Writing for International Students: The Design and Implementation of a Pilot Course

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In the fall of 1987, I designed, taught and evaluated a writing course for fifteen international graduate students at the University of Massachusetts Center for International Education. The idea for the course grew out of my experience teaching foreign undergraduates in the University's Freshman Writing Program, and teaching in an intensive summer writing program (CDEBMS) for minority and second language students. These experiences, in addition to my work at the Center as volunteer editor and writing advisor for the incoming international students, made me aware of the need for a specialized writing program that would introduce international graduate students to American stylistic differences as well as building their confidence in writing in their second or even third language.

A perusal of the university catalogues and informal interviews with members of the ESL department, the English department, Continuing Education and the International Programs Office indicated that no other such writing course exists at UMass, even though the University serves 1221 foreign graduate and non-degree students as well as 124 visiting scholars and researchers and 27 foreign faculty members (figures courtesy of the International Programs Office).
Although some ESL programs are available for graduate students, none focus on writing. For example, the American Language and Culture Program (ALCP) for Chinese and other Asian graduate students and scholars concentrates on listening and speaking skills. Continuing Education has two intermediate level ESL courses which deal with conversation and grammar, respectively. Several graduate level writing courses are offered (Al Aischuler in the School of Education gives a course on writing for journals and the Graduate Research Center offers seminars in grant proposal writing) but neither addresses the particular problems of international students or explicitly teaches an understanding of American writing style.

An awareness of the unique difficulties of international students in adjusting to the expectations of American professors has gradually emerged at the Center over its twenty year history. The faculty has noticed that international students are weak in certain areas: documentation of sources, correct use of quotes and paraphrases, avoidance of plagiarism, the expression of their own opinions, and in the use of an analytical approach rather than a straight narrative. Pulling together information from several sources also seems to present a problem, as does focusing on a main idea and exploring it adequately. However, there never has been any doubt about the intellectual ability of these students, nor about their academic or professional achievements in their own countries.

From the students' point of view, the difficulties they experience in writing coincide somewhat with the criticisms of their professors. A needs assessment conducted last semester among international students at the Center indicated that expressing an opinion, clarity and logic, class paper writing and developing a personal writing style ranked high on the list, while
grammar, punctuation, vocabulary and overcoming writer's block ranked lowest. At mid-level were "American style," documentation, developing a main idea, openings, and closings. As it happened, these mid-level needs were to become more and more important to the students as the course progressed.

Although I now had an idea, from looking at the needs of both the Center faculty and their students, of how to design my course, I still had little insight into the source of the students' difficulties. If their struggle with writing comes not from simple grammar problems (which they can, and sometimes do, have solved) or from a lack of talent, what cultural factors impede a smooth transition from writing in one language to writing in another? Why do some students seem to resist making a clear statement of their main idea? Why do they continually misquote authorities? Why are students prone to exaggeration? Why do they persistently avoid expressing a personal opinion, even when it is called for in the assignment? These questions intrigued me, and I hoped to find some answers as the course progressed.

Looking over my needs assessments and my unanswered questions, I developed several goals for my project:

1. To help international graduate students become more effective writers of American style papers.

2. To discover what these students need in a writing course that is different from what is taught in other contemporary writing courses.

3. To begin to understand the cultural differences that underlie these students' writing difficulties.

If these goals were accomplished I would not only have performed a useful service and, incidentally, enjoyed myself, but I would also have begun to
design a outline for an expanded version of the course which might be useful on other campuses.

For now, however, the Center seemed a logical place to research and teach a pilot class both because of its high proportion of international students, and because of its tradition of commitment and support of students from abroad. In addition, the overseas experience of faculty and American students at the Center would help create an atmosphere for a course which would treat the international students' writing with respect. This seemed particularly important, for I had begun to suspect that their difficulties were more the result of a cross-cultural communication problem than of a scholastic or linguistic inadequacy.

Literature Review

A look at the scarce literature on cross-cultural stylistic differences indicates that the field is a new one.

Kaplan remarked in 1966 that when foreign students began arriving at American universities it became apparent to instructors that even though their grammar was adequate, their attempts at class papers, theses and dissertations seemed disorganized or "somehow out of focus." The reason, he asserts, is that "the foreign student is employing a rhetoric and a sequence of thought which violate the expectations of the native reader."

Kaplan analyzed seven hundred foreign student compositions in three language groups and discovered that Mid-Easterners used a great variety of parallel constructions which sounded "archaic and awkward" to the English ear, that some Oriental writing is characterized by an indirect approach, the paragraph developing by "turning and turning in a widening gyre," rather than by straight inductive or deductive logic, and that French and Spanish writing
style allows more freedom for digressions, which both confuses and amuses the English reader by its apparently childish jumping from one topic to the next (pp.301-305).

Matalene (1985), referring to Kaplan's study, pointed out that the differences in composition styles run deeper than paragraph structure or the placement of the main idea. People from different cultures, she says, employ different rhetorics, that is, different ways of thinking about relationships that exist among speaker, subject matter, purpose and audience. She believes that the study of contrastive rhetoric should be done with explicit awareness of the cultural context, rather than by merely deducing cultural thought patterns from foreign student essays.

While teaching English composition in China, Matalene learned the importance that memorization has over paraphrase, analysis or interpretation in Chinese writing patterns. Slogans and set phrases, often drawn from classical sources "constitute the correct forms of verbal response," so a Western writing teacher telling the Chinese to avoid cliches is "counseling her students to write like uneducated barbarians" (p.792).

Despite this attempt in the literature to include cultural context in the analysis of writing style differences, most of the argument centers on the form of the essay alone. For example, Hinds (1983) claims to have found a Japanese writing schema that is significantly different from any English method of organization, and Kaplan, writing in 1972, postulates that "each language and each culture has a paragraph order unique to itself" (p.63). However, Das (1985), studying Indian students, concluded that faulty composition in English is linked to the same deficiency in writing in the first language. Mohan and Au-Yeung Lo (1985), looking at modern Chinese
teaching manuals as well as ancient and modern Chinese literature, found that the Chinese idea of the correct form of the paragraph is the same as the Western one. They point out that the differences that have been observed arise from the method of observation itself. For example, if correct English paragraph structure were to be deduced by Chinese researchers from English-speaking students writing in Mandarin it is likely that such claims would be considered invalid. The organizational deficiencies that foreign students exhibit, they believe, are more likely to be the result of the curriculum emphasis of their writing instruction. In Hong Kong, for example, English composition teachers stressed grammar overwhelmingly over organization, and marked papers for sentence-level accuracy rather than organizational faults to meet the requirements of the Hong Kong Certificate of Education English Composition exam.

While this argument in the literature is interesting, it is apparent from its narrow focus that the study of cultural differences in writing styles is only just beginning. A thorough investigation of the writing deficiencies of international graduate students may turn up many other cultural factors that would inform both curriculum development and teaching methods to help prepare foreign students for American graduate writing. This project is a beginning in this direction.

The Course and its members

Fifteen students signed up for a one-credit, pass/fail course billed as "Writing for International Graduate Students," an independent study with David Kinsey acting as advisor. Four of the students were from Mainland China, two from Somalia, two from Nepal, and one each from Sri Lanka, Indonesia, Brazil, Columbia, Mali, Tanzania and The Gambia.
Two of the Chinese students later dropped the course (one saying apologetically that she was "too nervous about it," as did the Malian student who had become overworked. The rest came more-or-less regularly for the eight, two-hour sessions. Attendance was the only requirement for credit; it was explained in the first session that it was a "performance" course, i.e., most of the writing and thinking would be done in class.

The objectives of the course were stated in the handout I gave each participant to copy onto their independent study form:

Students will attend nine two-hour sessions during which they will learn to find and develop a main idea, to use descriptive language, to express their own written opinion, to develop arguments and opposing arguments, to open and close a paper effectively, to quote, paraphrase and document references, to understand and avoid plagiarism, and to edit their own and each other's work.

Products of the course will be several short personal experience and descriptive pieces, a 500-word opinion paper, a 1000-word mini-class paper, and a correctly documented research paper written for another course.

Changes were made as the course progressed, but by and large, we stuck to this format.

Course Design

I attempted to cram into sixteen hours the following topics and assignments: work on a personal experience piece that explored cultural differences, finding the main idea in three published pieces written in a personal style, exploring metaphor in different cultures, avoiding clichés, finding descriptive language in poetry, using a Thesaurus, writing an opinion essay in a highly structured format, looking at the American idea of clarity, the linear development of an essay, the concept of plagiarism and the direct expression of opinion; documenting sources in APA style, quoting and paraphrasing Paolo Freire on the subject of pompous Brazilian expression to prove several different points - one of which was not his own, freewriting and
response, learning and practicing peer editing, and discussing the concepts of
voice and audience.

I had also intended to have them write a 1000 word "mini" class paper on
"Poverty in America" using several sources I would bring to class. In
addition, I encouraged them to start a scrapbook of photos, magazine pictures
and mementos which might suggest freewriting topics or informal essays to
them, which they would write for a home audience.

Implementation and Adjustments

Although we all soon realized this was too much for a one-credit course,
the students worked diligently and cheerfully on their in-class assignments.
I had intended for them to do most of their writing in class, but the large
group discussions were so involving and the questions that arose so
interesting that they had writing to do at home nearly every week as well.

I dealt with the overload by just touching on some of the topics (poetry,
voice, descriptive language, freewriting), by letting the scrapbook idea slide
(even when simply finding one at a reasonable price proved a difficult
task for students unused to shopping in Amherst), and reducing the mini-paper
assignment to a group discussion of how to put a hypothetical paper together.

This last decision was made by the students when I asked their opinion in
the seventh session on how to proceed. They expressed some frustration at not
knowing how to handle class papers by this time - one student saying he had
expected a "how-to" lecture on class papers at the beginning of the course.
They now hoped that in the remaining session I would give them a lecture on
the following points: openings, how to set objectives, more on quotes and
paraphrases, closings, and a list of things they should avoid doing in a class
paper. Needless to say, I only managed to cover openings, an outline of
arguments and closings in the final session. (Please see attached course outline for a more detailed description of each class session).

Analysis

1. Documentation

From the very beginning I made the students aware that I was interested in cultural differences in writing styles, and enlisted their help in finding them. One of the first that emerged was in the area of documentation. Students had been eagerly awaiting this session, thinking, perhaps that the preliminary freewriting and personal experience pieces were a diversion from their real task of learning how to write class papers.

It was clear that the information about APA and MLA styles was new to them, as was how to quote and paraphrase correctly. One of the reasons for this was pointed out by a Nepali student as a cultural difference: "We're afraid to quote anyone." After some laughter and discussion I learned that in many Third World countries, authorities may not want to be documented, for fear their words would be used against them. In African countries, where consensus is important, explicit quotation may destroy the semblance of political unity so necessary to the functioning of the Ministries these students may work in at home.

Of course, in writing papers in these countries, the ideas of others are mentioned, but it is more likely that they would not be attributed to their originator, but stated as if they were broadly accepted.

Furthermore, when an authority is quoted, it is common to write only the gist of what was said, rather than doing the diligent search for the person's exact words, as we require in academic writing in the West. Perhaps this is a
result of the influence of predominantly oral cultures in which hearsay evidence may be perfectly acceptable. Other countries may not have developed or accepted as necessary the Western style of academic writing, and may graft their own ways of documenting evidence onto the Western style that they have learned in school.

The following example from Mainland China illustrates this point:

"As early as forty years ago, Dean Acheson, the U.S. Secretary of State, analyzed the impetus behind China's revolution. He attributed one reason to China's overpopulation... Another man who favored curbing the rapid population growth in the 1950s was Ma Yin Chu, a celebrated professor in sociology at Peking University. Unfortunately, his valuable suggestions...brought himself only denunciations from the highest state leaders and persecution for two decades."

Of course, American university students must also learn how and why careful documentation procedures are called for in academic writing, for young people normally form their opinions according to hearsay evidence, "common knowledge" and half-remembered facts and personal experiences. Even as educated adults, we may question someone's analysis in ordinary lunchtable conversation, but rarely do we insist on documenting evidence. However, when American students reach a certain point in their education, they are initiated into a cultural procedure which, while it may appear tedious at first, is accepted as inevitable. Our scientific view of the world requires accuracy, and our legal insistence on the avoidance of slander is well known to the society at large through the popular media. International students, however, may reach academic heights in cultures where "truth" may not be based on "facts" as we see them.

2. Plagiarism

International students' confusion about plagiarism may also arise from subtle and unrecognized cultural differences. It is not enough to define
plagiarism as Corbett (1984) does (and as I did initially for the students):

"If you present as your own words what you have copied from some author or if you present some paraphrased material without acknowledging the source of the data or information, you are guilty of plagiarism" (p.163). Students from many non-Western countries may need to understand a more basic concept: that an idea can be owned at all.

When it is explained that in the West, an idea is the property of its originator, some international students find it amusing; almost unbelievable. They know that Americans are property conscious and consumerist, but owning an idea seems as outlandish as owning air. To explain the cultural difference, I told them a story that an African student had written for the class about her impressions of America.

"My first semester, I had a roommate...she and I used to cook and eat together and put our food in my fridge. One day, while she was out, I took her cooking pot without her permission and went down into the kitchen to cook dinner as is done in my culture...But this was a mistake. I wish I had not taken her pot without her permission, or talked to somebody who knew the culture before coming here. When she went into the room and could not find her pot, she came downstairs and started shouting at me for taking it without her permission. I was stunned and could not even open my mouth...I told her I was sorry for what I had done and that I would never do that again. I thought that was the end of the whole issue, but no. She waited until I came into the room and she started showing me what things belonged to her and what belonged to me...This was an experience which I shall never forget and shall tell my children and grandchildren."

To Americans, I told them, ideas are like cooking pots; you don't use them without permission. The hurt the student suffered in this incident underscores the necessity of explaining the cultural reasons for our idea of plagiarism as well as giving international students clear warning. Otherwise we risk being judged the way this student condemns Americans in the first part of her paper:
"The most striking thing for me, of which I was a victim, is the country's individualistic nature. Most people in this country hate to share whatever they have with anybody no matter what, unlike most parts of the world, especially in Africa, where I come from."

3. "Common Knowledge"

In explaining when it is necessary to quote, some confusion arose over what might be common knowledge. Is it what the reader of the paper knows, or is supposed to know? If so, why document anything, when your professor, by virtue of his/her title, knows it all? How can a statement like, "The Massachusetts state bird is the chickadee," be considered common knowledge if most Americans don't seem to know it?

Furthermore, how is a foreign student to determine what Americans know? The fact that Dean Acheson attributed China's revolution to its population problem may be so well known among Chinese academics that it is not worth documenting. So why should it be documented for an American audience, when Acheson was their own Secretary of State? My answer to these questions was, "When in doubt, document everything."

However, such advice can lead to even more trouble. Now that the students understood the importance we place on accuracy, some of them became scrupulous in applying the rule. Their questions became so detailed, I found them difficult to answer. "If you quote Nyerere throughout a (general, first-semester) paper about his influence on education, do you need to keep documenting when and where he gave his various speeches? How should someone's words be documented when they appear in a secondary source?" Some of the students became dissatisfied with the reference book we were using, Corbett's Little English Handbook, because it doesn't cover all these contingencies. In learning a new culture or a new method for doing something, specific rules are very important, for there is no "common knowledge" about when to stop applying
a general principle. For example, a student wanted to know what would happen in the following instance. He came up with what he thought was his own original observation: that God never speaks to the people directly, but always through a hierarchy of intermediaries. Could he be faulted for plagiarism, he wondered, if he had actually read this in a book years ago and forgotten about it? What if -- before he wrote the paper -- someone had pointed out to him that a famous author had the same idea, and had written a book about it. He still wants to include it in his paper as his own, because, after all, he had never heard of this author, but the idea is someone else's as well. Is there something like joint ownership of an idea?

4. Exaggeration

In some cultures, Nepal and India, for example, it is perfectly acceptable, even necessarily polite, to exaggerate for effect. A Nepali student, writing about his trip to America, says:

I was going to a country where people are said to be polite, hospitable, and civilized. I was dying to be engulfed in their politeness.

In a personal experience piece, this tendency merely makes the writing seem overdone. But when transferred to an opinion paper, it becomes more clearly - to an American - a fault.

Since the country has not significantly developed industrially, the number of jobs...are limited. It provides no room even for an extra person to be economically self-sufficient."

While it is not difficult to explain to these students that one must be literal in writing class papers, it is another matter for them to adopt the habit. It is nearly impossible for me, for example, to thank an Indian friend in his style:

We really have no words how to express thanks to you. Probably in previous life we were members of the same family.
Even if I were to adopt this form, I would always be thinking that I was being a little insincere, which is not something I like to do to a friend.

5. **Scientific Proof of Argument**

We in the West are just as unaware of our paradigm as are students coming from other cultures. In particular, we are unconscious of how much the scientific spirit has permeated our thinking, even if as individuals we do not think we know much about science. If someone speaks or writes in generalizations, we are likely to ask, "Who says?" or "where'd you hear that?" or to demand "proven facts" or evidence from "studies," as television advertisements often remind us. But students from cultures with different traditions of proof may not see the necessity for scientific accuracy. Take, for example, this African student's rejection of population control.

Malnutrition and infant mortality rate is a problem especially among families with a large number of children with little income. But when many of these families are asked whether they would like to use contraceptives, their replies are always no. Many of these contraceptives have side effects, such as dizziness, backaches, infection, headaches, etc. These contraceptives have side effects on affluent women who have access to good medical care. It may be even more dangerous for women living in an environment of poverty, who work on the farms all day long with no nutritious foods. Even those who object to family planning methods for religious reasons sometimes find it easier to influence people with the fear of cancer than with the fear of God."

Is this a writing problem, a thinking problem, or not a problem at all, but an alternative world view? Should it be dealt with in writing classes, or elsewhere in the graduate school? Should an understanding of the Western scientific method be a prerequisite for studying education at an American university? Such questions raise interesting speculation about international communication on development issues: just how much can we understand each other when internal frames of reference are so different?

6. How Opinion is Expressed
In explaining the structure of the opinion paper, I stressed that Americans are not a subtle people; we need to be hit over the head with a point to understand it. This is why the writer’s opinion should appear in the first paragraph, instead of politely or not at all, or obtusely, by hints, or by skirting the issue. Students seemed to understand this when working with a highly structured format like the opinion paper, but when left to their own devices, they were more likely to revert to their own comfortable style. For example, in this personal experience piece, a Chinese student criticizes by compliment. She writes of her meeting with a “typical American woman, independent, with a strong character.”

As one of the ordinary Chinese women, what I lack are exactly these characters. In our country, underdeveloped economically and with a strong feudal tradition of extended families and close family ties, husband and children constitute an integral part of a woman’s mental life...So we can hardly imagine that a divorced woman, away from her children, can live so happily and full of purpose in her evening years. We’re inclined to show our weakness and incapability in many facets, once we walk out of our “haven of love.” So we should learn from them, their self confidence, more individualistic and independent.”

When describing her paper to me before I read it, however, this student said that American women must suffer psychologically from living away from their children, and seemed truly skeptical that any woman living alone could be happy. Why she could say this but not write it I don’t yet understand.

7. Main Idea

The question of style discussed in the literature came up with one student in particular. According to Kaplan (1966), students who have learned to write in romance languages digress often from their central point. This student, artistic and imaginative by nature, who had written twenty children’s books and several plays in Portuguese, had trouble disciplining herself in following
a direct, linear style. Although she knew she was supposed to find a point and stick to it, her ideas kept spinning off in all directions.

There is something difficult about being in a different culture, or just speaking a foreign language, that is "appropriateness." In my opinion that is one of the hardest issues in coping with differences. When is the right time to say "hello," or "hi?" or start a conversation? When to ask personal questions or just be indifferent. When and under what circumstances is it appropriate to do such and such. Basically human beings are the same, and have more or less the same potential attitudes, knowledge, and skills. So, why are they so diverse? I think that what changes is the composition of the different elements, or the way they are structured based upon facts and circumstances. For instance, Americans say: "Time is money," and money in a capitalist system is something to be saved or invested in productivity. It sounds crazy, but I think this idea can change the whole concept of time, and the way it is spent in this society. Time and space are two abstract concepts that are lived by the way they are defined. I do not know what comes first: the system, the cultural values, or the people, but whatever order they have, they seem to be inter-relating somehow. So, if I have to make a stereotype of how American culture appears to me, I would say it is rational, dry, left-brain oriented, individualistic, values individual initiative and individual freedom, self-centered and diversified, nationalistic and proud of itself.

Although personal experience pieces written by other students had ill-defined or subtle main ideas, or digressions from strictly linear development, these problems didn't appear to be insurmountable. In seemed to me that these students had an idea of how they should be organizing their papers, and did not have to force themselves to "take on a completely different personality," as the Brazilian student put it, in order to write in American style.

It is unclear to me, then, if the trouble this student was having was a result of interference from correct writing style in Portuguese, or if she really had difficulty putting a finger on her ideas, or if her artistic, visual nature was an unusual personal characteristic, even in her own cultural context.

6. Depth of Analysis
Writing analytically seems to be difficult for some international students. Sometimes the attempt is made, but it is shallow, such as might be expected from a younger person in our culture. For example, a South American student, writing about American society, said that while she had tried to make friends, she found that Americans just "didn't care about me." She continues:

For me, it was really hard, because in my country people are friendly, nice and happy, and you can see that everywhere you go. People are not afraid to express their feelings...here, people do not express anything. If they express something it is not spontaneous or natural.

She continues,

I am not saying that to be an individualist is bad or good, I just say that a foreigner cannot expect very much from Americans (this is my own experience).

I cannot speculate, at this point, if problems with analysis are the result of inadequate scholastic preparation, of youth, of cultural habit, or of previous schooling that stresses rote memorization and correct answers, rather than any new thought by the students.

9. Cliche

The session on cliche proved amusing - for me - because my carefully researched examples ("grinding to a halt," "tip of the iceberg," "to take something with a grain of salt") were all new metaphors to the international students, not overworked at all. I abandoned the talk I had prepared as soon as I noticed they were taking notes.

10. Time Management

One of the students mentioned how difficult it is to adapt to the American haste in doing everything, and said that special need of international students is to learn to budget time effectively in writing papers. "At the JFK airport," she writes, "we took our own time; that's our culture, we have all
the time in the world to look at things, talk to people, to touch an
object..." Consequently, she missed her plane and "learnt the first lesson,
the utility of time."

These were some of the cultural differences that seem to impede
international students from writing in correct American style. Other problems
were paragraphs (How long should they be? What is meant by keeping one idea to
a paragraph?), overly complex phrasing ("testifying to the fact that" instead
of "saying that," "elaborated on it further," rather than "continued" or
"added"). Incomplete sentences ("The havoc it could cause and its
consequences.") were occasionally a problem, as was parallelism ("their self
confidence, more individualistic and independent"). However, these writing
problems strike me as either ordinary ESL problems or as typically American
basic faults that writing courses have always addressed.

Evaluation

I gave the students a combination open-ended and structured evaluation form
to complete at their leisure. The questions that asked for a written response
provided the most insight into what the students felt they had gained and how
the course could be improved. The following are some of the results of this
questionnaire.

1. What I like about this course was...
The organization and content
Participatory planning
The responses of freewriting and group editing of class papers
The content and the way it was organized
The atmosphere relaxed me
The writing experience
Teacher's encouragement to write
Having this course directed specifically at international students

2. I was really satisfied with...
Group discussion, written work, feedback, evaluation, sharing the written
work
The practice in writing class papers. Although it took me a lot of time, I felt improving.

Quotations
Your clear pronunciation and interesting reading materials
The work on documentation
The setting and the diversity of students
The format of the opinion paper session
Opinion paper and class on documentation

3. Now I am more confident about
   Doing freewriting
   The structure of my written work. How to plan before you write something
   Use of references, APA documentation and quotation and paraphrase
   What plagiarism is and what it is not
   My ability in writing from your encouragement
   Writing course papers
   Opinion paper

4. We should have spent more time on...
   Documentation, evaluating, discussing, criticizing various articles
   Colorful language, metaphor, cliche, and use of Thesaurus
   Paraphrasing
   Listening to more writing experiences from you
   Writing the minipaper
   Professional writing like opinion paper, documentation
   Openings, closings, objectives, outline, documentation, style

5. I still find it difficult to...
   Do paraphrasing
   Focus specifically on the topic and express myself
   Understand another’s speaking, to write formally in English grammar
   Express my ideas in a good writing pattern
   Understand some classmates who are not native speakers
   Punctuate correctly

6. Next semester I really think you should...
   Increase the credits and the load
   Force us to write more
   Expand the course to two credits and do more class papers...
   Touch a little bit on the common mistake of grammar
   Expand the course
   Give more time to the course and more assignment be given
   Spend more time doing a detailed needs assessment session in the very beginning

7. I wish I could...
   Have more time for the course and more credits
   Write more and more
   Have had more time to write class paper, and to get more teacher’s feedback
   Refresh my grammar ability
   Have more practice in English writing
   Write without much concentration
Have had more participation in the course design.
Have more time in research documentation.

8. I didn’t particularly like...
The scrapbook
The small group activities
Its short time
That some foreign students’ reading and accent which are difficult for me to understand.
Long time devotion to freewriting.
The pace of the course was a bit slow; could have been more dynamic if it had moved to different subjects more quickly.

9. My problem now is...
That I feel that I did not take the time to make more use of the course.
Quoting
The vocabulary and how I should think more analytically
How to enlarge my vocabulary
Improving my grammar as well as vocabulary
Listening comprehension and grasping points from a glimpse of an English-language article

10. International students especially need...
To polish their writing skills by practicing writing without thinking about language first
How to use the library. How to do documentation. How to take notes. How to organize the materials.
Functional grammar
To learn more about writing styles for class papers
To learn American-style in writing papers
To have a clear idea about what is expected from them, to feel self-confident
Lots of writing which is not possible in this one-credit course.

What strikes me about these responses is the obvious felt need of more writing courses, the emphasis these students place on ESL needs; grammar, vocabulary, listening skills, pronunciation, and the need to learn more about using the library and correct documentation. In my opinion, these are their only their most obvious needs. Organization, analyzing and sticking to the point are harder to know you don’t do well.

What kind of feedback is best for you personally? (Numerical values were to be assigned to different types of feedback, 1=very important, 4= not at all important.)

Written comments on papers by teacher. 1,1,1,2,1,1,1,1,1,
Grammar corrections. 1,1,1,1,1,2,1,1,
Positive suggestions on how to change your paper. 1,2,1,1,1,1,1,2,
Oral suggestions from the class in a large group. 1,2,3,1,2,1,2,2,
Explicit comments about what you did wrong. 1,1,1,1,2,1,1,2,1,

Written comments by peers. 2,3,3,2,4,2,1-4 (depends on the individual). 2,3,
Oral suggestions from peers in groups of two, 4, 2, 2, 2, 2, 3, 1-4 (depends on the individual), 2, 3.
Encouragement without too much direct criticism. 4, 3, 4, 3, 1, 2, 2, 1, 1.

(These responses give me the impression that most of the students were satisfied with the teacher-facilitated style and are comfortable with obtaining knowledge "from above," even though adult learning theory suggests the opposite. Grammar corrections are surprisingly important to them; I wasn't at all sure they read the ones I made on their papers.)

I asked the students to imagine an ideal writing course that would meet all their individual needs completely. Here were some of the suggestions:

More time given to all components of the course
Reading assignments from a more rigorous text
Examples of different kinds of papers: research, proposals, finished dissertations
Correct sentences and paragraphs are important
Should be able to write freely.
Grammar, such as subject-verb agreement
Summarizing an essay
Editing
Using the library
Individualized writing with feedback from instructor
Organization, planning, time management, taking notes
Lecture format, more idioms, English expressions, reading materials in class, writing practice out of class.
Eliminate freewriting, description, personal style and concentrate solely on class papers
Note-taking, organization, flow of ideas from one section to the next
Analyze other students' papers, invite professors to spell out what kinds of papers they expect

(These responses reflect the students' learning styles and previous educational experiences. A top-down, highly structured course with facilitated group discussion that focuses on easily observable, practical skills seems to be their preference).

Because I had already guessed their preference for an interactive classroom facilitated strongly by the instructor, I was interested in their comments on peer editing, where students work in groups of two to comment on each other's work. Students were asked to respond by circling numbers one through five, with five being "strongly disagree."

1. Peer editing helps me improve my writing: 5, 3, 1, 5, 2, no response, 3, 2, 3,
2. Peer editing is a waste of time: 3, 1, 3, 1, 5, 2, 3, 3,
3. I prefer reading my paper to the large group: 1, 1, 1, 2, 1, 1, 1, 3, 3,
4. I prefer teacher feedback to peer feedback: 1, 1, 1, 2, 1, 2, 1, 1,

(In other words, teacher facilitated group editing or teacher feedback is the preferred method.)
5. I feel comfortable reading my papers to my peers. 1, 2, no response, 1, 3, no response, 1, 1, 1.

6. I received good suggestions from my peers. no response, 2, 2, 2, 2, 3, 2, 2, 2.

7. I found my peers supportive. no response, 1, 2, 3, 4, 3, 2, 2, 2.

8. I couldn't understand some of my peers very well. 1, 2, 2, 2, 3, 3, 2, 2, 2.

9. The noise from the other groups bothered me. no response, 4, 4, 2, 5, 1, 5, 3, 1.

(The reasons for preferring teacher feedback to peer editing might be: English difficulties (understanding an unfamiliar accent), lack of really good suggestions from peers, and occasionally, bothersome noise, which may also be related to the difficulties in understanding each other's English. Most seemed to feel relatively comfortable with the peer editing arrangement, but preferred the traditional, authority-centered feedback method.)

I also included a question that had long been a concern of the Center, why international students are reluctant to participate in class discussions or in general meetings. I phrased the question this way:

"I've noticed that international students are often reluctant to speak up in other classes. However, in the writing class, everyone participated very openly. Why do you think this was?"

The answers were as follows:

Because the teaching method is democratic. Teacher works with students, not work on them. Students are made more and more confident of themselves and want to speak out their opinions.

It was due to the fact that all the students there were international students and that the instructor solicited their opinions, and facilitated the discussion.

There are several reasons. The first reason is that the class itself is a language class. Students would like to join the discussion in order to take the opportunity to improve their language. The second reason is the good organization. This make the students easily speak up. The third reason is that all students in this class are international students. Every student feels equal in English. In other classes, most students are Americans. Some international students like me might feel shy of speaking up. Sometimes international students might be difficult to get opportunity to speak, because others participated too openly, and because international students might have some difficulty arguing with others in English.

You were so great. You built up and boost our self confidence, and Professor Kinsey's class too. The international students talk and they participate. It's the understanding you both build into the
class atmosphere. Other classes its the individualism and competition for excellence. All have their say in planning. That too is important.

International student meet crisis of confidence upon their arrival to this new, complex environment. They think that people are also complex. They think that they might not perform the required standards for any task or activity they should do. They think that their pronunciation is incomprehensible to the Americans. The other factor worth mentioning is your approach to the foreigner. When I asked some of them about you, their response was all the same, that you are cooperative and that you are really helping them.

This is probably because everybody has the same problem and the same needs, in this case about how to improve his/her English writing skills. This situation enables every student to express his/her feeling or opinion and make him/her more secure if there is a mistake without getting pressures from others. In other words, being in a group of students with the same attributes stimulates everyone to present his/her capabilities as well as his/her limitations without being afraid of being laughed at.

All students are foreigners to the English language. Teacher's encouragement to talk.

One of the reasons was that we felt we were all in the same "boat." We were not so self-conscious about how we may sound in English.

* * *

It seems, then, that students do not want strictly top-down teaching; they blossom with encouragement and the opportunity to speak up and express their opinions. The "crisis of confidence" is more severe than I realized. It appears that even though I (and other American students) understand these newcomers well, they feel embarrassed in front of them or feel unable to speak up and compete with a fast-talking English speaker. Thus, keeping the writing course for international students only seems important.

Implications for course design and teaching style are the following preliminary suggestions:

Teaching style and course structure

1. International students only
2. Strongly teacher-facilitated style of group discussion
3. Confidence building
4. Peer editing used sparingly
5. Lots of feedback, both written and verbal by instructor
6. Build group feeling, facilitate interaction between members, create an atmosphere of mutual understanding.
7. Solicit opinions of all members, not just the ones who volunteer.
8. Plan and evaluate in a participatory way.
9. Give many writing assignments, but also give lectures and facilitated discussions about topics so students can see clearly what they are learning in each session.
10. Be aware of cultural misunderstandings behind style errors; give explanation and feedback accordingly.
11. The course should be three credits and be recommended for international students their first semester.
12. Instructor should always be available for individual conferences, both during in-class writing time, and outside of class.

Course content

1. Use of library
2. Documentation, quotes, paraphrasing, plagiarism
3. Do more class paper writing, including work on papers for other classes
4. Work on sentence level, paragraph skills
5. Critique and try different kinds of graduate level writing
6. Add some grammar?
7. Try a participatory planning session to find out needs and expectations of each particular group of students
8. Work more on analysis, on linear style, on inductive and deductive paragraph development
9. Find a better documentation sourcebook for APA style and use it in class
10. Balance the formal writing with freewriting in every session
11. Work more on openings and closings.
12. Don’t use the scrapbook, it’s too complicated and not “serious” enough
13. Concentrate less on personal experience pieces, especially at the beginning. It’s one of the most complicated forms of writing in American style; the balance of free-flowing ideas with a strong central point and the necessity of a not-too-subtle analysis combines and accentuates many of the weaknesses of international students. Start the course by giving assignments in a strict format; then loosen up and allow imagination to flow. Freewriting, of course, is an exception. Here, anything goes and no style is “correct.”
14. Alternatively, concentrate only on “formal” style, and avoid personal experience and freewriting entirely, as it appears to some of these students as an unnecessary frill.

Areas for Further Inquiry

The one strikingly negative evaluation brought up several points worth pursuing. The student who wrote it expressed dissatisfaction with the way the instructor “expressed disagreement not with how ideas were expressed but with the ideas/opinions themselves.” This surprised me, as I make a particular
effort to avoid doing this in writing courses (though perhaps I am less successful than I think). What is interesting, though, is this student’s view of the role of the instructor.

"I believe that the instructor’s role of editor should be limited to helping the student express any idea, even that which the instructor finds outrageous or annoying, in a way that makes it better understood."

In a course on writing in general—any kind of writing—perhaps this is true. But in a course on graduate level writing, is it not the instructor’s role to point out where an argument is unbalanced or shallow? If a student hands in what the instructor considers a polemic (as this student did), is it incorrect for the instructor to ask the student to try to write it in a different style...not because the opinion is wrong, but because it is a exhortation rather than a reasoned thesis? Is this a cultural value that should be taught? Should it be explained in class as a cultural value, or would that be condescending to students from cultures where logic and reasoning— as Americans know it (or should know it)—is the norm?

Another point brought up by this student is the question of "American" style.

I do not think that so much emphasis should be put in explaining this course as a guide to "American writing." Again with my limited experience I do not know that such a thing exists because most Americans I have read write differently. If such a thing does exist however I do not know how realistic it is to expect a student to master the intricacies within the course— so why not talk about "good writing" or "English expression" or anything else more generic? I hate to think that every time I go to a different English speaking country I would be expected to master the National variety of the English language, especially if this does not have a monumental effect on improving the way I express myself. Anyway, dropping the "American" from the title may help tone down the National Chauvinism."

Question: Is there a style that is expected in American graduate schools that is significantly different from other English writing styles? If some students are touchy about what they consider American chauvinism, should the
American emphasis be dropped entirely? And because most Americans write differently, as this student points out, can some of these different styles be grouped together into the set of "those styles suitable for graduate school writing," while the others might be classified as suitable (or unsuitable) for other purposes? If this is so, should it be explained in class to mollify those with this student's view of the situation?

It is clear to me from the indignant tone of this evaluation and the questions it poses that writing is not just a skill to be taught, but a political, emotional, social, and intellectual issue that must be approached with care and foresight when dealing with international students.

Another area for inquiry is to look at where the writing difficulties of various individuals come from. How much of a particular person's trouble is related to interference from the "correct" writing style (if there is such a thing) in the native language, how much is a result of their previous schooling and/or writing history, and how much might be the result of personality, thinking/learning styles, or other individual factors?

One might also ask if some cultural groups have different needs in a writing course, or prefer different teaching styles. The Chinese are one possible group for which a course might be designed separately. From their comments it is evident that they much prefer the lecture method over other teaching styles, and are used to extremely clear, specific assignments, rather than general papers that require their own judgment in the design.

Inquiry into the area of teaching style might turn up what mix of participatory planning and evaluation, authoritative leadership and individualized assignments and conferences might please the majority of (or am I dreaming here?) international students.
Lastly, I am interested in a comment by Ivan Illych to the effect that each group of learners is unique and therefore should have a course designed specifically for them. Though I agree heartily in principle, I am also realistic enough to know that it is difficult for teachers to take the time or trouble to create a new curriculum design for every class. But assuming it might be possible to create a process for doing this, how might one go about it? How would one combine participatory planning, for example, with what has been learned from this experience about the needs of international students? How might these needs be discovered not only by asking the students what they think they want, but perhaps by knowing something about their writing history? In fact, how much can we assume a student knows about his/her own needs (an alarming question)! Does the students' impatience with freewriting and description mean we automatically should erase these topics from a writing curriculum? Do these methods significantly improve international students' formal writing skills? So many questions come to mind, it is difficult at this stage to determine which might be the most important ones. However, one sure conclusion can be drawn: if an experience raises more questions than it answers, it is likely to have been worthwhile.
References


Das, B., Comparing rhetorical strategies in expository writing in the first and second language. Paper presented at the SEAMEO RELC 20th Regional Seminar, Singapore, April 22-26, 1985 (Secondary source)


Course Outline

Session I
Introductions
Administrative details
Objectives of writing course
Freewriting and response on topics chosen by class: laughter, mothers, first day at UMass

Session II
Presented scrapbook idea
In-class writing: "A personal experience that typifies American culture to you"
Peer Editing: Finding and developing a main idea
Large group discussion on handouts: finding the main idea.
Handout: "The Crab"
Large group discussion: using descriptive language

Session III
Scrapbooks: Sharing of ideas
Freewriting: Description of styrofoam coffee cup (using descriptive language)
Lecture: Using a Thesaurus
Large Group discussion: Metaphors in different cultures
Lecture: Cliche as "dead metaphor"
In-class writing: Work on personal experience piece
Peer Editing: descriptive language

Session IV
Explanation of opinion paper format.
Topic of opinion paper: "Your country is considering changing its population policy to the Chinese model of one child per family. (Or, if you are Chinese: "Your country is thinking of changing its policy so that it will no longer be involved in family planning decisions") As an expert, you are asked to give your opinion about this proposal." Outline your arguments according to the model:
1. Opening paragraph containing your opinion
2. Arguments in favor of your opinion
3. Opposing arguments
4. Closing paragraph

Large group brainstorming: possible arguments for and against

FOR
* Overpopulation is getting worse (in my country and the world)
* Individual families will be healthier, better educated, better off economically. Each child will be cared for.
* With less drain on resources, government can provide the services, health and old age insurance

AGAINST
* My (religion) (culture) won’t accept it.
* Poor people need children for old-age insurance
* State needs workers for economy
* People will make their own decisions regardless of government policy
In-class writing: write opening paragraph
Large group editing of each student’s paragraph: Does it state an opinion?

In-class writing: Outline your arguments, one per paragraph. Check with instructor. Write first draft.

Session 5
Large group editing: Volunteers read their second paragraph aloud. Class responds according to these questions:
1. Is one argument and only one expressed fully in this paragraph?
2. Is the argument clear?
3. Is it convincing? What can be added to make it more so?
Large group discussion: How to use opposing arguments to your advantage.
Peer editing: List the arguments your peer used in each paragraph. Choose a paragraph you want help with in your own writing and ask your peers the three questions above.

Session 6
Lecture: When to document a source.
Large group discussion: quotations paraphrasing
difference between APA and MLA styles
what is plagiarism?
avoiding generalizations and exaggerations
In-class assignment: Using handout “Education for Critical Consciousness” by Paulo Freire, illustrate the following points:
1. Brazilian writing is pompous and empty
2. Brazilian writing is culturally different from American writing but has no less content.
3. Brazilian intellectuals use abstract language to manipulate the common people.
Choose an appropriate passage to quote, lead into the quote or paraphrase smoothly, quote in correct form, and finally, tie in the quote with the stated argument.

Session 7
Peer editing on Freire assignment.
In-class writing: Using the books and articles provided, write a correct bibliography using Corbett’s handbook
Evaluation of course and suggestions for last session

Session 8
In-class assignment: Read five different openings of five Center publications (handouts). Discover different possible formats for an opening: description, quotation, formal academic style, personal journal
Large group discussion: In writing a hypothetical class paper on “Poverty in America,” how might you open with a quote? a description? a simulation? in academic style?
Large group brainstorming: ideas to include in this paper
IDEAS:
statistics about income
interview people in New York subway
definition of "poor"
number of poor
homeless people: why? how many?
health services are expensive
who are the people affected?
immigrants, illegal aliens, illiterates, Blacks, other minorities, small farmers, elderly
cost of insurance
welfare programs

Large Group discussion: How to arrange these ideas.
One possible way:
1) Quote from Reagan about poverty--there isn't any
2) Example of subway
3) Definition or statistics
4) Who are the poor?
5) Why are they poor?
6) Discussion of factors in #5
7) Sum up: American people don't see poverty that exists in America

Large group discussion: Read and discuss closings from several Center publications. How could we end our "Poverty" paper in different ways?

End of course.
(After session 3, an optional, one-hour individual conference was offered, and a final evaluation was done through the mail.)
Evaluation

Writing for International Students
Helen Fox/David Kinsey

Please complete ANY or ALL of the thoughts below.

1. What I liked about this course was... a) the organization of the content, b) it was satisfying my needs for knowledge.
   c) I really needed to know about documentation in beginning all complicated research papers.

2. I didn't particularly like...

3. We should have spent more time on... documentation

4. I was really satisfied with...
   a) Group discussion which was one of the methods that the instructor employed.

5. I still find it difficult to...
   a) paraphrasing

6. I wish I could... have more time for the course and more credits

7. Next semester I really think you should...
   a) increase the workload

8. International students especially need...
   a) How to use the library, how to do documentation
   b) How to take notes, how to organize due materials

9. Now I am more confident about...
   a) doing free writing

10. My problem now is...

   Quote
What kind of feedback is best for you personally? Please assign each a numerical value using the following scale:
1= very important 2=somewhat important 3=somewhat unimportant 4=not at all important

- written comments on papers by teacher
- written comments by peers
- oral suggestions from the class in a large group
- oral suggestions from peers in groups of two
- explicit comments on what you did wrong
- positive suggestions on how to change your paper
- encouragement without too much direct criticism
- grammar corrections (do you really read them?)
- other? Please explain below.
Here are some suggestions for a similar writing course next semester. Please indicate how important it is to address these issues. Use this scale: 1=very important 2=somewhat important 3=somewhat unimportant 4=not at all important

___ Concentrate more on how to write class papers.
___ Expand the course to three credits.
___ Expand the course to two credits with optional individual conferences.
___ Write longer papers, with more teacher support in the planning stage.
___ Do more freewriting.
___ Work more on openings.
___ Work more on closings.
___ Do more informal experience pieces.
___ Scrap the scrapbook idea.
___ Have several individual conferences throughout the semester.
___ Do more peer editing.
___ Work on papers from other classes in class.
___ Spend more time on documentation.
___ Other. Please explain below.

The following are some questions about peer editing (reading your papers and getting feedback in groups of two). Please circle the number that indicates your opinion.
1= strongly agree
2= agree
3=I'm neutral on this
4=disagree
5=strongly disagree

1. I feel comfortable reading my papers to my peers ___________
2. I prefer reading my paper to the large group ___________
3. I received good suggestions from my peers ___________
4. I couldn't understand some of my peers very well ___________
5. Peer editing helps me improve my writing ___________
6. I prefer teacher feedback to peer feedback ___________
7. Peer editing is a waste of time ___________
8. I found my peers supportive ___________
9. The noise from other groups bothered me ___________
Imagine an ideal writing course that would meet your individual needs completely. Please describe this course. Don't try to be practical -- be as imaginative as you like.

I think it is important to write the objectives for the course then imagine the content. After I complete the course I should be able to:

1. Write a good sentence.
2. Write a good paragraph.
3. Write freely.
4. Remove any blocks that relate to grammar - subject/verb agreement or relating to free writing.
5. Able to summarize or elaborate an essay.
6. Able to make documentation.
7. Able to edit writing.
8. Able to use the library efficiently.

The content of the course should be related to these objectives which I think I could meet my needs.
Evaluation

Writing for International Students
Helen Fox/David Kinsey

Please complete ANY or ALL of the thoughts below.

1. What I liked about this course was ...
   - The idea of having this course. I think it is very helpful to have this course directed specifically to international graduate students.

2. I didn't particularly like...
   - The pace, the rhythm of the course was a bit slow. It could have been more dynamic if it had moved to different subjects more quickly.

3. We should have spent more time on...
   - Writing papers, outlines, documentation, style.

4. I was really satisfied with...
   - The setting and the diversity of students.
   - The format of the opinion paper session.

5. I still find it difficult to...
   - Overcome the barrier of writing in English in a systematic way.

6. I wish I could...
   - Have had more participation in the course design.

7. Next semester I really think you should...
   - Spend more time in doing a detailed needs assessment session in the very beginning of the course; finding out students' needs, aspirations and expectations from the course.

8. International students especially need...
   - To work on style.
   - To have a clear idea (or ways to find that out) about what is expected from them; I feel self-conscious and anxious.

9. Now I am more confident about...

10. My problem now is...
I've noticed that International students are often reluctant to speak up in other classes. However, in the writing class, everyone participated very openly. Why do you think this was?

One of the reasons was that we felt we were all in the same "boat," at least this was the way I felt. We were not so self-conscious about how we may sound in English.

What kind of feedback is best for you personally? Please assign each a numerical value using the following scale:
1= very important  2=somewhat important  3=somewhat unimportant  4=not at all important

- written comments on papers by teacher
- written comments by peers
- oral suggestions from the class in a large group
- oral suggestions from peers in groups of two
- explicit comments on what you did wrong
- positive suggestions on how to change your paper
- encouragement without too much direct criticism
- grammar corrections (do you really read them?)
- other? Please explain below.
Here are some suggestions for a similar writing course next semester. Please indicate how important it is to address these issues. Use this scale: 1=very important  2=somewhat important 3=somewhat unimportant  4=not at all important

1. Concentrate more on how to write class papers.  
2. Expand the course to three credits.  
3. Expand the course to two credits with optional individual conferences.  
4. Write longer papers, with more teacher support in the planning stage.  
5. Do more freewriting.  
6. Work more on openings.  
7. Work more on closings.  
8. Do more informal experience pieces.  
9. Scrap the scrapbook idea.  
10. Have several individual conferences throughout the semester.  
11. Do more peer editing.  
12. Work on papers from other classes in class.  
13. Spend more time on documentation.  
14. Other. Please explain below.

The following are some questions about peer editing (reading your papers and getting feedback in groups of two). Please circle the number that indicates your opinion.

1= strongly agree  
2= agree  
3=I'm neutral on this  
4=disagree  
5=strongly disagree

1. I feel comfortable reading my papers to my peers  
2. I prefer reading my paper to the large group  
3. I received good suggestions from my peers  
4. I couldn't understand some of my peers very well  
5. Peer editing helps me improve my writing  
6. I prefer teacher feedback to peer feedback  
7. Peer editing is a waste of time  
8. I found my peers supportive  
9. The noise from other groups bothered me

Paper Prospectus (outline)
Imagine an ideal writing course that would meet your individual needs completely. Please describe this course. Don't try to be practical -- be as imaginative as you like.

I would like just to give some suggestions that are not exactly an imagined ideal writing course, but how about having samples of student's papers to analyze? I would like to have something to see and think about what is appropriate writing and what is not -- Or even having a professor coming to one of the classes telling what they expect from students, what kind of style they appreciate or how they think papers should be.
Evaluation

Writing for International Students
Helen Fox/David Kinsey

Please complete ANY or ALL of the thoughts below.

1. What I liked about this course was...
   Teacher’s encouragement to write

2. I didn’t particularly like...
   Long time devotion in free writing

3. We should have spent more time on...
   Professional writing like: opinion paper, documentation

4. I was really satisfied with...
   Opinion paper & a class on documentation

5. I still find it difficult to...

6. I wish I could...
   Have some more time in research documentation

7. Next semester I really think you should...

8. International students especially need...
   Lots of writing which is not possible in this 1 credit class

9. Now I am more confident about...
   Opinion paper

10. My problem now is...
I've noticed that International students are often reluctant to speak up in other classes. However, in the writing class, everyone participated very openly. Why do you think this was?

- all students are more comfortable to English language
- teacher's encouragement to talk

What kind of feedback is best for you personally? Please assign each a numerical value using the following scale:
1= very important 2=somewhat important 3=somewhat unimportant 4=not at all important

- written comments on papers by teacher
- written comments by peers
- oral suggestions from the class in a large group
- oral suggestions from peers in groups of two
- explicit comments on what you did wrong
- positive suggestions on how to change your paper
- encouragement without too much direct criticism
- grammar corrections (do you really read them?)
- other? Please explain below.
Here are some suggestions for a similar writing course next semester. Please indicate how important it is to address these issues. Use this scale: 1=very important 2= somewhat important 3=somewhat unimportant 4= not at all important

1. Concentrate more on how to write class papers.
2. Expand the course to three credits.
3. Expand the course to two credits with optional individual conferences.
4. Write longer papers, with more teacher support in the planning stage.
5. Do more freewriting.
6. Work more on openings.
7. Work more on closings.
8. Do more informal experience pieces.
9. Scrap the scrapbook idea.
10. Have several individual conferences throughout the semester.
11. Do more peer editing.
12. Work on papers from other classes in class.
13. Spend more time on documentation.
14. Other. Please explain below.

The following are some questions about peer editing (reading your papers and getting feedback in groups of two). Please circle the number that indicates your opinion.

1= strongly agree
2= agree
3= I'm neutral on this
4= disagree
5= strongly disagree

1. I feel comfortable reading my papers to my peers
2. I prefer reading my paper to the large group
3. I received good suggestions from my peers
4. I couldn’t understand some of my peers very well
5. Peer editing helps me improve my writing
6. I prefer teacher feedback to peer feedback
7. Peer editing is a waste of time
8. I found my peers supportive
9. The noise from other groups bothered me
Imagine an ideal writing course that would meet your individual needs completely. Please describe this course. Don’t try to be practical -- be as imaginative as you like.

What we did in this class is the mixture of "writing" course as well as "class paper writing." It would be good if it is just on class paper writing with more time on starting, doing and making documentation.
Evaluation

Writing for International Students
Helen Fox/David Kinsey

Please complete ANY or ALL of the thoughts below.

1. What I liked about this course was ... the responses of freewriting, and group editing of class papers.

2. I didn't particularly like...

3. We should have spent more time on.... colorful language, metaphor, cliche, and use of thesaurus.

4. I was really satisfied with... the practice in writing class papers. Although it took me a lot of time, I felt improving.

5. I still find it difficult to... understand better, speaking sometimes, to write formally in English grammar.

6. I wish I could... have had more time to write class paper, and to get more teacher's feedback.

7. Next semester I really think you should... expand the course to two credits with optional individual conferences, and do more class papers, either opinion paper or personal experience.

8. International students especially need...

9. Now I am more confident about... use of references, APA documentation, and quotation and paraphrase.

10. My problem now is... how to enlarge my vocabulary.
I've noticed that International students are often reluctant to speak up in other classes. However, in the writing class, everyone participated very openly. Why do you think this was?

There are several reasons. The first reason is that the class itself is a language class. Students would like to join their discussion in order to take the opportunity to improve their language. The second reason is the good organization. This makes students eager to speak up. The third reason is that all students in this class are international students. Every student feels equal in English. In other class, most students are American. Some international students, like me, might feel shy of speaking up. Sometimes international students might be difficult to get opportunity to speak, because others participated too openly, and because international students might have some difficulty arguing with others in English.

What kind of feedback is best for you personally? Please assign each a numerical value using the following scale:
1=very important 2=somewhat important 3=somewhat unimportant 4=not at all important

[ ] written comments on papers by teacher
[ ] written comments by peers
[ ] oral suggestions from the class in a large group
[ ] oral suggestions from peers in groups of two
[ ] explicit comments on what you did wrong
[ ] positive suggestions on how to change your paper
[ ] encouragement without too much direct criticism
[ ] grammar corrections (do you really read them?)
[ ] other? Please explain below.
Here are some suggestions for a similar writing course next semester. Please indicate how important it is to address these issues. Use this scale: 1=very important 2=somewhat important 3=somewhat unimportant 4=not at all important

___Concentrate more on how to write class papers.
___Expand the course to three credits.
___Expand the course to two credits with optional individual conferences.
___Write longer papers, with more teacher support in the planning stage.
___Do more freewriting.
___Work more on openings.
___Work more on closings.
___Do more informal experience pieces.
___Scrap the scrapbook idea.
___Have several individual conferences throughout the semester.
___Do more peer editing.
___Work on papers from other classes in class.
___Spend more time on documentation.
___Other. Please explain below.

The following are some questions about peer editing (reading your papers and getting feedback in groups of two). Please circle the number that indicates your opinion.
1= strongly agree
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4= disagree
5= strongly disagree

1. I feel comfortable reading my papers to my peers
2. I prefer reading my paper to the large group
3. I received good suggestions from my peers
4. I couldn't understand some of my peers very well
5. Peer editing helps me improve my writing
6. I prefer teacher feedback to peer feedback
7. Peer editing is a waste of time
8. I found my peers supportive
9. The noise from other groups bothered me
Imagine an ideal writing course that would meet your individual needs completely. Please describe this course. Don't try to be practical -- be as imaginative as you like.
Evaluation

Writing for International Students
Helen Fox/David Kinsey

Please complete ANY or ALL of the thoughts below.

1. What I liked about this course was ...

2. I didn’t particularly like...
   - Being experimented on
   - Being put on display in the resource centre

3. We should have spent more time on....

4. I was really satisfied with...

5. I still find it difficult to...

6. I wish I could...

7. Next semester I really think you should...

8. International students especially need...

9. Now I am more confident about...

10. My problem now is...
I've noticed that International students are often reluctant to speak up in other classes. However, in the writing class, everyone participated very openly. Why do you think this was?

What kind of feedback is best for you personally? Please assign each a numerical value using the following scale:

1=very important 2=somewhat important 3=somewhat unimportant 4=not at all important

-1- written comments on papers by teacher
-1- written comments by peers (depends on individual)
-1- oral suggestions from the class in a large group
-1- oral suggestions from peers in groups of two (depends on individual)
-1- explicit comments on what you did wrong
-2- positive suggestions on how to change your paper
-2- encouragement without too much direct criticism
-2- grammar corrections (do you really read them?)
-3- other? Please explain below.
Here are some suggestions for a similar writing course next semester. Please indicate how important it is to address these issues. Use this scale: 1=very important 2=somewhat important 3=somewhat unimportant 4=not at all important

1. Concentrate more on how to write class papers.
2. Expand the course to three credits.
3. Expand the course to two credits with optional individual conferences.
4. Write longer papers, with more teacher support in the planning stage.
5. Do more freewriting.
6. Work more on openings.
7. Do more on closings.
8. Do more informal experience pieces.
9. Scrap the scrapbook idea.
10. Have several individual conferences throughout the semester.
11. Do more peer editing.
12. Work on papers from other classes in class.
13. Spend more time on documentation.
14. Other. Please explain below.

The following are some questions about peer editing (reading your papers and getting feedback in groups of two). Please circle the number that indicates your opinion.
1= strongly agree
2= agree
3=I'm neutral on this
4=disagree
5=strongly disagree

1. I feel comfortable reading my papers to my peers 1 2 3 4 5
2. I prefer reading my paper to the large group 1 2 3 4 5
3. I received good suggestions from my peers 1 2 3 4 5
4. I couldn't understand some of my peers very well 1 2 3 4 5
5. Peer editing helps me improve my writing 1 2 3 4 5
6. I prefer teacher feedback to peer feedback 1 2 3 4 5
7. Peer editing is a waste of time 1 2 3 4 5
8. I found my peers supportive 1 2 3 4 5
9. The noise from other groups bothered me 1 2 3 4 5

It is difficult to generalize and respond objectively to this question because I don't think my peers were a "group". The only thing that was uniform about them was that they were foreign students.
Imagine an ideal writing course that would meet your individual needs completely. Please describe this course. Don't try to be practical -- be as imaginative as you like.

(1) There isn't enough time in one semester to teach a person to be a "good" writer -- the course should therefore concentrate on the practical aspects and help students write better essays. Skills to focus on should include note taking, organization of content and ideas, openings, closings, flow of ideas from one section to another, one paragraph to another, etc. Other skills should be taught from primary and secondary sources, and documentation. Some of these skills were touched on in class during the last 3 sessions. I suggest that this is where the emphasis should be.

I thought that some of the earlier sessions had been more abstract. I'm sure that free writing, practice at describing things like a symptom, expressing one's feelings about American culture, etc., can help one develop better expression skills. But I do not see it happening within the context of a one-semester, one-credit course -- my point is I think the course should concentrate on what can be achieved (what is possible). It should also attempt to link any exercises given to the desired goals (skills). Based on my expectations some of the exercises seemed quite pointless to me, and I know there was some frustration expressed by a few other class members.

(2) I would like this course to help the student express what he/she wants to say in a better, more efficient way. In my opinion, the instructor in this course went beyond that when in several instances that I can remember, she expressed her disagreement with the ideas expressed but with the ideas/points themselves -- which she attempted to change. I felt that the instructor should that it was her duty to defend and correct misconceptions about "American Values" and realities that foreigners may not quite understand. I think this is wrong. I also know that not all Americans feel the same way about any number of issues -- I therefore believe that the instructors role as editor should be limited to helping the student bring ideas, even that which the instructor finds outrageous or inaccurate, in a way that makes is better understood.
Please complete any or all of the thoughts below.

1. What I liked about this course was ...

2. I didn't particularly like...

3. We should have spent more time on...

4. I was really satisfied with...

5. I still find it difficult to...

6. I wish I could...

7. Next semester I really think you should...

8. International students especially need...

9. Now I am more confident about...

10. My problem now is...
I've noticed that International students are often reluctant to speak up in other classes. However, in the writing class, everyone participated very openly. Why do you think this was?

What kind of feedback is best for you personally? Please assign each a numerical value using the following scale:
1= very important 2=somewhat important 3=somewhat unimportant 4=not at all important

- written comments on papers by teacher
- written comments by peers
- oral suggestions from the class in a large group
- oral suggestions from peers in groups of two
- explicit comments on what you did wrong
- positive suggestions on how to change your paper
- encouragement without too much direct criticism
- grammar corrections (do you really read them?)
- other? Please explain below.
Here are some suggestions for a similar writing course next semester. Please indicate how important it is to address these issues. Use this scale: 1=very important 2=somewhat important 3=somewhat unimportant 4=not at all important

1. Concentrate more on how to write class papers.
2. Expand the course to three credits.
3. Expand the course to two credits with optional individual conferences.
4. Write longer papers, with more teacher support in the planning stage.
5. Do more freewriting.
6. Work more on openings.
7. Work more on closings.
8. Do more informal experience pieces.
9. Scrap the scrapbook idea.
10. Have several individual conferences throughout the semester.
11. Do more peer editing.
12. Work on papers from other classes in class.
13. Spend more time on documentation.
14. Other. Please explain below.

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8. I found my peers supportive 1 2 3 4 5
9. The noise from other groups bothered me 1 2 3 4 5
Imagine an ideal writing course that would meet your individual needs completely. Please describe this course. Don't try to be practical -- be as imaginative as you like.
Evaluation

Writing for International Students
Helen Fox/David Kinsey

Please complete ANY or ALL of the thoughts below.

1. What I liked about this course was ...
   Participating, Planning.

2. I didn't particularly like ...
   the small group activities.

3. We should have spent more time on ...
   evaluating/reviewing/meaningful activities.

4. I was really satisfied with ...
   written, feedback, evaluation, sharing.

5. I still find it difficult to ...
   focus specifically on a topic to express myself.

6. I wish I could ...
   write more and more.

7. Next semester I really think you should ...
   force us to write more.

8. International students especially need ...
   functional grammar.

9. Now I am more confident about ...
   the structure of my written work - how to plan
   before you write something.

10. My problem now is ...
    the vocabulary & how I should think
    more analytically.
I've noticed that International students are often reluctant to speak up in other classes. However, in the writing class, everyone participated very openly. Why do you think this was?

You were so great. You built up a base on self-confidence. In Prof. Kinzey's class, everyone felt comfortable. It's the understanding you both built in the class atmosphere. Other classes do not build individual competitiveness for excellence. All had their say in planning. These two are important.

What kind of feedback is best for you personally? Please assign each a numerical value using the following scale:
1 = very important  2 = somewhat important  3 = somewhat unimportant  4 = not at all important

1. written comments on papers by teacher
2. written comments by peers
3. oral suggestions from the class in a large group
4. oral suggestions from peers in groups of two
5. explicit comments on what you did wrong
6. positive suggestions on how to change your paper
7. encouragement without too much direct criticism
8. grammar corrections (do you really read them?)
9. other? Please explain below.
Here are some suggestions for a similar writing course next semester. Please indicate how important it is to address these issues. Use this scale: 1=very important 2=somewhat important 3=somewhat unimportant 4=not at all important

1. Concentrate more on how to write class papers.
2. Expand the course to three credits.
3. Expand the course to two credits with optional individual conferences.
4. Write longer papers, with more teacher support in the planning stage.
5. Do more freewriting.
6. Work more on openings.
7. Work more on closings.
8. Do more informal experience pieces.
9. Scrap the scrapbook idea.
10. Have several individual conferences throughout the semester.
11. Do more peer editing.
12. Work on papers from other classes in class.
13. Spend more time on documentation.
14. Other. Please explain below.

The following are some questions about peer editing (reading your papers and getting feedback in groups of two). Please circle the number that indicates your opinion.
1= strongly agree
2= agree
3=I'm neutral on this
4=disagree
5=strongly disagree

1. I feel comfortable reading my papers to my peers
2. I prefer reading my paper to the large group
3. I received good suggestions from my peers
4. I couldn't understand some of my peers very well
5. Peer editing helps me improve my writing
6. I prefer teacher feedback to peer feedback
7. Peer editing is a waste of time
8. I found my peers supportive
9. The noise from other groups bothered me
Imagine an ideal writing course that would meet your individual needs completely. Please describe this course. Don't try to be practical -- be as imaginative as you like.

Here individualized writing will feed back for the instructor. How to organize a start with a paper. Preliminary details. Then go to the library. How to take notes in a brief. How to plan 1½ hour discussion. Then how to plan the beginning, end, how to edit, how to shape include things. The technique of using time, how to plan or design discipline yourself in writing to catch up with yourself in writing to catch up with unnecessary writeup of time. One to one teacher feed back also always available.
Evaluation

Writing for International Students
Helen Fox/David Kinsey

Please complete ANY or ALL of the thoughts below.

1. What I liked about this course was ...
   The content and the way it was organized.

2. I didn't particularly like...
   its short time

3. We should have spent more time on....
   paraphrasing

4. I was really satisfied with...
   citation

5. I still find it difficult to...
   express my ideas in a good writing pattern.

6. I wish I could...
   refresh my grammar ability

7. Next semester I really think you should...
   solve a little bit on the common mistakes of the grammar

8. International students especially need...
   to learn more about writing styles for class papers.

9. Now I am more confident about...
   what plagiarism is and what is not.

10. My problem now is...
    improving my grammar as well as vocabulary.
I've noticed that International students are often reluctant to speak up in other classes. However, in the writing class, everyone participated very openly. Why do you think this was?

This is probably because everybody has the same problem and the same needs, in this case, about how to improve his/her English writing skills. Also, everybody is in a situation that enables every student to express his/her feelings or opinions and makes him/her more secure if there is a mistake without getting pressures from others. In other words, being in a group of students with the same attribute stimulates everyone to present his/her capabilities as well as his/her limitations without being afraid of being laughed.

What kind of feedback is best for you personally? Please assign each a numerical value using the following scale:
1= very important  2=somewhat important  3=somewhat unimportant  4=not at all important

- written comments on papers by teacher
- written comments by peers
- oral suggestions from the class in a large group
- oral suggestions from peers in groups of two
- explicit comments on what you did wrong
- positive suggestions on how to change your paper
- encouragement without too much direct criticism
- grammar corrections (do you really read them?)
- other? Please explain below.
Here are some suggestions for a similar writing course next semester. Please indicate how important it is to address these issues. Use this scale: 1=very important  2=somewhat important
3=somewhat unimportant  4=not at all important

1__Concentrate more on how to write class papers.
1__Expand the course to three credits.
1__Expand the course to two credits with optional individual conferences.
1__Write longer papers, with more teacher support in the planning stage.
1__Do more freewriting.
1__Work more on openings.
1__Work more on closings.
1__Do more informal experience pieces.
1__Scrap the scrapbook idea.
1__ Have several individual conferences throughout the semester.
1__Do more peer editing.
1__Work on papers from other classes in class.
1__Spend more time on documentation.
1__ Other. Please explain below.

The following are some questions about peer editing (reading your papers and getting feedback in groups of two). Please circle the number that indicates your opinion.

1= strongly agree
2= agree
3=I'm neutral on this
4=disagree
5=strongly disagree

1. I feel comfortable reading my papers to my peers
2. I prefer reading my paper to the large group
3. I received good suggestions from my peers
4. I couldn't understand some of my peers very well
5. Peer editing helps me improve my writing
6. I prefer teacher feedback to peer feedback
7. Peer editing is a waste of time
8. I found my peers supportive
9. The noise from other groups bothered me
Imagine an ideal writing course that would meet your individual needs completely. Please describe this course. Don't try to be practical -- be as imaginative as you like.
Evaluation

Writing for International Students
Helen Fox/David Kinsey

Please complete ANY or ALL of the thoughts below.

1. What I liked about this course was...
   - the writing experience

2. I didn’t particularly like...
   - the scrap book (the album)

3. We should have spent more time on...
   - writing on the minipaper

4. I was really satisfied with...
   - my papers and research papers

5. I still find it difficult to...
   - punctuate correctly

6. I wish I could...
   - write without much concentration

7. Next semester I really think you should...
   - give more time to the course and more assignments be given.

8. International students especially need...
   - to polish their writing skills by practicing writing without thinking language first.

9. Now I am more confident about...
   - writing course papers

10. My problem now is...
    - I did not take the time to make more use of the course. Although I did all the assignments, I feel that in some of the work I did was half-hearted.
I've noticed that International students are often reluctant to speak up in other classes. However, in the writing class, everyone participated very openly. Why do you think this was?

It was due to the fact that all the students are international students and that the instructor solicited their opinions, and facilitated the discussion.

What kind of feedback is best for you personally? Please assign each a numerical value using the following scale:

1= very important 2=somewhat important 3=somewhat unimportant 4=not at all important

1. written comments on papers by teacher
2. written comments by peers
3. oral suggestions from the class in a large group
4. oral suggestions from peers in groups of two
5. explicit comments on what you did wrong
6. positive suggestions on how to change your paper
7. encouragement without too much direct criticism
8. grammar corrections (do you really read them?)
9. other? Please explain below.
Imagine an ideal writing course that would meet your individual needs completely. Please describe this course. Don’t try to be practical -- be as imaginative as you like.

The course I would have liked is one in which more time was given to all the items in the course that we have experienced. Reading assignments should be given from a book that is more rigorous than the one we had.

Examples of different kinds of course assignment papers not: research, proposals, finished dissertations, etc.
Evaluation

Writing for International Students
Helen Fox/David Kinsey

Please complete ANY or ALL of the thoughts below.

1. What I liked about this course was
   the atmosphere relaxed to me.

2. I didn’t particularly like...
   that some foreign students’ reading and accent which are difficult
   for me to understand.

3. We should have spent more time on....
   listening more writing experiences from you.

4. I was really satisfied with...
   your clear pronunciation and interesting reading materials.

5. I still find it difficult to...
   understand some classmates who are not native speaker.

6. I wish I could...
   have more practice in English writing.

7. Next semester I really think you should...
   expand the course.

8. International students especially need...
   to join the study learning American-style in writing papers.

9. Now I am more confident about...
   my ability in writing from your encouragement.

10. My problem now is...
    listening comprehension and grasping points from a glimpse of
    an English-language article.
I've noticed that International students are often reluctant to speak up in other classes. However, in the writing class, everyone participated very openly. Why do you think this was?

Because the teaching method is democratic. Teacher work with students, not work on them. Students are made more and more confident of themselves and want to speak out their opinions.

What kind of feedback is best for you personally? Please assign each a numerical value using the following scale:
1= very important 2=somewhat important 3=somewhat unimportant 4=not at all important

- [ ] written comments on papers by teacher
- [ ] written comments by peers
- [ ] oral suggestions from the class in a large group
- [ ] oral suggestions from peers in groups of two
- [ ] explicit comments on what you did wrong
- [ ] positive suggestions on how to change your paper
- [ ] encouragement without too much direct criticism
- [ ] grammar corrections (do you really read them?)
- [ ] other? Please explain below.
Here are some suggestions for a similar writing course next semester. Please indicate how important it is to address these issues. Use this scale: 1=very important 2= somewhat important 3= somewhat unimportant 4= not at all important.

Concentrate more on how to write class papers.
Expand the course to three credits.
Expand the course to two credits with optional individual conferences.
Write longer papers, with more teacher support in the planning stage.
Do more freewriting.
Work more on openings.
Work more on closings.
Do more informal experience pieces.
Scrap the scrapbook idea.
Have several individual conferences throughout the semester.
Do more peer editing.
Work on papers from other classes in class.
Spend more time on documentation.
Other. Please explain below.

If the course is expanded to three credits, I’d consider to continue to join, because I think the course is very helpful to my work of editing and translation this semester, though it’s a one-credit course.

The following are some questions about peer editing (reading your papers and getting feedback in groups of two). Please circle the number that indicates your opinion.

1= strongly agree
2= agree
3= I’m neutral on this
4= disagree
5= strongly disagree

1. I feel comfortable reading my papers to my peers
2. I prefer reading my paper to the large group
3. I received good suggestions from my peers
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7. Peer editing is a waste of time
8. I found my peers supportive
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Imagine an ideal writing course that would meet your individual needs completely. Please describe this course. Don't try to be practical -- be as imaginative as you like.

Continue to give an English-writing lecture, telling us more idioms, English expressions and reading materials, and then practice writing or editing out of class.