very long hours on his journal entries, often translating from Japanese.

#4: "Which do you prefer?--Free choice or an assigned topic?"

Free Choice: 7                      Assigned Topic: 4

Existing System (2 assigned, 1 Free Choice): 5

Note: This divided response indicates that the 2 assigned, 1 free choice system fit this class population well, since the students all reported that they liked a part or all of the journal assignments.

#5: "Do you like the way your journal entries are not graded?"

Happy with System: 4

Unhappy with System: 6

Undecided or not Responding: 6

Note: I cannot determine a class consensus from these scattered responses.

After completing the Sample 2 topic which asked them to "Describe an important object," I asked for their reactions to this assignment as a Week 5 journal entry. The feedback generally was that this was a hard assignment and that they had difficulty writing under time pressure.

The Japanese students in particular had trouble understanding the concept of a "treasured object." K.T., the low student described in Chapter 5, was quite articulate about his misunderstanding:

I think treasure is the most important thing in my life. My most important thing isn't object. My treasure is my family and friend; therefore I confuse that topic.

2. End of Course Questionnaire, March 3, 1988: (Appendix E): The two questions that yielded the most information were numbers 5 and 7.

#5 "Which activity did you find the most helpful to improve your writing?" (Check one or two):

Journal writing at home  
 In-class writing in your journal  
 Working on a graded assignment in class  
 Class discussion  
 Working with a partner

Summary of Responses (15 students):

Twelve students chose "working on a graded assignment in class," and 9 students chose "journal writing at home." "Class discussion" and "Working with a partner" each received four votes.

#7. "How long did you spend on each entry usually? Did this amount of time get shorter or longer?"

Summary of Responses:

A. Length of Time: 5 of the 15 students responding reported spending 3 or more hours per journal entry. The average time spent by these students was 2-1/4 hours.

B. Amount of Time Spent:

<u>Same</u>	<u>Shorter</u>	<u>Longer</u>
3	7	4

(1 student did not answer)

S.A. (Pakistan) answered: ...one to three hours on each entry. I improve lot of things in this course and not only the time get shorter, and I try to make my paragraph more thoughtful.

3. Teacher Reactions to Course Questionnaire: I was surprised to discover that most students were spending a substantial amount of outside class time on each journal entry; in other words, in many cases they were writing at-home essays. The fact that most entries had interesting content and rarely included errors that prevented communication causes me to believe that the times reported are accurate, not inflated.

I did not predict that many students would select "Working on a graded assignment in class" as an important means to improve their writing. When I later asked verbally what they meant, some students explained that they liked the way I helped them revise in class; others reported that they were helped by learning how to write within 50 minutes; a few others explained that they were helped by the combination of teacher input and time pressure.

Finally, I was interested that four students mentioned partner work as helpful. I firmly believe in the value of working in pairs or in a small group as a learning technique. We did very little partner work, since as my two groups were small, on most days I was able to adequately answer requests for individual help.

#### Teacher Evaluation

##### Successful Techniques:

1. Interactive Journal Writing: I found that the weekly Teacher Response Letter is an excellent motivator for most students.

2. NOT Grading Journals: I think that the students were willing and encouraged to keep writing journal entries because of the positive feedback they uniformly received along with suggestions for improvement. My suggestions were related to both content and grammar. Positive feedback generates a far different feeling than red ink and low grades.

3. Three Topics per Week: For this group of students, the combination of two assigned topics and one "free choice" each week worked well.

4. Consistency of Grading System: The students and teacher were all aware of and using the same five categories of evaluation.

5. Size of Grading Form: The grading form I gave the students was small, just 4 x 8-1/2 inches; as a practical time management suggestion, the smallness of the form means the teacher has to make her comments concise. Also, the student is not overwhelmed by the quantity of problems. (Appendix B).

Techniques that Need More Test of Time:

1. Prewriting: As mentioned earlier, I believe that it is very important to expose students to the notion of writing as a process. Although we tried several prewriting techniques, I found that 8 weeks is far too short a time for most ESL students to really understand the concept.

2. Grading Form: After having contact with these students for just eight weeks, it is difficult to assess the effectiveness of using these grading forms as a teaching tool. Several more advanced students paid close attention to the grading forms and were able to revise accordingly. However, the five categories were confusing for some of the less experienced writers. If the students were able to use this



grading form for several terms, they would have opportunity to get thoroughly accustomed to using these five categories.

Changes I Would Make Another Time:

1. Explanation of 2 Different Writing Styles: At the beginning of this writing course, the students were very confused about which assignments were journal entries, and which were graded writing. In order to ease this confusion, I had all graded assignments completed on lined yellow paper. Another time, I would explain more fully the purpose of writing journals, compared to preparing more formal in-class writing that needs to contain clear organization, coherence, and correct spelling and grammar.

2. More Work with Partners: Since I was fortunate to have very small groups, 9 and 11 students, I did not emphasize partner work during this particular course. Another time, I would encourage and require more work with a partner. I have found that writing collaboratively seems to be most effective when students are working with someone from another language background. During this winter term, my ESL students got only a brief glimpse of the possibilities of working with a partner.

3. "Important Object" Topic: After talking to English teaching colleagues at O.S.U., both professors and graduate students, I learned that this "object" assignment tends to be difficult, for Americans as well as international students. In addition, I found that it was a culturally poor topic for the Japanese, in particular. Therefore, next time I would use another assignment as a midway assessment of writing progress.

4. Grading Form: As part of my "Coherence" category, I included "Subject-Verb" agreement. Another time, I would place the "S.-V." agreement more accurately in the Vocabulary/Syntax category.

#### Concluding Remarks

One satisfying result for me of using this interactive journal technique was that almost all the students showed consistently good effort and maintained a high level of interest. I believe that the weekly Teacher Response Letter provided an important way to maintain their interest because they were hoping to get their own entries published and they wanted to see the new information their classmates and teacher would share.

Midway through the course, the day after writing Sample 2, the students and I came to a point of decision about the rest of the course. The students had provided feedback about their attitudes towards journal writing from the journal questionnaire (Appendix C). I published some of their reactions in my Teacher Response Letter #4 (Appendix D). A number of students complained that three entries per week were too much work. After some discussion we came up with two ways to improve the situation. I offered them the option of writing 2 entries per week for a B grade, or 3 weekly entries for an A. (In the weeks to come, no students in fact chose the B option.) In order to ease some students' dissatisfaction with lack of journal grades, we agreed to set Thursdays aside as "journal day." The students would have class time to work on journal assignments, and I would circulate to carefully grade one piece of journal writing that they most cared about. This discussion session was an important event in our course. I am quite sure that most of

those international students had never before had the opportunity to discuss a problem with the teacher, normally a person of great authority, and then be invited to negotiate a solution. I felt honored that the students had become willing to share their feelings and frustrations with me.

## CHAPTER VII

### CONCLUSION

#### Summary of Findings

By completing the study described in Chapter IV, I now have answers to my research question: Will writing three journal entries per week during an eight week course facilitate improvement in length and fluency of ESL student writing? I have shown through charts and text in Chapter IV that my curriculum, heavily utilizing interactive journals, did result in improved length and fluency at the end of an eight week composition course. I have explained that these results exhibit interrater reliability. However, we need to consider these results tentative because they are based on the experience of only one eight week course with a sample size of fifteen students.

The scores given by three outside raters indicate that the majority of students made statistically significant improvement, but there is no proof that the students' gains resulted from writing interactive journals. The study could be done again comparing an interactive journal writing class to one that also emphasizes the process approach but does not include journals.

In Chapter IV I described how the results of my research study show that the middle or average performing students made the largest amount of progress using this interactive journal curriculum. The median student's score on Sample 1: 7, increased by 4.5 points to 11.5

on Sample 3 at the end of eight weeks. To look at individual students more closely, in Chapter V I discussed three students whose performance over eight weeks was not typical of the average student. I concluded that for the least advanced student of these three, my journal curriculum was not able to overcome his two major obstacles to writing well: low oral English proficiency and a negative attitude towards writing. For the other two students who had had composition training in their home countries, writing interactive journal entries provided a way for them to improve both length and fluency.

By presenting Student and Teacher evaluations of this composition course in Chapter VI, I illustrated that both parties involved felt that journal writing is an effective way to improve ESL student writing. Assigning a variety of topics each week provides an important means to maintain student interest. In addition, the students are motivated to continually put forth effort because they may be published in the weekly Teacher Response letter. The journals are commented on positively, but not graded, and this approach is another encouraging factor.

#### Suggestions for Further Research

1. It would be informative to try this experiment again comparing the progress of two separate groups:
  - One group uses Interactive journal writing
  - One control group does not use interactive journals.
2. The element of TIME seems critically important as a means to enable ESL writing improvement, especially in terms of length. It would be helpful to use interactive journal writing as a technique and:

- Ask the students to keep a log of the time they spend per journal entry.

- They could keep track of whether their writing time changes or remains the same. Does their amount of revising increase?

The more self-monitoring writers can do, the more they are able to understand their individual writing processes (Murray, 1982).

3. It was difficult to objectively describe my interactions with the students.

- Ask an Outside Observer to record the teaching procedure and interactions with the students--an "ethnographic case study," as described by Kantor (1984.)

#### Concluding Remarks

Looking again at Figure 2 in Chapter IV, we find an upward trend between the scores from Sample 2 to Sample 3. As explained earlier, I believe that the students needed the first four weeks of class to get accustomed to the journal writing process and writing in a workshop setting. I speculate that if the course had lasted four more weeks, the students would have continued to make progress. In other words, from the teacher's perspective, it would have been rewarding to continue instruction beyond the eight weeks, an extremely short period of time to achieve improvement in a craft as complicated as writing.

I am uncertain whether this interactive journal technique would work as effectively with another group of ESL students. I was fortunate in having a group of students who were highly motivated to succeed and who were willing to work hard. In addition, all had had some composition training in their native language or English, and sometimes

both. Another factor that facilitated the success of this journal writing method was that my two classes were small and I had intensive contact with them, four days per week. Once the students got used to a less formal classroom, they came to enjoy working together in a relaxed setting as fellow writers. One of the highest compliments I received on the course questionnaire was, "Mrs. Ferguson performs well as group leader."

My most important conclusion is that international students need a great deal of time to produce high quality writing.

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**APPENDIXES**

APPENDIX A

SUGGESTIONS ON HOW TO WRITE A  
WELL ORGANIZED PARAGRAPH

## APPENDIX A

March, 1988

SUGGESTIONS to Level IV Students about writing a coherent, organized English PARAGRAPH:

I. If you follow these 7 steps, you will be more likely to produce a paragraph that has interesting content and good organization:

1. Choose a subject you know about.
- \* 2. Narrow the subject to a topic you can develop in one paragraph.
3. List some details about your topic that would be of interest to your reader.
4. Limit the details to the most important ones you want to communicate.
- \*\* 5. State the main idea of the paragraph in your TOPIC SENTENCE.
6. List specific details to support your topic sentence.
7. Finally, write your paragraph; remember to end with a concluding sentence. (Adopted from J. Reid, p. 22, The Process of composition (1982).)

II. In order to make it clear to your reader that you are summing up the paragraph in your concluding sentence, you MAY use one of the following expressions:

To sum up	In short	In conclusion
At last	To summarize	To conclude

Therefore, we can see that...

NOTE: You do not have to use one of these expressions. The main thing to remember is to CONVINCe your reader that your topic sentence and concluding sentence are clearly tied together.

APPENDIX B

EXPLANATION OF GRADING CATEGORIES

GRADING FORM

## APPENDIX B

Level 4 Writing Grade Information

January 1988

I will be looking for 5 main categories when I grade your paragraphs and compositions:

I. CONTENT ** = <u>Most Important!!</u>	6 points Total
<u>Topic sentence</u> with a controlling idea supporting details.	2 points
- Is your argument <u>convincing</u> ?	
II. ORDER * = <u>Organization</u>	4 points
- Is your paragraph indented?	
- Do you have a concluding sentence?	
III. VOCABULARY; SYNTAX	4 points
- Do you use descriptive words?	
- Is your <u>sentence structure</u> correct?	
IV. COHERENCE	4 points
Transitions; Tense; Pronouns Subject-Verb Agreement	
- Do your sentences tie together well?	
V. MECHANICS	2 points
Punctuation, Spelling	
	—
Total =	20 points

(Keep!!)

## APPENDIX B (Continued)

Grading Form

- I. Content (6)
  - II. Order (4)
  - III. Vocabulary (4)
  - IV. Coherence (4)
  - V. Mechanics (2)
- (20) Total = \_\_\_\_\_

**APPENDIX C**

**JOURNAL TOPICS**



APPENDIX C  
Journal Topics

Week 1:

Entry 1: In order to think about how you write, please answer the following questions: (some derived from Ann Raimés, 1986):

- 1) Did you study composition in your native language?
- 2) Did you study composition in English?
- 3) Is writing easy or difficult for you?
- 4) How often do you write letters home?
- 5) What language do you dream in?
- 6) When you write in English, do you mainly plan and think in English or in your 1st language?
- 7) Which language do you prefer to write in? Why?

After writing answers to these questions, I had the students revise by writing an organized paragraph about "How I Write."

Entry 2: "Speaking compared to Writing": As a class, we made a list of ways that speaking and writing are different; then I appointed pairs of students to work together based on language background and writing ability. Assignment: Write a paragraph in which you compare speaking and writing.

Week 2:

Entry 1: Discuss your feelings about working with a partner to improve your writing. Do you like this method of learning? Why or why not?

## APPENDIX C (Continued)

Entry 2: In my country there is a funny SUPERSTITION that is known by everyone...

Week 3:

Entry 1: Write about one of your classes at the English Language Institute, THIS SCHOOL!

Entry 2: Describe the content of a TV news program or a magazine article and give your reactions.

Week 4: Feb. 1-4

Entry 1: Questions on JOURNAL WRITING:

- 1) How do you feel about writing in your journal?
- 2) How do you feel about the "Teacher Response to Students"?--my letter?
- 3) How do you feel when you see your journal entries published?
- 4) Which kind of assignment do you prefer?--free choice or an assigned topic?
- 5) Do you like the way your journal entries are not graded?
- 6) Other comments?

Entry 2: A magic genie has granted your wish for a short trip. If you could leave Tulsa tomorrow morning and be gone for a week, where would you go? Tell us what you'd like to do on this mini-vacation.

## APPENDIX C (Continued)

Week 5: Feb. 8-11

Entry 1: Discuss Marriage or Divorce in your Country by answering the following questions. The final entry should be written in paragraphs.---

MARRIAGE: What are the customs? Ages involved" Arranged marriage or not?

DIVORCE: Is it common? Is it hard to get a divorce? Is divorce socially accepted?

Entry 2: Look over your grading sheets. Which area (of 5 categories) are you having the most trouble with? Why? How can you improve?

Week 6: Feb. 15-18

Entry 1: Looking at IMP. OBJ. paragraph from last week:

- 1) Was it hard or easy to write this paragraph? Why?
- 2) How do you feel about writing under time pressure?
- 3) "Treasures" paragraph--Did this essay give you ideas or was it confusing.

Entry 2: "A CHILDHOOD MEMORY": Describe in as much detail as possible and think of a main point you are trying to make:

Where were you? Who was there? Was it happy or sad? How old were you?

## APPENDIX C (Continued)

Week 7: Feb. 22-25

Entry 1: Responding to a Newsweek article called, "Diplomats in our Backyard" (Read and discussed in class):

- 1) Summarize the main points of the article OR
- 2) As an international student yourself, tell about YOUR adjustments to life in the U.S.

Entry 2: A new student has just arrived at our school. Please give this person instructions about "How to Write a Well-Organized English Paragraph".

APPENDIX D

THREE TEACHER RESPONSE LETTERS

#1, #4, & #6

## APPENDIX D

TEACHER RESPONSE TO STUDENTS, #1:

1/19/88

Dear Level IV Students,

I want you to know for sure how pleased I am with the progress you are showing in learning how to write English smoothly and fluently. I am glad that the large Level IV was divided into two groups, since I feel that we will be able to make more progress this way. Our beautiful, new room with its long table is conducive to both discussion and serious writing work.

You are all fun to work with as you seem serious about your studies and very eager to learn. I am hopeful that you will maintain the commitment you are showing in getting your work done on time and attending every day. Please feel free to ask questions if you are confused or bewildered about a particular assignment.

Following are some interesting excerpts from the Journals of your fellow students:

## 1. Comparing the U.S. to Home Country:

R.S.: "Firstly I have seen a world of difference in social life. In India most of the people believe in arranged marriages but educated and broadminded families do not care about it and they believe in love marriage more than arranged marriage."

K.T.: "I like Japanese customs better than American. American people like rationality, Japanese does too. I think this word is sometimes good and sometimes bad. For example food. American people careless their food."

R.B.: "Japanese students wear uniforms. Therefore students spend less time worrying about clothes and more time studying. However American students are more interested in clothes fashions and are distracted from studies."

## 2. On Marriage:

Y.A.: "I believe that one of most important things in this life and more interesting is to be married and have your own family and children. Everyone dreams about that day. Who will be his or her spouse? What does he or she look like? How many children will they have?"

## 3. On Drugs:

N.K.: "Rumors of drug dealings have been swirling around the whole world. It's the most dangerous problem facing our society. People will kill and steal to have money to buy some drugs."

## 4. On Studying at the E.I.I.S.:

J.M.: "The work in the school is getting hard... Every day I work in four classes, that are listening, structure, reading, etc. One of them is writing; it seems more hard than the others. I think the reason is I must use all the grammar rules."

TEACHER RESPONSE TO STUDENTS, #4

2/9/88

Dear Level IV Students,

I don't know if other writing teachers have shared with you their feelings about grading your work, but I do not like to do it. First of all, I feel like I am playing God because I am deciding how to grade your thoughts and feelings, and it's HARD to be fair! Also, I know how it feels to have your paper marked up showing your errors and asking questions--it is often painful for the student. I KNOW how it feels because I am currently a graduate student at OSU.

So, I would like for you to keep in mind that I respect the hard work that each of you is doing. If I give you a low grade on your paragraph, I am trying to point out which areas of your writing are your weak ones. Please feel free to ask questions as often as you need to. Remember that writing clearly is a difficult skill in your first language, and even harder in your second language. So, HANG IN THERE!

Here are a few excerpts from your journals:

1. On grades in the Journal:

N.K.: "I like the way the journal entries aren't graded, because we have many mistakes in writing. If they are graded, we will feel sorry that we didn't do well."

A.R.: "I don't like the way my journal is not graded, because if my journal were graded I would know my grades and mistakes. I feel very satisfied when I see an A at the top of my paper."

2. On taking a MAGIC trip:

J.M.: "If a magic genie grants me the wish to take a short trip for one week, I would wish to take a cruise to the Carribean Sea on the comfortable Queen Elizabeth cruiser...I want the cruiser during the trip to make several stops at different islands. The first island is the Bahamas; there I will visit some beautiful beaches, and try to find a place where I can practice my surfing."

Y.U.: "If I could have a vacation for a week, I would go to Austria for skiing. I like skiing best of all the sports...Five years ago I went to the countryside of Austria to ski. That's pretty. The snow is high-quality and it's possible to have good conditions every time. The skiing grounds are ten times as large as Japanese ones. The ski lifts are five times as large as those in Japan...If I could ski only 5 days in Austria, I would enjoy 5 years' worth of skiing in Japan."

3. On a difficult college course:

S.A.: "I passed all the other courses that I took at my college, but I could never pass botany. This was because all the botany students had to spend several hours a week in a laboratory looking through a microscope at plant cells, and I could never see through a microscope. I never once saw a cell through a microscope. This used to enrage my instructor...I put my eye to the microscope and saw nothing at all, except now and again a nebulous, milky substance. I saw what looked like a lot of milk."

TEACHER RESPONSE TO STUDENTS, #6:

2/24/88

Dear Level IV Students,

For me, this past week has been filled with lots of vicarious excitement watching the Olympic winter games. I know that many of you are also enjoying this international competition. On Saturday night my whole family was glued to the TV set in order to find out which Brian, the American or the Canadian, would earn the gold medal. Although I hadn't heard of either skater before last Thursday, I found that it was vitally important to see just which man would win, and then who else would receive third place. There is something beautiful and inspiring to see a young athlete work extremely hard and then achieve a flawless performance while the whole world is watching.

Even though there were many, very interesting journal entries this week, I chose to publish only one student's work since we have almost reached the end of this class. Thanks to all of you who are keeping up with your demanding journal assignments.

Describing his beloved pet dog:

L.F.: "Dogs are the most wonderful kind of pets. They are loyal, serviceable, lively, and lovely. I have a female short-haired German pointer that has given my family very pleasant moments. I bought her when she was only a few days old; in those days, she could sleep inside a shoebox. Now, three years later, she is about thirty five inches tall. She has sad eyes typical of her breed, strong legs with hard claws, and large, hanging black ears. Her name is Bussy, but nobody can explain the origin of this name. Bussy is white with so many little black spots that she looks gray when she is seen from a distance. In addition, she has three big black spots next to the hind legs. Her tail is short and she moves it with elegance.

Our dog is like another person in my house. She sleeps on a common bed with a mattress, pillows and blanket. In the morning after she gets up, she comes down the stairs and drinks coffee and milk, and then she goes out to run sturdily and to pursue birds and cats; later she comes back to bed for a few more minutes. Bussy is such a tame dog that she has never bitten anyone. She only growls behind our fence, and this has been sufficient to keep away strangers. On some occasions, she leaps that fence and runs away toward the hill adjoining my house, where she spends many hours sniffing and roaming.

When anyone arrives home, she jumps on the person, putting her front paws, usually dirty, on his clothes, while simultaneously moving her tail frantically. I remember today those moments with nostalgia, but at the time that she does it, it is difficult for us to abide this conduct.

Now, we don't have any pet here in Tulsa, and for this reason we remember our dogs every day. All their actions, even though they made us angry, become funny remembrances today.



APPENDIX E

WRITING COURSE QUESTIONNAIRE

MARCH 3, 1988

## APPENDIX E

## LEVEL IV WRITING CLASS QUESTIONNAIRE:

March 3, 1988

1. How old are you?
2. What is your home country?  
How many years of schooling did you have in your home country?
3. What did you like most about this Level IV writing class?
4. What did you dislike about this writing class?
5. Which activity did you find the most helpful to improve your writing? (Check one or two):

Journal writing at home  
In-class writing in your journal  
Working on a graded assignment in class  
Class discussion  
Working with a partner

6. Grading Form:

Do you understand the 5 categories?  
Did the form help you understand how to improve your writing?

Please answer as honestly and as completely as you can--feel free to add explanations on the back.

7. Think about your JOURNAL WRITING:
  - A. How long did you spend on each entry usually?
  - B. Did this amount of time get shorter or longer during the course?
8. Think back over all the paragraphs and journals you have written these 9 weeks. Which one do YOU consider to be your very best work? Please explain.
9. Other Comments: (Again, it's OK to use the other side.)

THANKS FOR YOUR HELP!!!

APPENDIX F

STUDENT WRITING: SAMPLES 1, 2, AND 3  
JANUARY 11, FEBRUARY 9, AND MARCH 2, 1988

## APPENDIX F

Writing Sample #1: K.T.

January 11, 1988

I have chosen to in the United State because I was interested from Solar energy system and Eneyg problem for our furture. Because I'm kind of engeneer in Japan and I have worked for our company about five years, our company has a couple of Solar system. However I thought about that was not so good. Therefore I'm looking for new good system and I'd like to invention new solar system. But that is too difficult for me. Then other one thing is energy problem for our furture. Because Do you know American stock of oil enegy will be finished for about five or six years later. Then this problem will be bring a lot of problem. This mean is everything in our life. For example If American country export from Arabic country. It will be became Gas cost about four dollars for gallon. Because our country usually export a lot of oil from Arabic country. Then our country oil cost is about four dollars for a gallon. This is no problem in your life.

## APPENDIX F (Continued)

Writing Sample #2: K.T.

February 9, 1988

My tresure

My tresure is old red jaket. It seems quit simple and part of some place discolored, but It is the best clothe in my clothes. when I was young, I always wore that jaket when I was doing excrcise and traveling, Then that jaket has a lot of my happy memorise in our College life. I was belong to a hiking club when I studied in College. Than that club excrcise traning was too hard for me; therefore i sometimes felt about give up my club excrcise, but my jaket usually help my mind and it told me, dont give up it.

## APPENDIX F (Continued)

Writing Sample #3: K.T.

March 2, 1988

Toyohashi

I like Toyohashi very much. Because it is my hometown and it beyond too middle city in Japan. My city surrund has many enjoyable place in the year. For example Summer-time we can go Pacific Ocean. It located about twenty minites by car. It has beautiful the seashore. Then we can do, fishing, camping and surfing. Then I like fishing very much. Because that is my favorite sport. Then I sometimes could get delicious fish for dinner. Then our city doesn't have any special thing, but anybody don't want to move other city. Because anybody love our city.

## APPENDIX F (Continued)

Writing Sample #1: A.K.

January 11, 1988

I have chosen to study in the United States because

- behalf on studying I can travel around United States during holidays.
- I want to widen my knowledge.
- I can improve my English especially talking and listening.
- I have an ambitious to study in United States as I was young.
- After having education in United States it can modify the student to become more polite and more open minded.
- I love the life in United States.
- I can get a better job after having my studies.
- I can learn more about the American traditional and their life.
- I want to be an English teacher in my own country.
- English is one of the international language.
- United States is one of the most famous place for the people to get their further studies.
- behalf on studying we can know more friends from foreign country.
- I love to see the snow during the winter season.
- the people in United States are very friendly.

## APPENDIX F (Continued)

Writing Sample #2: A.K.

February 9, 1988

Collecting Badges

Collecting badges is one of my favorite treasures. Until today I still collect badges. Before I came to United States, I had collected about five hundred kind of badges. And I try to bring it to United States. But there are too many. Until my mother promises me that she would keep for me. I have been collecting badges for ten years. The badges that I collected such as schools badges, love shape's badges, companies badges, animal's badges, sports game's badges and etc. I can exchange badges with my friends. Sometimes, I go these badges from my brothers where they bought it from Singapore and Australia. I had spend nearly one thousand dollars for buying these badges. Anyway, I love these badges, when I feel bore I can look at these beautiful badges and count the number of the badges. I wish I were the only who can collect most badges in the world.



## APPENDIX F (Continued)

Writing Sample #3: A.K.

March 2, 1988

Singapore

Singapore, the gateway, is a farry-tale city. People have been drawn here throughout the ages from all parts of the world by its beauty and vibrancy. Singaporeans have a love affair with cars, drive fast, often ignore red lights. When crossing the streets you have to choose your opening carefully. It is better by using the bridge in order to cross the streets. There are a lot of cars moving along highway, and there is no speed limit while driving on the highway, so people always drive fast.

The millions of tourists who visit the country each year, as you can see they are carrying cameras strapped around their necks. Couples, regardless of ages, are taking photos. The snap of cameras lenses sound like crickets on a hot summer night.

There is a famous place for people enjoying and relax there, which is Sentoso island. The perfect tropical island with its peaceful beaches, secluded coves and superb seafood. The people here are gracious and friendly. Also they are welcoming hosts. Tourists gengerly court sunsets and wish that time would stand still. They complain that time goes very fast, just like the blink of an eye. When night comes, people filled the clubs. The lights from the clubs illuminated the beauty of the city. It makes a wonderful view that would bring people to paradise. Also there is skyscraper which built in 170 stories. Once you go

## APPENDIX F (Continued)

Page 2

A.K.

there you might be lost. You need to take about a month to finish your shopping. It is a nice place for shopping. You can buy things with low prices.

In conclusion, journeying through Singapore by land or sea, you will inevitably become captivated its glorious vistas and vibrant people.

## APPENDIX F (Continued)

Writing Sample #1: L.F.

January 11, 1988

I have chosen to study in the United States because I want to learn English and then for to get a Master degree in Petroleum Engineer, specifically on any Reservoir topic. Venezuela has large volumes of petroleum and needs that its Oil Industry gets the technical capacity for produce it.

Also, is very important for the oil workers to speak English, because to Venezuela come lots of people from the United States, England, Russian, etc, that want talk about our respectives experiences. The Oil Industry, in general, doesn't have nacionalities. We all learn from the another experencies.

The technical staff of 'Petroles de Venezuela' have come to study in the United States principolly. As I want to be part of that group of important people, I needed go abroud and learn about the U.S.'s Oil Industry.

## APPENDIX F (Continued)

Writing Sample #2: L.F.

February 9, 1988

My Favorite Book

One of the best books that I had read is "La Rebelion de Las Masas", written by Jose Ortega y Gasset. It have touch me a lot of important concepts about the human life and how we would life so that we really apreciate the humanity progress and we learn how to be useful to all the other people in the society. I brought that book to Tulsa and often I review some important paragraphs in order to sure me that I have understood exactly. But it is not a treasure as a book for me. I avoid in the present time and in the future to feel special emotions to the material things because, when for any reason, I lost or broke them I have a very bad time.

## APPENDIX F (Continued)

Writing Sample #3: L.F.

March 2, 1988

Caracas

The city that I love and hate simultaneously is Caracas, and it is because I know it so well that I always find at least one reason for love it and another for hate it. It is too polluted and too crowded. I feel aversion for traffic jams so usual in that city. In fact, there are so many cars that was necessary stopped each day some ones. However, that situation began recently, almost thirty years ago. Since its foundation, by Deogo de Lozada in 1567, thru perhaps 1945. Caracas had experimented a very low, and almost flat, development. It was by several reasons. The first one is the relative low importance of Venezuela as political entity when Spanish Empire took America, because both its relative poverty in valuable minerals, as gold and silver, and its warriors native inhabitants. The second reason is that after Bolivar liberated all the territory that today is occupied by several countries, the Venezuelan began a temble Civil War during all the end half of the last century; In that time, another cities was growing and developing. Those inconvenients in an agricultural country put us down as almost the poorest county in America. In that century, after the oil boom, the fabulous affuency of money has destroyed nearly all our cultural patromony and it has turned Caracas without history. A congestioned place with many people many tall buildings and many

## APPENDIX F (Continued)

Page 2

L.F.

cars, but without memory. Studing detailed thas metamorphosys,  
and living here for many time one can always find some reasons  
for feeling near and at the same time far of that place, and more  
even when I look it from the distance.

## APPENDIX F (Continued)

Week 7 Journal Entry: L.F.

February 27, 1988

Writing a Good Paragraph

Writing a good paragraph require expend a lot of time for both organizing the ideas that will outline it and reviewing the grammar and vocabulary that will be in that one.

The first thing that I do when I going to write a good composition is to think well about the topic in question, limiting the scope of the composition and deciding about the details that will appear in the paper. At this moment, I have a good general idea of the content and then I begin to write it.

That first paper is written fluently regardless of the grammar and coherence among consecutive sentences. Then I cluster together similar ideas in the same paragraph and suppress the not necessary ones.

Finally, I check the coherence and grammar of the composition and try to include new structures and words in order that it can express the same ideas that I want to.

Following the previous procedure is hard and you need enough time, but it is a excellent way to practice almost all my subjects simultaneously. (Edited with a few corrections).

APPENDIX G

DESCRIPTION OF THREE RATERS



## APPENDIX G

## Description of Three Raters:

A. Mary Bagot:

TESL Masters Degree Candidate, OSU B.S. in Ele. Ed., Centenary College, Shreveport, LA.

1985-1986: Engl. Instructor, Mito Engl. Center, Hitachi, Japan.  
 1986-1988: Engl. Composition Instructor, OSU: Freshman Comp.,  
 Americans Writing Research Papers, ESL Intermed.  
 Technical and Report Writing.

B. Frances Griffin:

M.A. in TESL: OSU

1969: M.A., Latin Amer. Hist.; Tulane U., New Orleans  
 1984-1988: Engl. Composition Instructor, OSU: Technical and Prof.  
 Report Wrtg. Freshman Comp. I & II for Intern'l.  
 Students, Remedial Engl. for Int'l. Graduate Students,  
 Remedial Comp. for American Students.

C. Paul McClure:

TESL Masters Degree Candidate, OSU

1985: M.A., Pastoral Studies, Aquinas Inst., St. Louis  
 1970: B.A., German, Indiana State Univ.  
 1986-1988: English Composition Instructor, OSU: Freshman Comp. I  
 for International Students

APPENDIX H

ENGLISH LANGUAGE SCHOOL  
WRITING EVALUATION FORM  
(UNIVERSITY OF TULSA)

## APPENDIX H

## ENGLISH LANGUAGE SCHOOL WRITING EVALUATION FORM

E Writing Test                      Date \_\_\_\_\_                      Grader \_\_\_\_\_

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Unity - 4 points

all sentences directly relevant

---

Order - 4 points

logical progression of thought

---

Coherence - 4 points

consistent perspective, tense,  
pronouns

sentence connectors

---

Completeness - 4 points

sufficient detail

concluding sentence

---

Clarity - 4 points

sentence structure

punctuation

spelling

---

Total - 20 points

---

VITA

Margery C. Ferguson

Candidate for the Degree of

Master of Arts

Thesis: CAN INTERACTIVE JOURNAL WRITING MAKE A DIFFERENCE?

Major: English/TESL

Biographical:

Personal Data: Born in San Diego, California, the daughter of Alice C. and Francis F. Coleman.

Education: Received Bachelor of Arts degree in English at the University of California, Riverside in August, 1969; studied bilingual education at Colorado State University, Fort Collins, 1972-1973; completed requirements for the Master of Arts degree at Oklahoma State University in December, 1988.

Professional Experience: ESL Teacher, English Instructor for International Students, University of Tulsa, January, 1988 to March, 1988; Teaching Assistant, Department of English, Oklahoma State University, August, 1986 to May, 1987; ESL Teacher, Intercultural Service Center, Tulsa Public Schools, September, 1985 to May, 1986; Remedial Reading Instructor, Poudre R1 School District, Fort Collins, Colorado, September, 1978 to May, 1979; Bilingual First Grade, Poudre R1 School District, Fort Collins, Colorado, September, 1974 to May, 1977; Bilingual First and Second Grade, East Otero School District, La Junta, Colorado, September, 1973 to May, 1974; Music Teacher, Inner London Education Authority, London, England, September, 1971 to July, 1972.

Professional Organizations: Member TESOL, Teachers of English to Speakers of Other Languages

Member OKTESOL, Oklahoma branch of TESOL