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Strategies for First-Year University ESL Students to Improve Essay Writing Skills

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University of San Francisco

**Strategies for First-Year University ESL Students
to Improve Essay Writing Skills**

A Field Project Proposal Presented to
The Faculty of the School of Education
International and Multicultural Education Department

In Partial Fulfillment
Of the Requirements for the Degree
Master of Arts in Teaching English as a Second Language

by
Mengjie Wei
May 2017

Strategies for First-Year University ESL Students to Improve Essay Writing Skills

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in

TEACHING ENGLISH AS A SECOND LANGUAGE

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UNIVERSITY OF SAN FRANCISCO

Under the guidance and approval of the committee, and approval by all the members, this field project has been accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree.

Approved:

Instructor/Chairperson

Date

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ABSTRACT

This project provides a writing guidebook for first-year university level English as a Second Language (ESL) students and teachers. Most ESL students have difficulties in academic English writing, especially first-year university ESL students. Due to the differences in linguistic and education backgrounds, first-year university level ESL students desire a writing guidebook that is appropriate for them; ESL teachers should be provided with professional teaching methods and materials in delivering lectures too. By applying Schema Theory and Stephen D. Krashen's Monitor Model, strategies for students and teachers are professionally designed in this guidebook.

In order to help ESL students better their command of basic writing skills, systematic writing topics are applied within the book. Writing exercises, a self-checklist, and a self-reflection form are the supplemental materials that can be useful in improving students' writing skills. ESL teachers can benefit from this book by learning various teaching strategies. This guidebook should be used in an ESL university ESL classroom to enhance student academic writing performance.

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Statement of the Problem

The English as a Second Language (ESL) students who are in first-year of university are considered the group of students who have the most challenging difficulties in essay writing. Hyland and Hamp-Lyons (2002) noted that English for academic purposes at university level is high beyond “academic literacy,” because it requires students’ ability to solve academic tasks and deal with different reading and writing problems (Pae, 2014). Furthermore, ESL students are no longer required to pass all academic tests. They should be prepared with skills to deal with all difficulties in reading and writing class. Furthermore, the ESL writing classroom can not offer all the assistance needed to satisfy ESL students’ needs and train them to become proficient writers (Harris & Silva, 1993). Because of limited training in writing in ESL classroom, students found it harder to improve their writing skills.

As an ESL student in the United States, I struggled with learning English in my first-year of university. I had lots of difficulties in essay writing. Sometimes I felt so depressed and inferior. Because of limited training in essay writing, I had no idea of material collection and preparation. The most challenging thing was that I had a serious problem with cognitive comprehension. I felt anxious when my ESL instructor had us write an essay. Writing essays was the most painful experience in my first-year university level ESL writing class.

Most English as a Second Language (ESL) students have pessimistic attitude to writing because they think writing is a difficult task in the form of essay composition. Rhetorical and linguistics problems affect students' completion of the writing tasks. Rhetoric means the study that uses visual, written and spoken language. It focuses on how language is used to construct meanings, create knowledge and maintain social groups. Rhetorical and linguistics studies are based on cultural and economic practices (Rhetoric & Writing Studies, n.d.). Due to ESL students' education and linguistic background, they have problems adapting to the English-writing class. Writing a University level essay should master various skills. The complex skills increase ESL students' writing difficulties. 79% of ESL students stated that they wanted to study academic writing skills; about 40% ESL students indicated that they felt they needed more support from ESL instructors in helping them to enhance writing skills (Sidman & Karathanos, 2015). Different linguistic backgrounds make it harder for first-year university level ESL students to adapt to their ESL writing class.

The other reasons why ESL students dislike writing are the fact that they have problems with linguistics, cognitive comprehension, paragraph organization, text structure, as well as psychological issues during the process of writing tasks (Setyowati & Sukmawan, 2016). Namely, linguistics and cognitive comprehension bring ESL students difficulties in reading, which directly influence student writing performances.

ESL students have difficulties in argumentative essays because the norms embedded in the ESL students' education system are related to their native cultures. That is to say, in any educational system, reading and writing skills are influenced by the norms of culture; however, people do think the same even though they are from different

cultures (Reynolds, 1993). ESL students are used to using their native cultural and educational system. Once they enter a country that has different language and cultural background, they do not perform not as well as native speakers.

Hu (1995) indicates that because of limited competence in the English language, ESL students do not have enough mastery of skills of English organizational patterns. They have more difficulties in organizing materials compared with native speakers. ESL students tend to use their native rhetorical structures to deal with their ESL writing task, which enables them to produce a writing style that is different from the standard academic English structure. ESL students, especially those who are in first year of university, have more difficulties to adapt to an English language environment because of their long-term adaptation to their native languages. ESL writers tend to use their first language to create ideas in their mind, and this will help students perform better in developing and organizing their papers (Chan, 1988).

Lacking an appropriate guide decreases first-year university ESL students' performance in ESL writing classes. Most ESL students feel inferior because of their non-native accent and non-professional writing skills (Fernsten, 2008). First-year university level ESL students also have great difficulties in academic English writing classes. Factors like content, vocabulary, composing, developing, and analyzing ideas affect first-year university ESL students' performance. Nunan (1999) says that "the most difficult task to do in language learning is to produce a coherent, fluent, extended piece of writing, which is even more challenging for second language learners" (Younes & Albalawi, 2015). Nofal (2010) investigated the reasons behind ESL students' shortcomings in English. He finds that it is hard for first-year university ESL students to

express themselves appropriately in academic writing. He also states that “Unity, consistency, order and coherence are obviously lacking; students fail to signal the direction of their thoughts by the use of transitional words such as, ‘however’, ‘moreover’, ‘nevertheless’, and phrases like ‘on the other hand’, ‘in fact’, ‘of course’” (Younes & Albalawi, 2015).

All ESL learners are defined as non-native speakers, which shows that they have greater difficulties in English writing compared with their native counterparts (Grami & Alkazemi, 2016). Most first-year university ESL students have difficulties in new cultures and educational systems. These difficulties lower their comprehensive ability in academic classes.

In conclusion, first-year university ESL students have several difficulties in essay writing. First, they have difficulties in the rhetorical and linguistic aspects of the English language (Sidman & Karathanos, 2015). Second, they have problems of linguistic usage, cognitive comprehension, paragraph organization and text structure issues during the process of writing tasks (Reynolds, 1993). Third, because the norms that were embedded in the ESL students’ education system were related to their native cultures, it is difficult for first-year university ESL students to adapt to English-speaking countries (Chan, 1988). Fourth, the limited competence in English language makes it difficult for first-year university ESL students to master the skills of English organization patterns (Chan, 1988). Fifth, lack of confidence and appropriate guides decrease first-year university ESL students’ performance in the writing class (Fernsten, 2008).

Purpose of the Project

The purpose of this field project is to summarize essay writing strategies that can improve the writing skills of English as a Second Language (ESL) students in the first year of university. This field project reviews and synthesizes the problems that ESL students have in academic essay writing during first-year university level. The project also details the strategies that can be taken either by ESL students or ESL instructors to improve ESL students' essay writing skills. The reason why I chose first-year university ESL students as my target audience is that first-year university ESL students are the group of people who have the great difficulties in academic learning, especially in essay writing. Without any academic ESL writing experience before, it takes more time for first-year university ESL students to adapt to writing classes compared with native-speaker students. Moreover, due to ESL students' linguistic and cultural backgrounds, academic ESL writing tasks become difficult challenges.

This guidebook is designed for first-year university ESL students who have difficulties in essay writing; it is also designed for ESL teachers who require professional training in teaching ESL writing classes.

Theoretical Framework

This field project is supported by Schema Theory and Stephen D. Krashen's Monitor Model.

A schema organizes a subject or event's knowledge. It is based on previous experience and knowledge, and it contributes to current understanding or action. Schema Theory concentrates on cognitive science, which discusses how the brain structures

people's knowledge. Previous experiences help people know better about their new experiences (Pankin, 2013). That is to say, ESL students' previous learning experience will supply them with more expectations and motivations during their study. Schema Theory emphasizes students' prior knowledge to learn and take advantage of their previous memory aids to reinforce new knowledge based on their past knowledge (Pankin, 2013). In my field project, Schema Theory supported the framework of writing strategies, which is beneficial to first-year ESL students. Schema Theory is the basis of this project. In order to help first-year university level ESL students improve writing skills, combining their prior knowledge with current new knowledge is the most important.

According to Krashen's Acquisition/Learning Hypothesis, he states that the central hypothesis of the Monitor Theory is that conscious learning is not applicable for expression; it only can be used as a Monitor (Krashen, 1979). Monitor Theory can only be used when the language learners have sufficient time, and it can only be realized when the language learners are concerned with form. Monitor Theory is being used by many other teachers: language learners' anxiety is low in the classroom because the classroom can meet the language students' need for language acquisition, and provide the communicative activities that they are interested in (Krashen, 1979).

In Krashen's Monitor Theory, he states that adult language learners need to have two processes in order to improve language fluency: acquisition and learning. Acquisition can be influenced by natural language interactions, just like children acquire their mother tongue. Learning needs conscious thought and deep analysis under a formal instruction. The Monitor Hypothesis posits that prior learning cannot influence acquisition, however,

it can work as a monitor or editor for language learner's output (Schulz, 1991). When first-year university level ESL students begin to learn new knowledge about writing, it will not increase their fluency in English communication. However, it will draw learner's attention to monitor their fluency and check their errors within an essay. Krashen's Monitor Model allowed the notion of first-year ESL students to learn to monitor themselves whenever there is a problem in academic writing. With the support of this theory, I was able to create a guide for ESL students to benefit from academic writing.

Significance of the Project

Many English as a Second Language (ESL) learners adopt their teachers' judgment as truth, but ignore the fact that social and political realities enhance their labeling of deficient, incompetent, or even lacking in cognitive ability (Fernsten, 2008). Writing courses are the fundamental courses for all ESL learners, especially first year university level ESL students. It is important to provide first-year ESL students with a useful writing guidebook in order to improve their writing ability, and it is necessary to offer ESL teachers teaching methods. Mastering professional skills of essay writing is the basic step for first-year university level ESL students to have a higher education, especially their future research. In order to help ESL students to deal with their writing problems, a useful guidebook is of great necessity. This guidebook offers first-year university level ESL students various writing strategies, and summarizes some obstacles that they may have during ESL writing classes. Appropriate teaching instructions for ESL teachers are included too.

After reading this guidebook, first-year university level ESL students will feel more comfortable and confident in academic English writing. Their problems in academic essay writing can begin to be systematically addressed. Certain writing strategies that are mentioned in this guidebook are also useful for them during their entire times at university.

ESL teachers can learn from this book to help first-year ESL students improve their writing. For example, this guidebook delivers the information on how an ESL teacher can activate first-year ESL students' writing performance during the class. What strategies should be taken for the ESL teachers to help first-year ESL students to refine sentence structure? Schema Theory will be applied for providing ESL instructors teaching strategies. The ESL instructors are encouraged to take advantage of ESL students' experience to help them reform their new knowledge. As a result of the guidebook, first-year ESL students shall get various writing strategies in writing classes, and ESL instructors will gain professional training and instructions. Both first-year ESL students and ESL instructors will benefit from this guidebook.

Limitations of the Project

The potential limitation of this project is its target audience. First, it is difficult to estimate the average age of my target population. What I focus on is first-year university level ESL students, however, there is no research that accurately shows the range of age. Students that are at different ages perform differently in ESL writing classes, so it makes it hard to pick a certain group of people. Second, a potential limitation is cultural differences. ESL classes have large differences between cultural groups. Students might

have different cultural and education backgrounds before they enter English-speaking countries. Because of these varieties, this guidebook might not cover all the differences in explaining the cultural effects on ESL learning.

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Introduction

English is being used widely nowadays because of ongoing advances in the internet, international trade/business, and global communications. Students who study English at the college or university levels are referred to as English as a Second Language (ESL) students. Many ESL students who study at universities in the United States can understand the use of English; however, most of them have difficulties in communicating their ideas in academic writing (Adas & Bakir, 2013).

Writing in a first and second language is different in significant ways. The composing process and the features of writing work are significantly different between first and second language writing (DelliCarpini, 2012). Academic English writing is a challenge to all ESL students, especially first-year university ESL students.

Most ESL students have difficulties in the rhetorical and linguistic aspects of writing because of their prior education and linguistic backgrounds. It is difficult for them to adapt to a different linguistic culture. Due to the differences in education and linguistic backgrounds, linguistic, cognitive comprehension, and text structure are very difficult for them in processing writing tasks (Setyowati & Sukmawan, 2016). Most of the ESL students' reading and writing skills are influenced by the norms of culture. They still think the same way even though they are living in a different culture (Reynolds, 1993). Cultural differences are another factor that increase first-year university level ESL students' writing difficulties.

ESL students have more difficulties in organizing materials compared with native speakers because they have limited competence in English (Hu, 1995). ESL students prefer to use their first language in producing words because it is easier for them to create ideas (Chan, 1988). ESL students are accustomed to using their first language to describe and express ideas, which makes it difficult for them to use English in creating ideas.

First-year ESL students might feel depressed when they have too much pressure in English academic writing. Lack of confidence and appropriate guidance lower their performance and learning ability in ESL writing class (Fernsten, 2008). ESL students are easily affected by negative emotions because of their low performance in academic writing classes. The role of ESL teachers is quite important to ESL students. Giving more encouragement to first-year ESL students will increase their confidence and interests in academic writings.

Due to these writing difficulties that first-year university level ESL students have, it is quite necessary to provide writing strategies.

To better contextualize and explore the needs of first-year University ESL students, there are two themes in this review of literature: 1) Writing strategies for first-year ESL students and 2) Teaching strategies for ESL teachers.

Writing Strategies for First-Year University Level ESL Students

Due to the difficulties that first-year ESL students have in academic writing, appropriate writing strategies need to be provided.

There are two important techniques that can be used as writing strategies for the ESL students. The first technique is planning before writing, and the second technique is

rewriting and revising their texts. ESL students need to command these strategies in order to open the door of university level writing (Kieft, Rijlaarsdam & Van Den Bergh, 2006). Planning before writing is very important because the writers would have more space in building up the structure of their writing, also it gives more time to the ESL writers to come up with ideas in their mind ahead of writing. Rewriting and revising are steps that can help ESL students to refine their papers by checking grammar, sentence structure, paragraph organizations, etc.

Knowledge of grammar is also of great necessary for ESL/ELL students to build up error-free sentence structures in academic writing, but grammar correction and grammar feedback may not result in writing improvement because of four specific reasons, as described by Sjolie (2006). First, grammar correction only deals with the surface of grammar, not the way it is being used. Second, the development of language and grammar acquisition appear hierarchically, which means that it is ineffective to give a student grammar correction that is far beyond his/her level. Third, students might have misinterpreted teachers' grammar comments, while teachers might have misinterpreted students' grammar too. Fourth, students do not incorporate the corrections that they don't understand in their work (Sjolie, 2006). Sjolie (2016) also claims that "You control the grammar; the grammar doesn't control you!" (37). Surely, grammar correction can not improve first-year university level ESL students' academic writing performance because of its many limitations.

According to Dr. Stephen D. Krashen's Monitor Theory, he believes that writers that do self-correction in grammar may not be conscious of grammar errors. He also claims that error correction is totally of no value and useless (Krashen, 1982). Monitor Theory

emphasizes the importance of unconscious learning. Monitor Theory can only be used by language learners who have sufficient time in learning language. Language learners' prior knowledge may not affect acquisition, but it can be used as a monitor or editor in producing language learner's output (Schulz, 1991).

Instead of making grammar correction sentence by sentence, ESL students can be encouraged to make sentences by using different possible adjective clauses, appositive phrases, participial phrases, absolute phrases, elliptical adjective clauses, then they notice the exploration of use of grammar. Students can practice the phrase (Sjolie, 2016). It is wise to encourage ESL students to make sentences by using different clauses because they can not only learn the function of clauses, but also the structure of sentences/paragraphs.

Online formulaic sequence checkers are effective in ESL writing. The first hypothesis posited by Grami and Alkazemi (2016) is that students who have statistical online feedback perform better in judging word sequences. The second hypothesis is that students' ability in combining words correctly and positively reflected their writing quality (Grami & Alkazemi, 2016). Taking advantage of online formulaic sequence checkers can be helpful for first-year university level ESL students because they can view statistical online feedback independently, which saves time and increases their writing efficiency.

Peer readers and writers can be useful for first-year university ESL students to get writing feedback. Peer writers can revise the errors effectively upon the comments from peer readers. As Berg (1999) and Chaudron (1984) noted, peer feedback has been accepted because it is different from teachers' feedback. Teachers' feedback was too general, while students' feedback tends to be more specific (Rollinson, 2005). Peer

feedback can provide a higher interaction between readers and writers, and it can create collaborative dialogues between these two parties (Rollinson, 2005). The strategies of peer feedback can be used in first-year university level ESL writing classroom.

Teaching Strategies for ESL Teachers

Teaching strategies for ESL teachers are also necessary in order to improve first-year university level ESL students' academic writing. Traditional teaching methods are not applicable any more. In the early 1980s, ESL writing instruction was not being freed from the tradition of behavioral and structural teaching. Most of the ESL teachers contribute a large amount of time in commenting on students' writing assignments at university. According to the traditional belief, written feedback provided by ESL teachers is necessary to help students improve writing skills (Ko, 2011). However, according to some researchers' recent research, they believe that there is no singular method that can be effective regardless of the changes of students, teachers, classrooms, culture and purpose of writings (Ko, 2011). Relying too much on ESL teachers' writing feedback does not help students improve writing skills.

In many countries around the world where ESL students begin learning English, most of the practices of teaching ESL are very traditional and inflexible. Teacher-dependent and content-focused practices are the main stream in most schools (Grami & Alkazemi, 2016). Teacher-dependent and content-focused practices are the methods that ignore students' participation and creativity in ESL learning. Student performance is limited because they do not have enough space to take advantage of their own creativity and knowledge. Students rarely learned writing skills through grammar-based or pattern-

product approach; they were not engaged in a free-writing style (Zen, 2005). In language education, “culture” has been mixed with “nation”, and the understanding of practices has been rooted into regional, ethnic, and religious association.

It is significant for first-year university level ESL students to share their own ideas and culture with other people. ESL teachers can provide language materials for the ESL students to identify their own ideas (Menard-Warwick, 2009). As an ESL instructor, giving students freedom to choose their topic is very helpful for them to develop writing production. Giving the flexibility of topic choice and elaboration in, for example dialogue journal writing, will contribute to students’ creativity and comprehension (Peyton, Richardson & Wolfram, 1990). ESL teachers can provide students with various writing topics, and give students freedom to choose their favorite topics. With their favorite topics, students have more confidence in developing their essays.

ESL teachers’ experiential knowledge plays an important role in the process of teaching. There are two main kinds of teachers’ experience: *Classroom teaching experience* and *life experience*. *Language learning experience*, which comes from life experience, contributes to teachers’ knowledge through practice (Ellis, 2013). ESL teachers are encouraged to combine their life experience with classroom teaching experience in ESL classes. For example, ESL teachers can share their personal learning habits and learning strategies. If ESL teachers want to think about the possible role of writing strategies in ESL writing courses, they need to know what ESL students already know how to do, consciously or not (Leki, 1995). It is important to engaging students in producing their own topics, personal experiences by using their competencies of academic, sociocultural, and linguistic (Bulushi, 2015). It is significant for ESL teachers

to get to know their students. Getting to know students' linguistic and educational backgrounds, culture and prior learning strategies are quite necessary.

The term blog-assisted language learning (henceforth BALL) can also be used in teaching first-year university level ESL students. Blog-assisted Language Learning is being used by many different researchers in software and courses designs. Taking advantage of BALL can help ESL students cultivate the belief of writing skills, especially from the entries of peer reviews (Lin, Groom & Lin, 2013). Students can share their essays with other classmates, learn from each other, and have peer feedback through blog-assisted language learning.

Summary

There are two themes in this review of literature: 1) Writing strategies for first-year ESL students, 2) Teaching strategies for ESL teachers. The first theme is about providing writing strategies for first-year university level ESL students. This part provides different writing strategies for ESL students. The second theme delivers certain teaching strategies to ESL teachers. This review of literature shows the difficulties that first-year ESL students have in academic writing classes. It also addresses some learning and teaching strategies for ESL teachers. The research used in this review of literature support the topics of the difficulties of first-year university level ESL students, writing strategies for first-year university level ESL students, as well as teaching strategies for ESL teachers. The literature review also indicates that first-year university level ESL students' academic writing difficulties need to be paid attention to. Strategies in helping them refining academic writing are also of necessity too.

CHAPTER III THE PROJECT AND ITS DEVELOPMENT

Brief Description of the Project

The project focuses on a series of writing strategies for first-year university level ESL students, and certain teaching strategies are also offered to ESL teachers within the project. Due to the difficulties that ESL students have during their first-year at university, appropriate writing strategies should be provided to them in order to acquire a higher educational level. The main purposes of this project are to help first-year university level ESL students improve their writing skills in academic writing classes, as well as to refine ESL teachers' teaching skills in writing classes. There are two sessions in this project. The first session addresses on various writing strategies, and related writing exercises for first-year university level ESL students. The second session highlights some teaching strategies for ESL teachers in ESL classroom.

Pictures and videos are included in this project in order to lower students' anxiety. Self work, pair work and group work are included in the exercises.

Development of the Project

My prior experiences of working with ESL/EFL college students greatly influenced me to choose the topic of this project. I used to work with EFL college students in China. I taught English writing classes. I found that most of my students had challenges in English writing, especially first-year university level college students. By interviewing some of my students, I thought limited comprehensive ability was the main factor that influenced their performance in English writing. In order to help them improve writing

skills, I started to work with them one on one. After working with them, I was wondering what were the problems that lead to their low performance in academic writing classes.

My prior experience of being an ESL student also inspired me in creating my field project. When I first entered the United States, I was at the very beginning level of English. According to academic requirements, I had to take ESL class at school. I still remembered how much I struggled when I was working on my essay. I had problems of grammar, punctuation, sentence structure and paragraph organization, etc. I felt so depressed and frustrated when I was asked to rewrite my paper. I realized that I might need help in writing. In order to improve my writing skills, I started to read ESL writing books, ask for support from the writing center and get feedback from my teachers, etc. However, I did not have any intensive training. Because of my prior personal experience in ESL writing, I felt very confident and comfortable in developing my field project.

The Project

The project in its entirety can be found in the Appendix.

CHAPTER IV

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Conclusions

Because of the ongoing advances in the internet, international trade/business, and global communications, English is becoming widely used all around the world. Students who want to have advanced English education at college or university level choose to go to English-speaking countries such as the United States. However, adapting to an English-speaking country, especially in the setting of an academic English class, becomes so challenging for most of these ESL students. Due to different educational and linguistic backgrounds, most ESL students have problems or difficulties in academic writing classes. Those who are in first-year university level have the most difficulties in English classes, particularly in writing classes.

In order to help first-year university level ESL students enhance overall writing skills, I designed a guidebook for both first-year ESL students and ESL teachers. The guidebook that I created in this project provides various writing strategies for first-year university ESL students, as well as teaching strategies for ESL teachers. By reading this book, ESL students can have a systematic knowledge about writing an academic essay at the university level; ESL teachers can learn some teaching methods through this guidebook.

The purpose of this project is to summarize essay writing strategies for first-year university ESL students, as well as teaching strategies for ESL teachers. My project briefly reviews and synthesizes the writing difficulties that ESL students have during

first-year of university level, and details the strategies for both ESL students and ESL teachers in the setting of ESL classroom.

Recommendations

The project is designed for first-year university level ESL students and ESL teachers. ESL Students who have difficulties in academic English writing are welcome to use this guidebook for review and practice. ESL teachers that desire teaching methods of academic writing may find it helpful too.

ESL students may benefit from this book by learning various writing strategies based on different topics. Topics like prewriting, topic sentence & thesis statement, body paragraphs, summary, paraphrase, and revision are clearly presented within the guidebook. This book is suggested to be used in ESL writing classes. Students should be encouraged to work with other classmates with this book. Pair work exercises and group work exercises are included in this book too. Self-check list and self-reflection form are also included in this guidebook because it is important for students to look back and reflect on their prior learning process. ESL teachers are encouraged to use this book to deliver ESL writing lectures.

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APPENDIX

Strategies for ESL Students in first-year University Level of University to
Improve Essay Writing Skills

Strategies For First-Year
University ESL
Students
to Improve
Essay Writing Skills



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Introduction-1

English is being used widely nowadays because of ongoing advances in the internet, international trade/business, and global communications. Students who study English at the college or university levels are referred to as English as a Second Language (ESL) students.



Introduction-2

The target audiences for this book are primarily first-year university ESL students and ESL teachers.

Various pair activities, group work, as well as individual assignments are provided in this book.



Congratulations !

Introduction-3

Mastering professional skills of essay writing is the basic step for first-year university level ESL students to have a higher education. If you are looking for a guidebook to help you deal with your writing problems or improve your teaching strategies, this book should be your best choice.



Introduction-4

This book is designed for first-year university level ESL students and ESL teachers. ESL Students who have difficulties in academic English writing are welcome to use this guidebook for review and practice. ESL teachers who desire teaching methods of academic writing may find it helpful too.



WHAT IS AN ESSAY?

An ESSAY

Introduction

Thesis statement

A topic sentence

Body paragraph

Conclusion

What is an essay?

Write opinions.

Share answers.

I think an essay is

Chapter 1:

1.1 Background Introduction

You might have difficulties in academic English writing because of your different linguistic and educational backgrounds.



1.1 Background Introduction

Most of you have difficulties in academic English writing. Due to the differences in linguistic and education backgrounds, you may desire a writing guidebook that is appropriate for you.



1.2 Difficulties in Essay Writing

Researchers said.....

First, ESL students have difficulties in rhetorical and linguistics aspects of the English language (Sidman & Karathanos, 2015).

Second, they have problems of namely linguistics, cognitive comprehension, paragraph organization, text structure issues during the process of writing tasks (Reynolds, 1993).

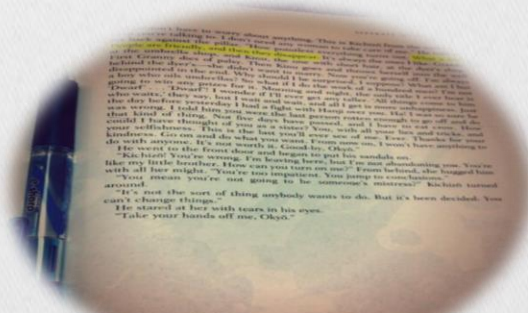
Third, because the norm that embedded in the ESL students' education system was related to their native cultures, first year ESL students may have difficulties adapt to English-speaking countries (Chan, 1988).

1.2 Difficulties in Essay Writing

Researchers said.....

Fourth, limited competence in English makes it difficult for first year ESL students to master English organization patterns (Chan, 1988).

Fifth, a lack of confidence and appropriate guide decreases first year ESL students' performance in the writing class (Fernsten, 2008).



Chapter 2

Strategies for University First-year Level ESL Students in Academic Essay Writing

2.1 Structure of A Paragraph

A paragraph should have.....

- ❑ Topic Sentence---It is important to be happy.
- ❑ Supporting Evidence---It prevents us from diseases.
- ❑ Supporting Evidence---It keeps us healthy.
- ❑ Concluding Sentence---We need to be happy everyday.

Exercise: Number the Sentences with Correct Terms.

1. Supporting Evidence
2. Concluding Sentence
3. Topic Sentence

_____ Lacking vocabulary limits writing performance.

_____ There are many ways that limit our writing performance.

_____ Lacking English comprehensive ability is not helpful in English writing.

_____ In order to improve writing performance, students need to realize the importance of word selection.

Definition of Topic Sentences

Topic sentences should...

1. State the key idea of a paragraph.
2. State the most general statement.
3. State the attitude or opinion in a sentence.



Definition of Topic Sentences

Topic sentences can't be written as.....






1. Statements that are too general
2. Statements that are too narrow
3. Statements that deliver too many ideas or opinions
4. Statements that are too broad

Exercise

Topic sentences can't be written as.....

Statements that are too general;
Statements that are too narrow;
Statements that deliver too many ideas or opinions;
Statements that are too broad.

Please put T for a correct topic sentence, F for an incorrect topic sentence.

-  There were so many reasons that affected his low performance in Math. _____
-  He has cut down his daily expenses since he lost his job. _____
-  The newly-released film is based on a true story. _____
-  It is necessary for the manager to know it is a risky attempt to finish this project. _____
-  Adult ESL learners find it harder to participate in class compared with young ESL learners because they are self-oriented. _____

Chapter 2

Strategies for University First Year Level ESL Students in Academic Essay Writing

2.2 Writing Skills



Prewriting

I. Choose A Topic

II. Brainstorming



Topic sentence & Thesis Statement



Write a Summary



Revise



2.2.1 Prewriting

Prewriting is the first step that helps you to be successful in writing

Choose a topic.

Pick up a topic that you are interested in. Make sure not to make it too general.


Exercise:


Please write down 3 topics that are related to your educational background.

Discussion:

Identify the following topic sentences as too general, too specific, or suitable.

 Group 1: Chinese food is so delicious.

 Group 2: Chinese food is so delicious and yummy because it has lots of tastes and flavors, because people can have many choices when they order food.

 Group 3: Chinese food is delicious and yummy.

Exercise

Put **N** for narrow topics, **G** for general topics, **S** for suitable topics.

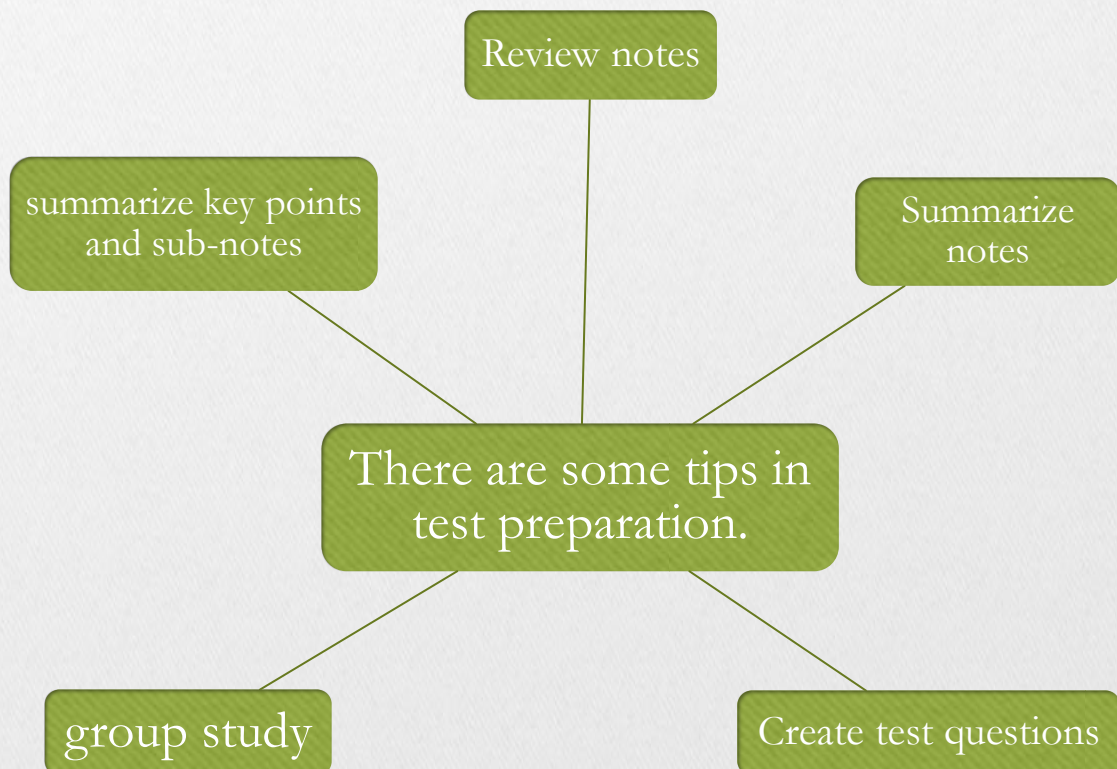
1. American culture is complex. _____
2. There are different races in America, Whites, Blacks, Indians, Asian, and so on. _____
3. Many voters supported Trump. _____
4. If you want to learn how to play the flute, you will have lots of things to learn. _____
5. In order to play the piano, you have to learn to read the rhythm first. _____
6. Building up a good relationship with professors is so necessary. _____
7. Teaching young kids is much harder than adult. _____

2.2.1 Prewriting

Prewriting is the first step that helps you to be successful in writing

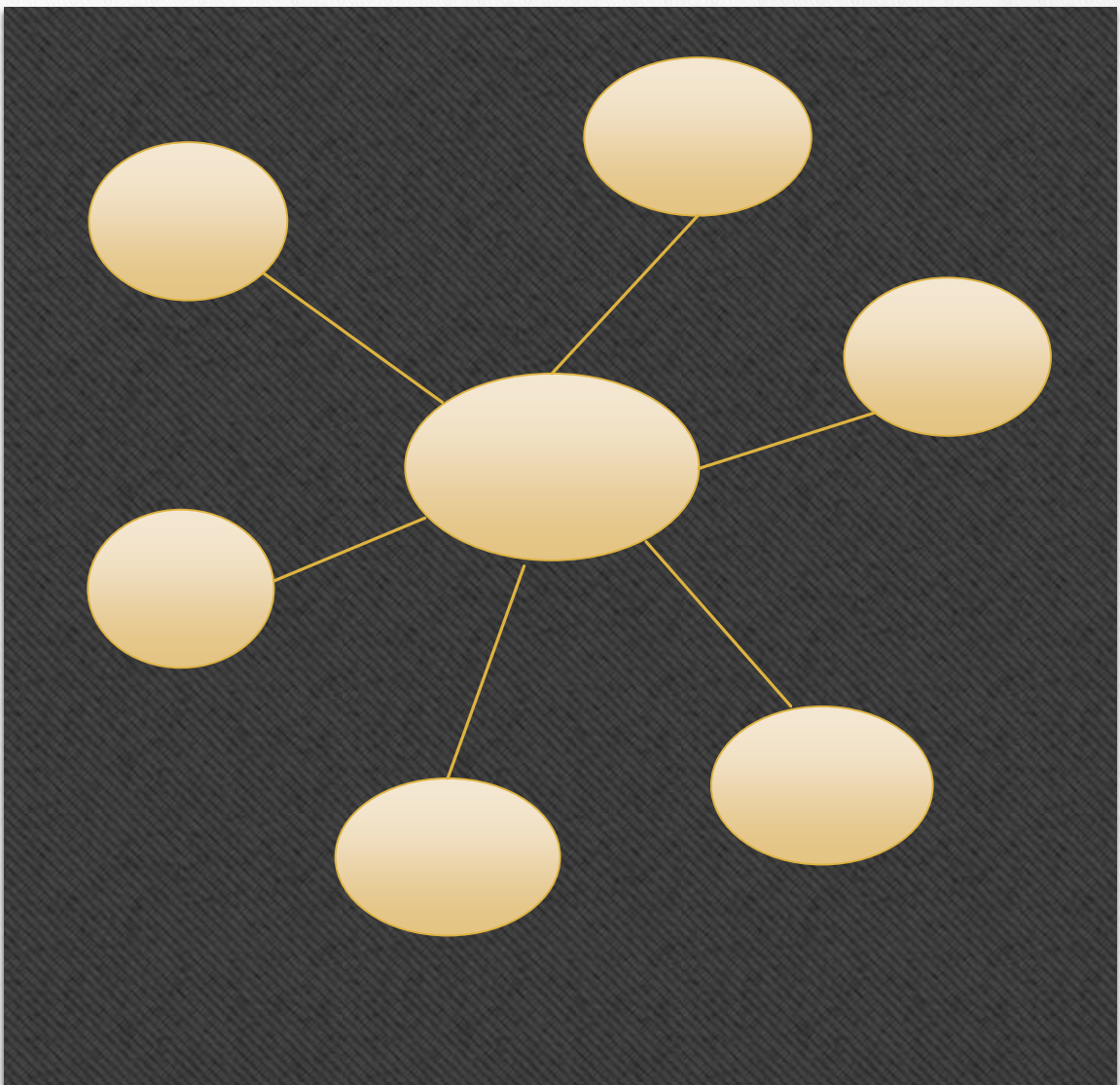
- Brainstorming

List all the ideas that come out in your brain. Be creative. Use brainstorming form to develop your ideas. For example:



Exercise:

After choosing a topic, please complete the brainstorming form.



Please brainstorm the following topics.
Share your answers with your
classmates.



Group 1

♥ Riding a bike is so difficult.

A large, solid green square intended for brainstorming answers to the topic "Riding a bike is so difficult."

Group 2

♥ She has lots of problems in learning Math.

A large, solid green square intended for brainstorming answers to the topic "She has lots of problems in learning Math."

♥ There are many ways to lose weight.

A large, solid green square intended for brainstorming answers to the topic "There are many ways to lose weight."

♥ There are many reasons for the low labor fees in China.

A large, solid green square intended for brainstorming answers to the topic "There are many reasons for the low labor fees in China."

2.2.2 Topic sentence & Thesis Statement

A topic sentence tells the readers what the paragraph is primary about.

A topic sentence.....

- must be a complete sentence.
- should contain the topic and controlling ideas.
- should not be neither too general nor too narrow.

2.2.2 Topic sentence & Thesis Statement

A controlling idea is a single word or phrase.

A controlling idea shows the basic idea of a paragraph.

- Traveling around the world is Lily' s dream, because she wants to be traveler.
- Air pollution in Mexico City becomes a big problem.
- In order to pass the test, Paul studied over night yesterday.

2.2.2 Topic sentence & Thesis Statement

A thesis statement expresses an idea that has the central idea of an essay. A thesis statement should be a declarative statement, instead of a question, a fact, an announcement, or a summary.

A good thesis statement:

♥ New programming, which can require uncomfortable decisions and adjustments by all who are involved, is required to address this considerable challenge (Emmenecker, 1974).

♥ As the student population in institution of higher education grows increasingly diverse both linguistically and culturally, the definition of the term “basic writer” is becoming even more complex (Matsuda, 2003).

Pick up 2 topics and develop them into two independent paragraphs.

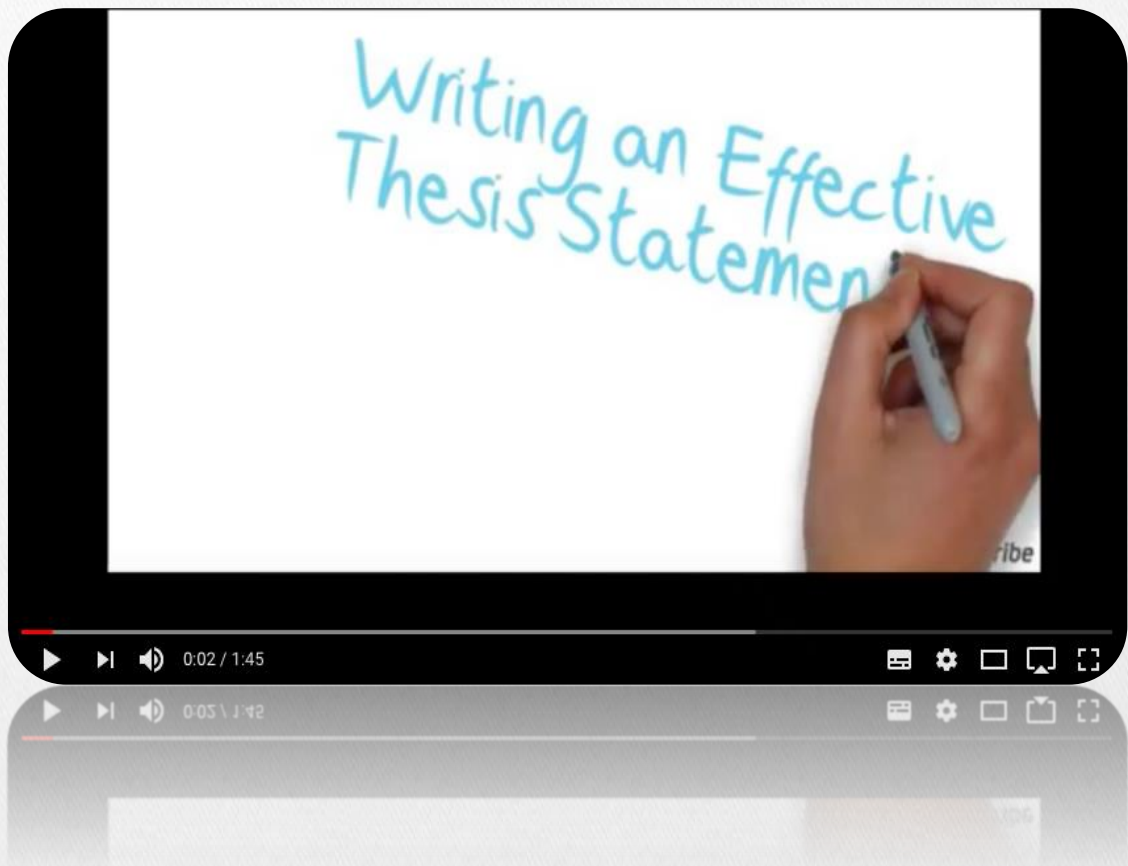


A large, empty rectangular area with a light brown, textured background, intended for writing a paragraph. It is framed by a thin green border. Two black horizontal bars are visible on the left and right sides of the page, partially overlapping the writing area.



A large, empty rectangular area with a light brown, textured background, intended for writing a paragraph. It is framed by a thin green border. Two black horizontal bars are visible on the left and right sides of the page, partially overlapping the writing area.

Writing an Effective Thesis Statement



T. (2012, December 17). Retrieved April 12, 2017, from https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4sx42_C10zw

Is New York a Good City to Live?



Is **New York** a Good City to Live?

New York is very suitable for living.

Thesis:

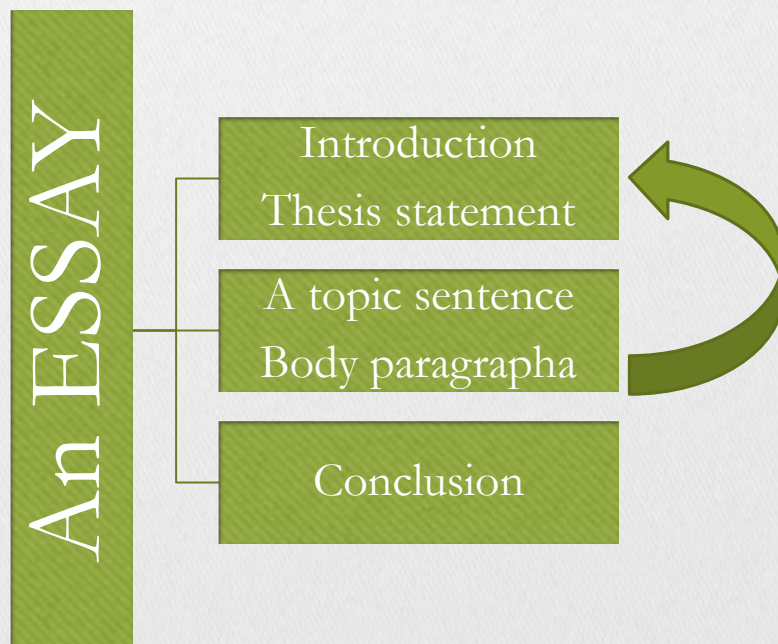
New York is not a good place to live.

Thesis:



2.2.3 Body Paragraphs

- The body paragraphs of an essay are important. The body paragraphs support your thesis statement by breaking it down into small pieces.
- Every body paragraph should include a topic sentence, supporting evidence, and a concluding sentence.



2.2.3 Body Paragraphs

Topic Sentence

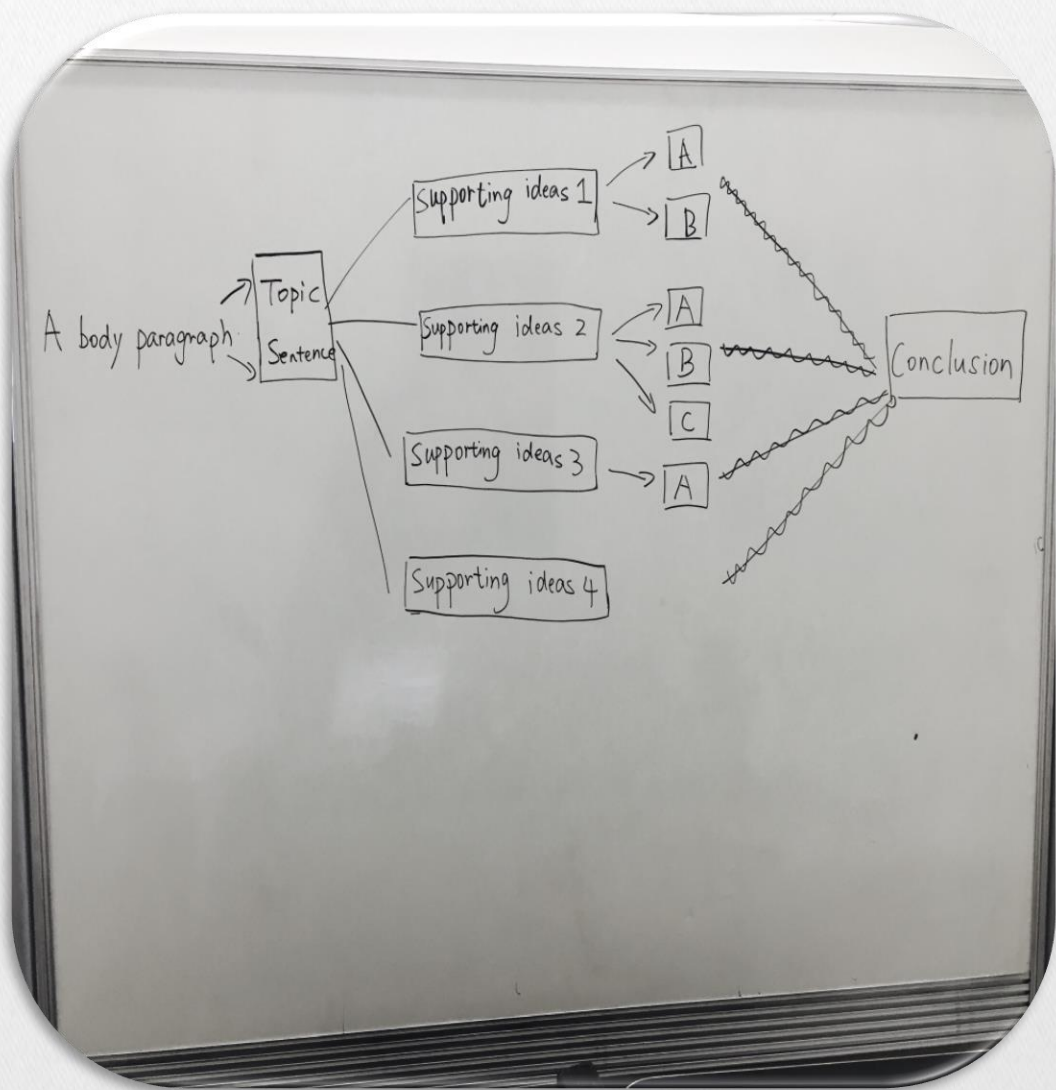
The United States acts like a big melting pot which has various of nationalities within the country, and English learners have been rushing to both public and private school in the United States to pursue a good education. In *English May be My Second Language, but I'm Not ESL*, Hooper mentions that Census data from the U.S. Department of Education indicates that the number of English language learners(ELL), those students speaking a language other than English in the home, has increased to over 5.5 million students in U.S. public schools (Ortmeier-Hooper, 2008). Because of the multilingual education background, U.S. schools need to build up a multicultural, equitable, just learning environment for all of the English learners

Supporting Ideas

Concluding Sentence



How to develop a paragraph? (Parallel Development)

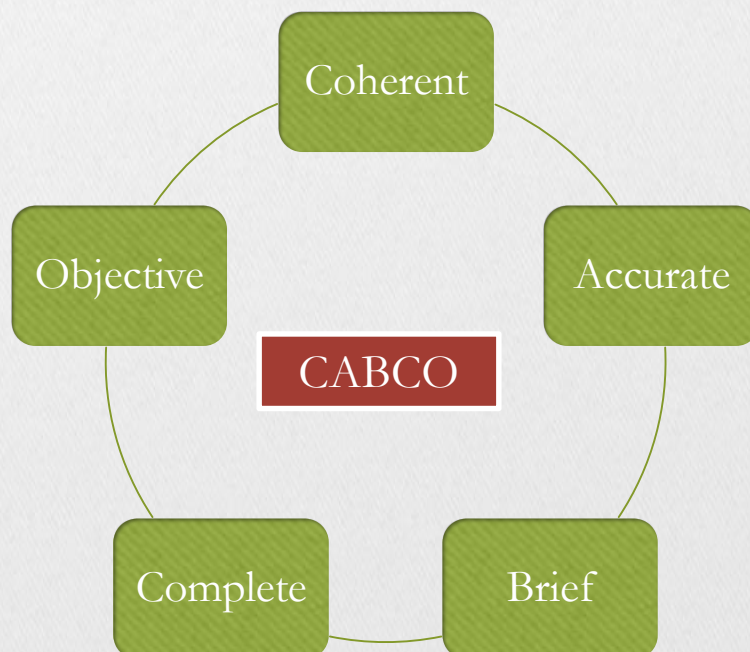


2.2.4 Summary

A summary is a brief restatement of the most important idea of the essay.

A good summary should be **CABCO**.

Coherent , **Accurate**, **Brief**, **Complete** and **Objective**.





2.2.4 Summary

Writing a summary is very helpful for reading comprehension.

A good summary can help readers understand the content in a very short time.

Please summarize the following paragraphs in your own words.

However, teaching ESL writers to revise is not always easy because they lack native-like intuitions about language and thus cannot see problems in their own writing (Taylor). To develop such intuition students can be given numerous opportunities to read well-written prose (Krashen 1984; Raimes 1983). Another solution is to ask ESL writers to give feedback to each other's work or perhaps to pair ESL writers with native speakers (Chan, 1988).

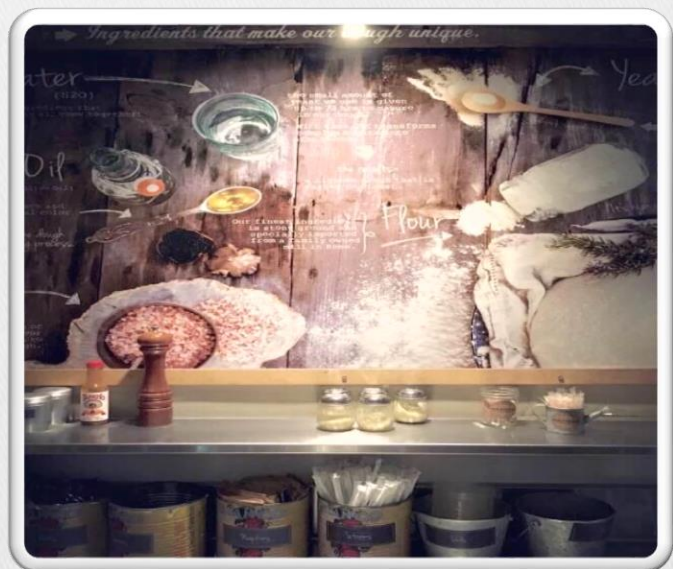
2.2.5 Paraphrase

A paraphrase is a restatement of an author's ideas. It uses the author's ideas, but rewritten it in your personal words.

A good paraphrasing should not have too many words from the source, but have very similar meanings to the original sentence.

Tips for paraphrase:

- 1. Find synonyms.
- 2. Simplify words.
- 3. Change voice.
- 4. Change order.



Steps for Paraphrasing

Read the given source at least three times.

Circle the key words of the original sentences.

Replace the key words by using your own words.

Check your paragraph by asking yourself:

Are too many words the same?

Is it easier or harder?

Is the author' s attitude the same as yours?

Does your paraphrase make sense?

Please paraphrase the following paragraph

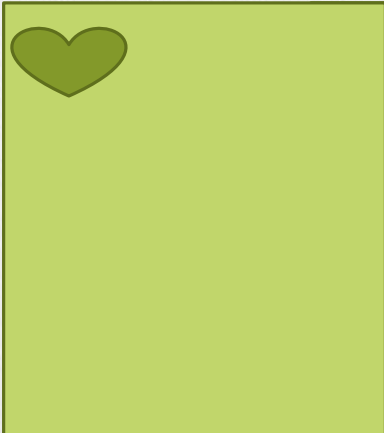
Spanish L1 children who use Spanish at home but use English more in and outside the home, and who have little interaction with other Spanish speakers outside the home, are able to keep their Spanish sentences free of English morphemes, but not free of English grammar. In contrast, Spanish L1 children who use less English and more Spanish inside the home and have more interaction with other Spanish speakers outside the home, even though they also use large amounts of English outside the home, are able to maintain standard Spanish grammatical patterns in large part free of English grammatical influence, but not free of English morphemes (Smith, 2004).



2.2.6 Revision

Why Revision?

Why do you think revision is important? Please share your ideas with other classmates. Write down your common ideas within the blue box, otherwise, write it in the green boxes.

		
---	--	--

Revision Checklist



1. Don't bind yourself to your original intention.

It is necessary for writers to look back at their original rough draft form.

2. Nothing is sacred.

The writer should always keep in mind that anything in their paper can be deleted or altered in order to refine the paper.

3. Look for the beginning, middle, and end, anywhere.

The writer have to look back and forth at the paper because the beginning may come where the ending is; the end may come throughout the beginning; the middle might be anywhere in the whole paper. The writer need to check all these elements and make sure that the structure is correct.

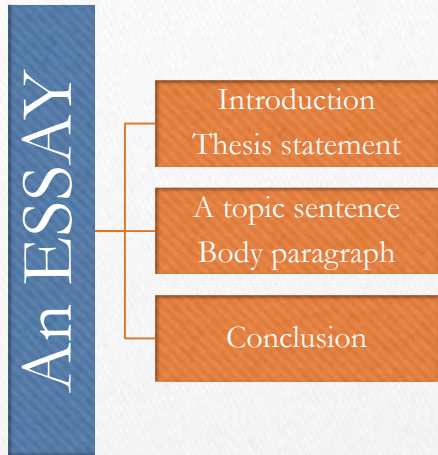
4. Be aware of the mixed associations of words.

The writer should be very careful of choosing words, because different words have different meanings to different people.

5. Keep your usage and punctuation straight.

A bad word choice can mislead the readers, as well as incorrect punctuation (Weigl, 1976)

Self-reflection



- What did you learn from this book?
- What strategies are helpful?
- What's your future plan of learning English writing?

A large green rectangular area containing a white box for writing. A small red heart icon is positioned in the top-left corner of the white box.

Chapter 3:

Strategies for ESL Writing Teachers in ESL Writing Classroom



3.1 Know Your Students

Time in US

Undergraduate students may or may not have traveled abroad before. They might just arrive at U.S. before classes begin. Because of their jet lag, the ESL teacher might need to give enough time to the students to adjust to the new environment.

Cultural Comfort

Many of the international students may have learned American culture before, however, they might need more time in adapting to all situations, like conversational topics, communication skills, behavioral, learning style and ESL classroom, etc. Most of the international students may have difficulties in understanding the language because of their limited English comprehension. It's important for ESL teachers to get to know their students' cultural.

Language Learning

International students might be overwhelmed by cognitive, psychological, and emotional demands. It takes time for them to fully adapt to a English-speaking environment.

Grammar Knowledge

Most International students might not be familiar with formal English rules of grammar. They may be good at tests taking, while they might be able to apply the rules appropriately. The knowledge of English grammar and structures need to be paid extra attention to them.

Writing/Reading

Writing and reading always come together. In order to improve students' writing ability, reading practice could not be ignored. International students may have different patterns of organization in language, so their competency in English might be influenced. They might not be familiar with typical US forms of writing (The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill,2017).

3.2 Share Students' Own Ideas and Culture.

Activity 1

Instructions:

Teachers should be prepared to ask students to write a short essay (minimal 6 sentences) about their culture and education background.

Please remind students to finish this essay individually.



Activity 1

Please write something that you would like to share with our class about your own culture and educational background.

3.3 Give Freedom



Activity 2

Instructions:

Teachers should be prepared to ask students to write a short essay (no more than 100 words) about any topic. Please remind students to finish this essay individually. Collect all essays, and provide feedback.



Activity 2

Choose a topic that you are very interested in.

Expand it into a mini essay. Please do include a topic sentence and a short summary (no more than 100 words).

3.4 Experiential Experience

Activity 3

Instructions:

Before class, teachers should prepare a story about their prior learning experience. In the class, teachers will share this story with the whole class.

After listening to teachers' story, students should write down their thoughts.



Activity 3

What benefits did you learn from your teacher's story?
Please write down at least 3 points that you learned.
What are your learning strategies in English writing?
Please list 3 strategies that you would like to share with
others. Examples are required. Be specific and detailed.

3.5 Partner's Feedback

Activity 4

Instructions:

Inform students early to bring their favorite essay to the class. Instruct students to evaluate other students' essay by checking grammar, punctuation, sentence structure.

Other people's feedback is important !



Activity 4

Bring your favorite essay to class. Exchange your essay with your neighbor. Please check his/her grammar, punctuation, sentence structure, etc. You are welcome to give any comments on his/her essay.

Self-reflection for the ESL Teacher

-
- What did you learn from this book?
 - What strategies are helpful?
 - What's your future plan for teaching English writing?



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