

*An Investigation into the Relationship between the Educational  
Context and the Written Product of University EFL Students  
with Implications for the Teaching of Writing*

*by*

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The candidate confirms that the work submitted is her own and that appropriate credit has  
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## ABSTRACT

This study investigates the sources of difficulties that Damascus University learners face in their composition writing courses at the Department of English Language and Literature. The research is carried out through a longitudinal study of both the context and the product of writing across a four year EFL writing course. Findings suggest that the writing problems that students face are inherent in the writing pedagogy in current practice at the University.

Most studies in ESL/EFL writing have looked at the final product in isolation from the context in which it has been produced. This work has attempted a study of the process of teaching and evaluating writing at Damascus University across four years and analysed longitudinally, in the light of the contextual findings, the final products (written under the influence of the context described) of the same group of learners. Research on ESL writing too has focused mainly on the teaching of writing in smaller classes. This work is unique too in having to deal with a large class situation.

In addition to the introduction and conclusion, the thesis comprises six main chapters. The first chapter looks at the theoretical developments in the teaching of L1 writing and their impact on ESL/EFL perceptions and writing pedagogies. Based on the insights gained from the above survey, chapters two and three attempt to evaluate the Damascus University context of teaching writing across the four year program. Chapters four and five analyse longitudinally the syntactic and the discourse level features of an authentic sample of students' written exam products, produced under the effect of the context of writing described in chapters two and three. The aim of this is twofold, to investigate the influence of the context on the product of writing and to trace the development that learners make across the four year program. Chapter six incorporates the relevant theoretical beliefs outlined in the work with an understanding of the Damascus University context to present suggestions for instructional practices that are to make of the writing course a more effective, purposeful and useful one.

The approach to writing pedagogy upheld in this work focuses on the 'process' and 'context' of writing without ignoring the 'product'. Its ultimate aim is not only the improvement of the writing abilities of learners but also their growth and development through the composing experience.

**To my mother and father**

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## **LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS**

**ESL: English as a Second Language**

**EFL: English as a Foreign Language**

**L1: Mother Tongue**

**L2: Second Language**

**NP: Noun Phrases**

**VP: Verb Phrases**

## INTRODUCTION

### 1. Statement of the problem:

Our interest in this topic was mainly the outcome of the difficulties encountered as a student doing the composition writing courses at Damascus University's Department of English language and Literature. Writing composition was and still is one of the most difficult courses to pass with one of the highest incidence of failure, the reasons for which this work intends to investigate. Many teachers and students at Damascus University are convinced that it is mainly the low level of language proficiency that is resulting in this high incidence of failure. It was in this claim that our quest started. It appeared that at Damascus University, language proficiency is equated with writing proficiency. This work intends to investigate the validity of this equation.

Investigating the reasons for the learners' writing difficulties was first attempted through a detailed analysis of the internal characteristics of a sample of exam papers written by a group of passing and failing students across four years at the University, to find out that which is deficient in the failing papers and suggest ways of incorporating it into the course. In the process of the analysis, we came across some interesting samples of students' writing and across even more interesting criteria on which their evaluation was based. It appeared that some papers failed when they attempted to say something with the limited language repertoire that their writers possessed and others passed when they in fact said very little in a relatively sophisticated language. To give the reader a first hand feeling of what the problem is, we shall present two four year exam compositions written in response to the same task, the first was assigned a very high mark while the second was failed with a very low mark<sup>1</sup>:

The following is the highly marked composition:

*Our changing society*

*Where there is a will there is a way*

*Amidst the complexities of the twentieth century life and the swift advance of change and progress, the individual finds himself in perplexity. Hence, change in life is expected on many levels. On one hand, there are many changes in the education of our society. It is certainly true that education is the*

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<sup>1</sup> In this study, we were given permission by Damascus University Administration to use students' past exam papers on condition that none of the names or the marks of the subjects used in this research be exposed. All through this work, fictitious names will be used and the subject's marks will be referred to as passes or fails or as highly marked or low marked depending on the point to be made.

*most valuable asset in our lives. It gives us the right to think as we like, to read anything we wish, and to express our opinions. thus, education is the means by which we make our lives useful. Hence more and more people are going to school and university nowadays.*

*Education enables people to supply themselves with the intellectual needs, and to enjoy the luxuries of the present age. Thus, the persons who learn in our society safeguard their dignities as human beings. In addition to that, they can satisfy their desires to render services to the community. There is no doubt that education plays an important role in our developing society.*

*“Actions speak louder than words”. Hence people tend to achieve their hopes. They no longer believe in words. Thus they use every powerful means, in order to make our society a civilized one. In fact, civilization is the means by which people try to follow the European countries. Therefore, people tend to work more than they did in the past. They realized the importance of work in society. Nowadays, people are able to know that if they want to reach the top of the ladder, they must not afraid to put their feet on the first rung.*

*“Character is the soil, abilities are the seeds.” If the character is good, the seeds will grow, and the harvest will be plentiful. If the character is bad, there will be no harvest at all. Thus, people are becoming more aware of the importance of their characters in life. They are beginning to know that success in life depends on character rather than abilities. Hence in order to achieve success, they must depend on themselves, and that is what they are trying to do. There is no doubt that people in our modern society have strong wills. They are ready to face any obstacle, because they know that if they want to gather honey, they must suffer the stings of the bees. Thus, people are becoming more optimistic, because they know more than before that man is the architect of his own fortunes.*

(Nuha, 4th year)

A closer look at this composition reveals that the statements that this student is trying to make are very general; people in this modern society have become more educated, more active, stronger in character, stronger in will and more optimistic. There is little or no supporting evidence to the statements made, and no evidence to show that in the past things were otherwise. The whole composition centres around some rote learnt proverbs. The introductory paragraph does not make clear what the thesis is and the concluding one does not give the reader any sense of closure. There is an abundance of unnecessary cohesive ties within paragraphs and the whole text seems to be addressed more to an Arab audience than to an English one.

In what follows is the very low marked composition written on the same topic as the one above:

*Our Changing Society*

*Our society is always in changing way. This changing does not always mean to the best field. Some sides of this changing have developed towards the best such as the educational field, farming field, rights of women, and the uses of the developed medicen, but the habbits of people has two different sides.*

*The first field which had developed is the field of education. Ignorance was a very bad illness. We had excluded ignorance out of our life. Children went to school, took education and become respected men. The advantage of the education is to have wise and reasonabl men.*

*In the field of farming, in the past people were always in fear of the dangerors flood, and the bad insects for their production. Nowadays we have built the dams, and rejected the danger of flood, and their are many scientific medicen for the insects which are bad for croops.*

*In the field of science their are a lot of developed process. Doctors now have the medicen for many dangerous illness such as the canser. Children now do not die because of the illness, they can take the medicen required and cure.*

*Women now have all their rights. They educat, work, and they even work in the political field.*

*The last thing I want to speak about which always changing is the habbits of people, and the traditional things. Many of these habbits have changed and become better, such as the treating of girls and the invaluable habbits which are very bad. People now dismisses these bad values. The bad thing that society has changed to is that people now do not love each others like at the past time. Nowadays every one is intrested in his own things. He likes himself only.*

*Finally many sides of society has changed some sides have become better and others become worse. In all cases the good development is more than the bad development, and we hope so.*

(Nada, 4th year)

In this composition, the student introduces the reader to her topic and mentions briefly the type of changes that have taken place in society. She then describes each aspect of this change separately. In the first paragraph in the body of the composition she describes the

changes in the field of education and gives evidence for this by saying that all children nowadays go to school and become educated. In the next paragraph, she describes changes taking place in the field of agriculture. She gives evidence for this by explaining how people have built dams and made use of insecticides to improve on the quality of their crops. In the following paragraph, she deals with the developments taking place in the field of science where the discovery of new medicines has helped people recover from many serious illnesses. In the paragraph that follows, she goes on to describe how women have got more rights than they had in the past and she also gives examples on that. From there, she goes on to describe the changes taking place in the people themselves. People have got rid of some of their bad habits such as the way they treat women but on the other hand they have become much more selfish and self centered. The final paragraph is a conclusion in which the writer sums up the whole essay by saying that changes have taken place positively and negatively, however the positive changes have been more than the negative ones.

The essay is meaningful and well organized. The topic has been introduced briefly and each point has been discussed and supported in a separate paragraph before the essay was finally concluded.

A closer look at both papers reveals that the first, although characterized by a relatively high level of grammatical proficiency, appeared to be saying something when in actual fact it said very little. This paper was passed with a very high mark. The second, on the other hand, was trying to say something but in less proficient grammar; so it was not only failed but was given a very low mark. The seriousness and the roots of the problem became more apparent to us when we looked at the writing of these two students across the four years. We found that the learner with the highly marked paper has reproduced in all her exam papers across the four years the same bits of texts fitted in wherever possible, whether relevant to the meanings in the rest of the text or not. The learner therefore, knowing what the teacher was after, came to the exam prepared with chunks of texts to be fitted here and there to engineer a piece of writing that would satisfy the teacher. The other student on the other hand who was trying to express her meanings, with the limited repertoire of lexis and structures that she possessed, was penalised and failed. In what follows the second and third years exam papers of the passing student are presented to clarify the point just made. The fourth year paper was reproduced above. To make the process of comparison easier, the chunks of texts that have been repeated in the 2nd, 3rd and 4th year papers have been bolded.

#### *The place of women*

*Work is the means by which we make our lives useful. It is as necessary for man as it is for woman, because work enables woman to supply herself with her*

*urgent material needs and to enjoy the luxuries of the modern world. Thus, working women can secure a good future for their families and for their society.*

*A century ago people used to think that woman's place is in the home; moreover, they used to believe that her duty is to look after her husband, her house and her children. Nevertheless, men are in charge of our society, because they hold the most influential positions and control most of the important jobs.*

*Today, however, these thoughts have changed completely. In most countries, women have got the same rights of men; they have got the right of work and the right of education, nevertheless, they still have to catch up and to feel disadvantaged compared with men in many respects.*

*There is no doubt that the woman who does not work, loses her dignity as a human being and her position in her society. Thus, amidst the complexities of life and the swift advance of change, women find themselves forced to work. Nevertheless, from my point of view, I think that women should work in order to live as useful members in their society.*

*As far as woman's work is concerned the best thing women can do is to assert their creative existence, and as a matter of fact they can satisfy their desires to render services to the community. However, the woman who does not work, hinders the progress of her family, society, and nation; she is a heavy burden on her society, because she steals part of what other people gain, whereas, there can be "no gains without pains".*

*Self-reliance is a way to success. However, women should depend upon themselves in order to create a successful position in society. It is time women realized that work is essential for them as human beings and as members in this modern world. Furthermore, women should realize that the economic wealth of nation depends upon the work of every individual and the co-operation among all of them. Nevertheless women should bear in their minds this proverb: "Don't put off till tomorrow what can be done today", because we all know that "Action speak louder than words".*

(Nuha, 2nd year)

### *The benefits and pleasures of learning English*

#### *Where There Is Will There is Success*

*Amidst the complexities of life in the modern world and the swift advance of change and progress, the individual finds himself in perplexity. Thus, as far as I am concerned, education is the means by which I make my life*

*useful. It is the most valuable asset in my life because it gives me the right to think as I like, to read anything I wish and to express my opinions in a new language.*

*There is no doubt that my study of English enables me to supply myself with the intellectual needs and to enjoy the literature of the ancient civilizations. Moreover, learning English enables me to assert my creative existence as an outstanding student and to promote a positive representation of my nation's values and ideas. Thus, as far as I am concerned, my study of English helps me to enjoy the English literature which is part and parcel of the human civilization.*

*Self-reliance is the way to success. Therefore, I have a tendency to think that I should rely upon myself in order to attain success and to live as a useful member in the community. Thus, learning English is the means by which I make my life useful to the future generations. Furthermore, learning English broadens my outlook on the world in general and on England in particular.*

*"Man is the architect of his own fortunes". In my opinion learning English enables me to be the master of my own destiny. However, it is certainly true that learning English affects my own character since it helps me to safeguard my own dignity as an educated citizen in this complicated world. Thus, it is well-known that character is the soil, abilities are the seeds. If the character is good, the harvest will be plentiful.*

*"As you sow, so will you reap". Thus, through studying English I try to work hard in order to reach the top of the ladder bearing in my mind that man can not reach the top of the ladder if doubt makes him afraid to put his foot on the first rung. Moreover, despite the difficulties which face me sometimes, I always try to bear in my mind that the bud may have a bitter taste, but sweet will be the flower and that difficulties are meant to judge the strength of the will.*

*Self-confidence is a way to success. Therefore, I always try to reach the top of education depending on my own efforts. Thus, through learning English, I can communicate with foreigners without facing difficulties. Moreover, I can learn about human civilizations in general as well as about the English civilization in particular and as a matter of fact I can learn about the mistakes of the previous generations and do my best to avoid making these mistakes bearing in my mind that "By other's faults, wise men learn". There is no doubt that learning English is a great pleasure for me because it enriches my own knowledge and helps me to secure the enjoyment of my family and my parents who always encourage me to do my best and to bear in my mind the famous proverb which says "Never put off till tomorrow what can be done today".*

*Thus, through learning English I try to render favours to my country and to my nation. Moreover, I can do my duties without complaining as well as I can help the progress of my country because I tend to think the "Actions speak louder than words".*

*Blessed are those who make the barren places of life fruitful with kindness and happiness. therefore, I try to achieve my duties and to learn English and as a matter of fact I can be one of those who are blessed.*

(Nuha, 3rd year)

Since each of those papers was produced in a separate exam in a different year for a different teacher, no one realized what was going on. The writer of this text graduated after her first attempt with very high marks and became a University assistant lecturer, whereas the other student could not graduate and had to repeat that paper year after year. It is worth mentioning here that the graduates of this department are themselves the future English school teachers. This is resulting in a vicious circle because when students become teachers they teach what they themselves have been taught.

The example presented above is evidence that even when a learner is relatively proficient in the language, she does not see in writing a means of generating personal meaning and exploring new forms and structures. On the contrary she has learnt to see in writing a means of reproducing forms, structures and ideas. It seems that the difficulties that students are facing have their roots not only in the poor linguistic abilities of the majority of learners but in the approaches to the teaching of writing in current practice at the University. Such samples of writing lead one to assume that the writing courses taught at Damascus University are indirectly encouraging rote learning and content reproduction. The content that learners are trying to produce and its originality, which is the main objective of writing, does not seem to count for much. Learners are credited when they produce correct though incoherent or largely meaningless texts in forms and organizational patterns that are not acceptable to the L2 discourse community and are penalized and failed when they attempt original and thoughtful ideas with their limited repertoire of lexis, structures and forms-a practice that may have far reaching damage on learners. It may not only be teaching them that the truth of their 'correct' writing is unquestioned, but it may also be indirectly teaching them to believe in the truth of anything written in correct form without questioning it themselves.

Thus whereas teachers think that the problems behind poor writing lie in the learner's lack of proficiency in the new code, we feel that the roots of such problems may lie in the ways and perceptions of writing adopted by writing teachers at the University. The relatively uninteresting dull task for example that the learners have been set in the first

place, the role that the teacher adopts in relation to it, the teacher-student relationship, the purpose of writing and to whom it is intended are all factors that may have a significant bearing on the final product. The conclusion arrived at through observations of this kind was that the product of writing had to be studied in the light of the context in which it had been learnt and produced. This consequently led us to abandon our initial objective which was merely to investigate and examine the final products of students' writing. Instead the objective became to investigate first the context in which the learning of how to write takes place and then study its influence on the learner's final products.

Our hypothesis is that the difficulties that Damascus University learners are facing in their writing course are not merely linguistic (as many teachers would like to believe), but primarily pedagogic.

## **2. Theoretical Background**

The works of many researchers especially in the field of L1 writing have led us to formulate our own perceptions of the importance of teaching writing and how it can be best taught. Two approaches to the teaching of English writing have been prevalent in the past: the 'skillist' and the 'cultural heritage' model. The first perceived writing as the accurate reproduction of prescribed text forms with emphasis on spelling, punctuation and standard syntax. The second perceived literature as a source of experience and knowledge that learners could incorporate in their own writing. More recent developments like the 'process approach' saw in writing a process that enables the writer to discover through his writing experiences what he actually thinks and means (Murray:1980,1982; Elbow:1973). Others saw in writing a process of self-discovery that would eventually lead the individual writer to growth and development (Dixon:1969; Moffett:1983; Britton et al :1975; Judy:1980). Very recently the 'social constructionist' model of writing has gained in popularity especially in courses teaching English writing in scientific and technical fields. This approach perceives writing as a piece of text that has to conform to the context, organization, language and structure dictated by the 'discourse community' to whom it is being addressed (Reid:1984a,1984b; Horowitz:1986a,1986b; Faigley:1986; Coe:1987; Swales:1990).

The study has sought to review these approaches, and use them to form a view of writing that can illuminate the teaching of writing at Damascus University. Another major undertaking in this study has been the analysis of the final exam products that students produced. Earlier efforts to understand composition writing have focused merely on the analysis of the final 'product', i.e. on the text produced by the learners, and have analysed it syntactically (Hunter:1965) or have combined considerations of error frequency and syntactic complexity (Scott and Tucker:1974) or have combined the T-Unit and error frequency with other syntactic measures (Goloub and Kidder:1974; and Endicott:1973).

To go beyond this level of analysis, researchers have chosen to study the cohesive devices which make the syntactic units come together to form a text (Witte and Faigley:1981). More recently studies have focused on the processes of written discourse in general (cf. Gregg and Steinberg:1980; Whiteman:1981; Frederiksen and Dominic:1981; Nystrand:1982).

### **3. Objectives and Research Questions**

We have felt that the approach to the teaching of writing in current practice at the University of Damascus may be seriously deficient. The aim of this work is to establish evidence of the presence of the problem and suggest alternative solutions. We would like to investigate whether what Damascus University is facing is not a writing crisis but a pedagogic one. The problem leads us to a number of questions:

- 1) How does the educational context across the four years of the program influence the student's process and product of writing?
- 2) How do the criteria of evaluation and task setting at the University reflect the teachers' perceptions of writing and affect the students' performance and perceptions of writing too?
- 3) How do the morphosyntactic features compare between the passing and the failing papers and how much development in these aspects is achieved by students across the four year program?
- 4) How do features of content and organization compare between the passing and the failing students and how do students develop as far as the discourse level features are concerned from year one to year four of the program?
- 5) In such a context (especially in a the large class situation), what will be a more effective way to teach writing and how can it be implemented?

### **4. Overview of the Whole Work**

Chapter one reviews the literature on L1 and L2 writing pedagogies to form the theoretical background necessary to gain an understanding of what writing involves and how it can be best taught.

In chapter two and in the light of the understandings formed in chapter one, a description and an assessment of the effectiveness of the writing courses taught at the University across the four years is presented.

In chapter three, an outline of the criteria that determine teachers' choice of tasks and the criteria on which they base their assessments of students' writing is presented. The

influence of that on students' perceptions of writing is investigated in the second part of that same chapter.

In chapters four and five a longitudinal analysis of the final products of a sample of fourteen subjects who have written on the same task across their four years at the University (and who have been subjected to the pedagogic context described in chapters two and three) is carried out. Chapter four opens with a review of the literature carried out on studies of syntactic development of ESL/EFL learners. Guided by the measures found in the literature a detailed morphosyntactic analysis of the data is carried out and the findings are processed and statistically examined. From the sentence level analysis of chapter four, the work moves on to the discourse level analysis of chapter five.

Chapter six makes suggestions for developments that can be introduced to transform the course into a more meaningful and effective one taking into account the limitations of the context under scrutiny.

## CHAPTER ONE

### Review of Literature

This chapter is divided into two main sections. The first reviews the current schools of thought influencing the teaching of L1 writing, and the second surveys the approaches to the teaching of L2 writing, past and present.

#### 1.1. Current Schools of Thought Influencing the Teaching of Writing to Native Speakers of English

While the teaching of writing to native speakers of English has been mainly directed towards the teaching of the formal and the technical aspects of the process as is evident in the studies in Braddock et al. (1963), some British and American educationalists and scholars have reflected upon the teaching of language in general and the teaching of writing in particular and highlighted the importance of the intellectual and social aspects involved in the process. Their views, diverse as they may be, have helped to shape current theory and practice in the teaching of English writing to native speakers and eventually to non-native speakers because the former has been a source of inspiration and guidance to the latter (Krapels:1990). In what follows an account will be given of some of the basic concepts of the nature of English writing and its pedagogies brought in by some distinguished specialists in the field. These reveal different but complementary aspects of what can be called 'the process<sup>1</sup> approach' to writing. Most educationalists would agree that four basic features: the writer, the reader, the context and the text are essential in any purposeful and contextualized communicative interaction involving construction and transmission of knowledge whether in L1 or in L2 (figure 1.1).

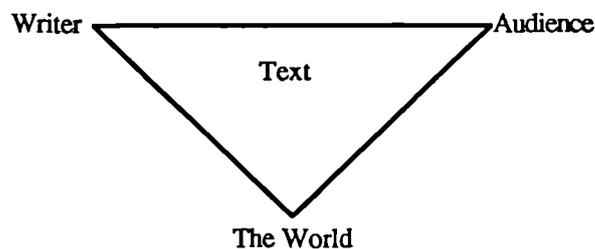


Fig. 1.1. Kinneavy's Communication Triangle

(reproduced from Beard 1984:56)

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<sup>1</sup> The term 'process' is used here to refer to approaches to writing that addressed features other than the final 'product'.

In this work therefore, the different approaches and perceptions of writing will be discussed taking into consideration how each addressed the four basic elements in written communication i.e. whether focus is on the writer, the reader, the context or the text<sup>2</sup>. It is important to stress here that these approaches do not fall into clear cut categories and often focus on more than one of those basic features, however this categorization has been carried out in this work mainly for the sake of clarification.

### **1.1.1. Focus on Writer**

#### **1.1.1.1. The Personal Growth/Personal Expressivists**

Dixon, in his book *Growth Through English* (1969) criticized the two most popular approaches to the teaching of language; the “skillist” and the “cultural heritage” approaches. The “skillist” model which views English as a series of linguistic skills to be taught and learnt did succeed in fulfilling its initial objective which was to obliterate illiteracy, but it did so by ignoring the fact that such skills are only elements of a much broader process; the process of human interaction through which individuals learn expressiveness and competence in a certain language. Learning the “skill” became the “end” rather than the “means” and the operations used specifically in the written mode became the centre of English learning.

Dixon rejected the “cultural heritage model” too on the grounds that although it puts the “skills” model back in its place as a means to an end and presents learners with experience through literature in ready made structures and contents that could be imitated, it does not offer learners the opportunity to draw from their own experiences of reality and thus fails to help them relate their personal experiences with language. This model according to Dixon “neglects the most fundamental aim of language - to promote interaction between people” (1969:6). A weakness, Dixon says, that even the current account of language as “communication” suffers from because whilst dealing with pre-fabricated messages, it ignores “the discoveries we make in the process of talking and writing from experience” (1969:6).

The model which Dixon advanced as an alternative for the other two is “the personal growth model”. It is based on the view that the primary aim of language is to share experience and promote interaction with other people. Unlike earlier language-centred approaches, this approach is learner and learning centred whereby the writer’s experiences provide the content and the rationale for writing. It is a model that promotes

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<sup>2</sup> In the discussion of the approaches to L1 writing, the focus-on-text approaches have not been discussed in detail because our main objective here is not to review the L1 approaches as much as it is to study how developments in L1 writing pedagogy influenced L2 approaches to teaching writing.

personal growth through the learner's self-discovery and self-expression. By using all forms of language - writing, conversation, drama - children can express and explore their thoughts and feelings and in consequence learn about themselves and others. The teaching of English therefore becomes a meeting point of experience, language, and society. As pointed out by Squire and Britton in their forward to the third edition of Dixon's book *Growth Through English* (1975), English is "the sum total of the planned and unplanned experiences through language by means of which a child gains control of himself and of his relations with the surrounding world." (1975:xviii). Thus, growth through language is not only an emotional and intellectual experience but a social one too.

With such views a new dimension has been added to the teaching of language in general and the teaching of writing in particular. There is more to writing than just the accurate reproduction of correct structural forms or the drawing on one's own storehouse of cultural and literary heritage. Writing is a dynamic, generative process that goes hand in hand with the personal growth of the learner. Through the process of clarifying, ordering, shaping, connecting and speculating upon experiences, the individual gains more insight into himself and learns more about others in the community and consequently matures and grows. Dixon's writing class is therefore a place for diversifying personal growth. The implications of this on the teaching of writing is that teachers should initiate writing activities that provide opportunities for learners to express their own feelings, ideas, opinions, experiences and values.

Another British educationalist who saw in writing a process of personal growth too is James Moffett. In his book, *Teaching the Universe of Discourse* (first published in 1968) James Moffett (1983) rejects the definition of English as "content" or as "skill". He maintains that the two are of an integrative nature and the symbol cannot be abstracted from the symbolized nor can a message be freed from its code. Like Dixon, Moffett upholds a developmental view of writing but he draws heavily on the works of Piaget and Vygotsky and in consequence perceives the primary dimension of development as a movement from egocentrism to decentralization, a process by which the self enlarges assimilating the world to itself and accomodating itself to the world; "differentiating among modes of discourse, registers of speech, kinds of audiences is essentially a matter of decentring, of seeing alternatives, of standing in other's shoes, of knowing that one has a private or local point of view and knowledge structure" (Moffett 1983:57).

In line with this developmental view, Moffett devised a means of classifying different modes of discourse based on the increasing distance of time and space between the writer and his audience, and the writer and his subject as is illustrated in figures 1.2 and 1.3 respectively:

Reflection -- intrapersonal communication between two parts of one nervous system.

Conversation -- interpersonal communication between two people in vocal range.

Correspondence -- interpersonal communication between remote individuals or small groups with some personal knowledge of each other.

Publication -- Impersonal communication to a large anonymous group extended over space and /or time.

Figure.1.2. Moffett's classification of modes of discourse based on the increasing distance of time and space between the writer and his audience

(reproduced from Moffett 1983:33)

What is happening -- drama -- recording

what happened -- narrative -- reporting

what happens -- exposition -- generalizing

what may happen -- logical argumentation -- theorizing

Figure 1.3. Moffett's classification of modes of discourse based on the increasing distance of time and space between the writer and his subject

(reproduced from Moffett 1983:35)

The style, order and structure of a piece of writing are therefore determined by the choices that a learner makes concerning the level of abstraction that he is to use to verbalize his experience. According to Moffett egocentricity or "the writer's assumption that the reader thinks and feels as he does, has had the same experience, and hears in his head, when he is reading, the same voice the writer does when he is writing" (1983:195) can be at the root of the majority of the learning writers' communication problems; i.e problems of organization and mechanics and problems of style. The problem according to Moffett lies with the teacher's approach. Teachers dictate rules but what the learner really needs is "not rules but awareness", because his mistakes in writing are not made out of ignorance but because he is deceived by his own egocentricity and *thinks* that he has made the necessary amendments when he has not.

In a more recent work, *Coming On Centre* (1981) in a chapter entitled "Integrity in the teaching of writing", Moffett sees writing as consisting of all of the following, reading upward from the most material to the most authorial:

- Revising inner speech - starts with inchoate thought.
- Crafting conventional or given subject matter - starts with given topics and language forms.
- Paragraphing, summarizing, plagiarizing - starts with other writers' material ideas.
- Transcribing and copying - starts verbatim with others' speech and texts.
- Drawing and handwriting - starts with imagery for sensorimotor activities.

(reproduced from Moffett 1981:90)

Moffett insists that writing consists of not just one of these activities but all. None of those activities is 'wrong', but what is 'wrong' is failing to include any. All these activities are practiced simultaneously whenever writing takes place at all stages of growth; even when a child learns how to write letters, his letters need to be connected to meaning, to inner speech. Some older children find themselves incapable of finding meaning only because they spent so much time copying, paraphrasing, and fitting given content into given forms but never had the chance to look into themselves, their inner speech and find meaning of their own. A closer look will show that the features suggested by Moffett (1981) are characteristic of creative writing. A point that needs to be borne in mind for it seems that some educationalists are equating creative writing with writing in general. Creative writing is certainly one type but not all.

Moffett's classroom therefore is a place that fosters the growth of the individual learner from the personal initial egocentricity to the impersonal and from a low to a high level of abstraction. Inner speech is the matrix of spontaneous discourse and teachers should concentrate their efforts on developing it. This can be accomplished by encouraging pupils to work together in small groups, providing audiences for one another, talking over and trying ideas before and during writing in order to aerate and revise inner speech across successive versions. Peers are a less threatening audience than the teacher and in consequence they might be more likely to influence their partner's writing. Part of the teachers' responsibility therefore is to teach students how to teach one another. Giving feedback is important; however, it should not only be given at the end of writing but during the process because then changes can be incorporated into the final product. Moffett also recommends chain-reaction assignments whereby a lot of re-writing and not only tidying up takes place under the influence of suggestions made by peers. "It is with the isolated, sink-or-swim assignment that the student goes for broke" (Moffett 1983:200). Learners should be exposed to the various purposes of writing and the entire range of discourse. They should be offered a choice of subject and form and above all they should learn to write by writing. Without proper help the learner might never come

across all kinds of trials (assignments) that are possible and he might not be able to make the most out of his errors. To this end, Moffett (1983) proposes that teachers should expose their learners to a variety of meaningful assignments that are given in a meaningful order besides arranging for a good quality feedback that will ensure maximum learning. Moffett does not only discuss the importance of the variety of assignments but he also insists on the quality of such assignments. An assignment should not leave the writer with no real relationship between him, his subject and his audience. "I would not ask a student to write anything other than an authentic discourse, because the learning process proceeds from intent and content down to the contemplation of technical points, not the other way" (1983:205). The traditional methodologies teach "composition" as "decomposition", they require the learner to carry out grammatical exercises in isolated dummy sentences and formulate language without developing thought, but writing should be used in realistic ways as the authentic expression of the writer's own ideas. Moffett feels strongly against the traditional view that seeks to teach writing as form first: "It is a crime to make students think that words, sentences, paragraphs, are 'building blocks' like bricks that have independent existence and can be learned and manipulated separately pending the occasion when something is to be constructed out of them" (1983:206). The end result of such an approach could be that a student may learn all the rules but still develop very little as far as awareness and judgement in writing are concerned (1983:207). Modern approaches to the teaching of writing should shift their focus from the final product to the learner for the subject is in the learner (1983:59). Another of Moffett's (1983) recommendations to teachers is to make use of extensive reading to help learners incorporate language structures which in turn can be used in their writing. One has to bear in mind too that reading does not only incorporate language structures but it also provides learners with a rich source of content. Moffett (1983) thinks that points of departure for reading discussions should not be the good old 'rhetorical analysis' and 'pesky questions' but the student's own response to their reading. Last but not least, Moffett suggests the interweaving of writing with other media, arts and disciplines so that "all these forms of knowing remain in natural relations with each other, providing warm-ups and follow-ups for writing and offering it as one among alternative ways to discover, develop, and render the mind." (1981:92).

Miller and Judy (1978) are two other educationalists that offer a "personal growth" approach to writing. Their approach is similar to that of Dixon's. When a student performs a number of imaginative writing experiences and finds them satisfying, he is in effect experiencing growth as a human being. "Every human being has a rich storehouse of ideas, experiences, dreams, and visions" (1978:35) and helping the learner to look into himself and to draw upon such faculties will help him become in touch with "the real self". "Personal growth" will therefore be achieved through the processes of recollecting, discussing, debating, exploring, interacting and collaborating.

Judy's (1980) contribution to the teaching of L1 writing is his "experiential approach". He bases it on an amalgam of theories presented by a number of psychologists like Piaget, Vygotsky, Langer and Jung; linguists like Chomsky, and teachers like Britton, all of whom reflected upon the complex relationship between thought and language. Language "reflects" thought but there is no one to one correspondence between the two. Perceptions are shaped and influenced by past experiences and by the language that one has learnt. Language can shape thinking, and thinking and experience can in turn shape language. According to Judy, the three elements; *experience, language and thinking* are like a rubber triangle inextricably bound together yet influencing one another. This triangle grows and stretches day after day as we gain more experiences that are internalized through a language-based process to become part of our storehouse of experiences. When the need arises for such an experience, we reach out for it through the complicated language-based process of "thinking". Consequently we end up with "ideas" that can be self-examined and communicated to other people. Our human needs, first to organize and understand our experiences and then to share them with others initiate this process.

The major premises of Judy's (1980) experience-based approach are the following:-

Firstly, one should write from experience. It is often the teacher's setting of tasks that trivializes the importance of the rich storehouse of experiences possessed by learners which in consequence forces them to present superficial and irrelevant experiences. Students should be made aware of their experiences and should be given the opportunity and time to understand and re-examine them through talking about them, for a lack of understanding of one's ideas results in bad writing.

Secondly, students should be exposed to writing experiences exhibiting a wide variety of modes of discourse such as poems, essays, plays, stories, etc... contrary to the traditional trends that restrict learners to academic and expository writing. Teachers need to make their learners aware that although different modes require different choices of form, convention and rhetorical style yet they will enhance the writer's abilities to say the same thing in different ways.

The third premise of Judy's experience-based approach is that students should be taught to reach, through their writing, a variety of readership and not just the teacher. Classmates can often supply a variety and a less threatening type of audience.

The fourth premise is that structuring or organization in writing cannot be taught but can be practised. The traditional way of teaching writing as form separable from content is wrong because " ... form grows from content and is inseparable from it" (1980:41). Hence a writer does not just fit content to the form he already knows but he goes through

a long process of looking into his experiences, meditating about them, thinking over and again the reason and the aim for writing taking into consideration the background and interests of his reader before he actually evolves strategies for forming his work.

The fifth premise is that form and correctness will be learnt through the process of exploring the different modes of discourse and during the process of composing for a variety of readership. Judy (1980) emphasizes that correctness should not be sacrificed for the sake of “self-expression” but it is the duty of the teacher to place correctness within a reasonable proportion to content and expression. One has to keep in mind here that this level of proportion will vary depending on whether the learner is a foreign or a native speaker of English. There is no doubt that an L2 learner who is totally new to the foreign code will be needing more instruction on form and correctness.

Through a detailed description of the phases of application of this approach of his, Judy (1980) illustrated that such writing theories can be successfully implemented into a course of teaching writing to learners with different academic backgrounds. The psychological and linguistic maturity of the learners determined which course they had to follow. Judy started his secondary students off with the type of writing that will enable them to explore their private personal experiences and then he gradually guided them towards “public writing” that dealt with a wide range of topics. Underlying this practice was his belief that a learner must be taught how to explore first the dimensions and resources of his “ultimate self” before starting to write. Like that of Moffett (1983), his course adopts the learn-by-doing philosophy because he is convinced that the ‘error correction’ and ‘rule teaching’ methodologies do not teach writing. What should concern the learners is not the quality of their finished piece of writing but whether they matured and grew as individuals during the process. “If growth in the individual takes place, growth in language will naturally follow” (1980:51) and “sophistication in language follows and emerges from sophistication in perceiving and dealing with experience” (Judy 1980: 50).

In a book entitled *Writing Without Teachers* (1973), Elbow offered a guide to all those who wish to learn how to write or improve their writing. His approach is a practical one and his model for teaching writing consists of two stages, the creative which takes place mainly in the first half of the writing cycle, and the critical which occurs mainly in the second half. The former is productive whereas the latter is editorial. Elbow uses two metaphors to describe the two stages of the writing process: ‘growing’ and ‘cooking’. The former means “getting words to evolve through stages” (1973:73) and the latter means “getting material to interact” (1973:73). He identifies the ‘growing’ process as consisting of four stages: Start writing and keep writing; Disorientation and chaos; Emerging centre of gravity; Mopping up or editing (1973:25).

In the opening chapter to his book, Elbow (1973) highlights the importance of free-writing. Free-writing means getting to write without having to stop for any reason especially to correct or to revise. This will help to rid the writer from the habit of editing while writing and at the same time it will enable him to pour down on paper everything that comes to his mind without having to criticize himself or to worry about ‘mistakes’ of spelling, grammar, and punctuation. It is the schooling system that makes learning writers obsessed with errors. Proceeding to write quickly and freely might be threatening, says Elbow (1973), but learners must allow themselves to proceed without a plan because this short-lived loss of control will eventually allow thoughts, feelings, and perceptions to find their own order, coherence, and logic but only if writers force themselves to sort out the chaos and get to a theme. Plans and outlines might help a writer organize his thoughts but only when the thoughts are down on paper. Editing which Elbow defines as “figuring out what you really mean to say, getting it clear in your head, getting it unified, getting it into an organized structure and then getting it into the best words and throwing away the rest” (1973:38) should be left to the very end because concentration on surface level features during the process might interfere with the writer’s thoughts and block his attempts to write.

The “cooking process” is the process whereby contrasting and conflicting materials interact. Elbow explains all the different types of interactions that take place during the process of writing:-

#### Cooking as interaction between people

People often build their own views by adopting somebody else’s, adding to it or contradicting it. “... we each successively climb upon the shoulders of the other’s restructuring, so that at each climbing up, we can see a little further” (1973:50).

#### Cooking as interaction between ideas

The more one encourages contradicting and conflicting ideas, the more new ideas that did not seem possible before will emerge.

#### Cooking as interaction between words and ideas

It makes no difference whether you start first with the “word writing” or the “idea thinking”, what matters is that you should use both and keep on moving back and forth between them.

### Cooking as interaction between metaphors

Comparisons, metaphors and analogies will help writers see some thoughts through others and this may lead to new ideas and new perspectives.

### Cooking as interaction between modes

Writers should feel free to switch from one mode to another such as from prose to poetry or from formal to informal writing or from the personal to the impersonal or which ever way their writing will grow into because that will give different perspectives to their work too.

### Cooking as interaction between you and the symbols on paper

Elbow calls it the interaction between the “you” and the “not-you”. A writer has to learn how to react and interact with his thoughts after he puts them down on paper because that will produce new reactions in him.

After reflecting on the process of writing, Elbow offers some suggestions to enhance his teacher-less class. Writers should learn how to share a piece of writing and how to give useful feedback. Such feedback might be better than that of the teacher’s because whilst the latter offers only criticisms and advice from a sole reader, the former might offer the writer a variety of ways by which his experiences have been received and consequently lead the writer to growth and progress. Reading aloud too might be a successful way of helping the writer sense the effect of his writing on his audience.

While Elbow was concerned with the practicalities of the writing process, Murray (1980) speculated on the theoretical description of the processes’ mental and cognitive aspects. He was the first to reflect on the composing process and his work inspired many educationalists in this area of research. In his essay “Writing as process: how writing finds its own meanings” (1980), he rejects the idea of using the final product to explain the process; “Process can not be inferred from product any more than a pig can be inferred from a sausage” (1980:3).

Murray (1980) identifies three stages that take place during the process of writing: *rehearsing, drafting, and revising*. Each has its own different characteristics yet they do not follow one another in a series of logical steps. They overlap and interact with one another continuously.

“...the writing process is a kinetic activity, a matter of instantaneous motion, action and reaction which is never still. There is no clear line between the stages of rehearsing, drafting, and revising. The most meaning-producing actions may, in fact, take place on the seams between these stages when the tension between them is the greatest” (1980:12).

This view is in opposition with the traditional linear view of writing as think, make an outline and write. During the process of writing and while meaning is being made, Murray identifies four primary interacting forces: *Collecting and Connecting, Writing and Reading* (see Fig. 1.4).

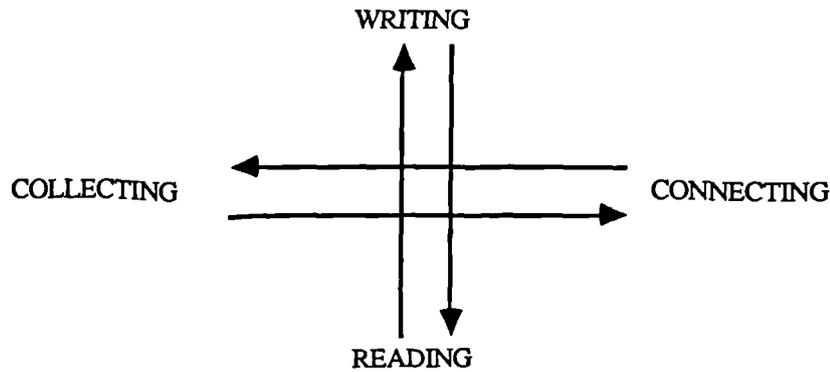


Figure 1.4. The primary forces interacting while writing

(reproduced from Murray 1980:8)

Anyone of these forces joined to any other may start the writing process but once it is started, all these forces begin to interact with one another. We do not collect, then connect, then write and then read. These forces are always acting against one another and it is this action that produces meaning.

By nature, man is an “information-collecting organism”, he collects lots of information which cannot be ordered unless connected. Connecting is a process which enables us to see information which we could not see earlier on, some of which might be contradictory, this in turn impels us to seek more information to support our present information or to construct new meanings. It is due to our need to share our experiences with others that we feel the need to speak or to write. The force acting against writing is reading which serves as a form of criticism to what has been written but the writer needs to read thoroughly only towards the end of the writing process, otherwise his writing will be impaired rather than helped.

In the following diagram, Murray illustrates how the pairs of forces relate to one another:

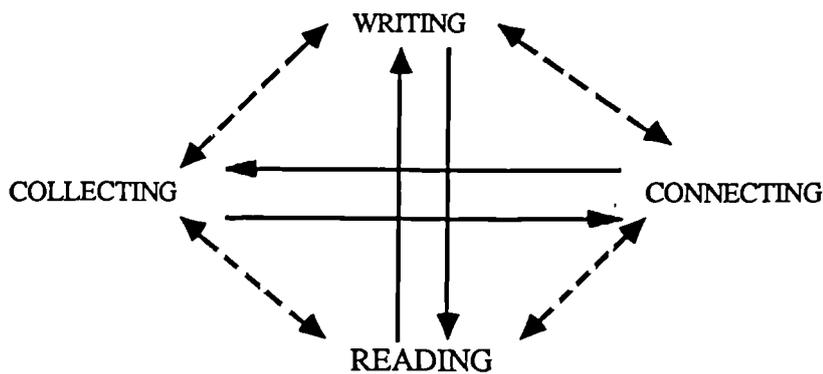


Figure 1.5. A diagram showing how the forces relate to one another

(reproduced from Murray 1980: 10)

These forces do not only work in conjunction with one another, but they also relate to each and every other one of the forces. e.g collecting is an act of reading and writing and so is the force of connecting.

During the stages of rehearsing, drafting and revising, the four forces can be in a state of balance and imbalance. While rehearsing for example, writing and collecting are predominant while the forces of ordering and criticism are held back. Whereas during the revising stage, the opposite takes place and the writer becomes more critical and more orderly. All the forces are wildly out of balance before the actual process of drafting takes place.

In his book *Learning by Teaching* (1982) in an article entitled “The interior view, one writer’s philosophy of composition”, Donald Murray defines the L1 student writer as *an individual who is learning to use language to discover meaning in experience and communicate it* (1982:11). This definition embraces all the characteristics that Murray thought necessary to define an L1 writer:

He is an *individual* who is trying to find through writing the best way to discover what he wants to say and explore his own meanings.

An L1 writer is *learning to use language* and thus he should find out on his own that it is a valuable tool that will enable him produce the final product - his thoughts, but he must be cautioned against thinking that there is a correct or an incorrect usage of language. All he needs to know is that certain structures work while others don’t and that through his own experiences in writing, experimentation on what works best for the meanings intended will take place. “It is usually necessary to use the wrong word to get to the right word and to pass through the awkward construction on the way to the graceful one”

(1982:12). One has to be aware here that with an L2 learner, all is not in the individual because there is the question of cultural acceptability. The L2 learner needs to be made aware that the constructions used sometimes in his L1 might not be acceptable in the L2. Kaplan (1966) has shown that people from different cultures organize their thoughts differently. An L2 learner too may need more guidance in as far as the use of words and structures are concerned for the foreign learner's repertoire of lexis and syntax may be limited and he may need a lot of guidance on possibilities available in the new language.

Writing is an act that helps *to discover meaning in experience*. Through the continuous process of revision, refinement, definition and clarification new meanings emerge and that in turn enriches the student's experiences.

The writer then has to *communicate it*, that is he has to reveal to others what he has been delegating with himself for the purpose of sharing his experiences with other humans.

Murray's approach to teaching L1 writing has had important implications on the composition curriculum. Some of those implications have been delineated in his article "Teaching writing as a process not product" (1982). There should be no text for the writing course but the student's own writing. The learner should be made aware that it is his responsibility and not the teachers' to explore his own world and discover his own meanings using his own language. The teachers' responsibility is to support but not to impose their own ideas and beliefs on the student. Moreover, the teacher should restrain himself from providing the learners with content. The student should be given the chance to find his own subject using his own forms and language. He should also be given the chance to exploit the language that he already knows and to write as many drafts as necessary in order to discover what he wants to say and to arrive at the meaning intended. Students should be offered to write about topics that are of interest to them and they should be encouraged to attempt any form of writing that will help them communicate what they have to say. Bad writing according to Murray is often the result of the inappropriate writing assignments given to learners. It is often the result of the uninteresting topics or topics that learners know little about. The learning writer should be given ample time to explore his topic and to get it finished. Students should be encouraged to read their writing aloud to hear their own voice coming from the page and share it with their classmates and teachers. There is no place for long lectures and large group exercises in Murray's classroom, individual conferencing through which teachers raise questions that will teach the learner how to question their own drafts is the main form of instruction. Mechanics should come at the end and their purpose is to leave nothing standing between the writer and his reader. The teacher must keep in mind that his role is not to judge a piece of writing but to see what other choices the writer could have made, he must also remember that each student is an individual exploring the

writing process in his own way. “There are no rules, no absolutes, just alternatives. What works one time may not another. All writing is experimental” (Murray 1982:17).

In essence, writing to Murray is a “process of discovery through language. It is the process of exploration of what we know and what we feel about what we know through language. It is the process of using language to learn about our world, to evaluate what we learn about our world, to communicate what we learn about our world” (1982:15).

More recently, Murray’s claim that one doesn’t really know what one means until one has said or written it, has been challenged by Steinberg (1980) who thinks that that does not necessarily apply to all types of writing. This, Steinberg (1980) believes is characteristic of creative and not of expository writing. Many writers know exactly what they are thinking about before they actually start writing simply because “The writing process of the proposal or report writer is also different from that of the poet or novelist. The central idea for the annual report from a department chairman, for example, seldom begins with an image, which then exfoliates as the muse allows. Procedures for expository writing are typically much more orderly” (1980:162). Steinberg therefore, cautions teachers against thinking in terms of one model and forcing it upon their learners because some of these models work for some people and for some types of writing but not for all. Moreover, Steinberg thinks that by insisting on students to use a certain model, teachers may be teaching learners how to cheat. A good example of this is when teachers require students to write outlines at the onset of writing, but students hand in essays with outlines that they wrote after they have finished their writing.

Unlike Murray and Elbow, Donald Graves (1983) did not reflect and speculate on the processes of composing but spent most of his time studying the writing behaviours of school children. Through watching the actual composing processes of his students, he portrayed the process ingredients. His importance lies in the fact that he was interested in how to guide the learning writer through each stage of the composing process. His book, *Writing: Teachers and Children at Work* (1983) is addressed to both experienced and inexperienced writing teachers helping with children’s writing. The book does not list what teachers ought to do, rather it documents authentic examples of what actually goes on in the classroom and carries readers through problems to solutions. In the preface to his book, Graves (1983) reckons that the guide lines, techniques, insights and observations he offers can assist teachers working with children as well as those working with students of all ages.

“Conferences” were at the heart of Grave’s (1983) writing program and he devoted a large part of his book explaining about their setting, their length, the principles of helping children speak, and the how’s and why’s of asking various types of questions during conferences. He transcribed a number of authentic conferences and he discussed and

commented on them in detail because he believed that to be able to conduct conferences effectively, the teacher must develop the skill and sensitivity that will enable him to make judgements regarding the child's ability to handle problems and assess the stage at which each learner is in his draft. A writing teacher, according to Graves (1983) should be in control of two crafts, the craft of teaching and the craft of writing. Graves (1983) suggests that early conferences should focus on content, that is, the teacher should direct questions that will enable the learner to discover content. In the second conference, questions to help the learner order his content should be offered. And in the third and last conference, questions that will help learners attend to sentence structure and the mechanics of writing should be given (Fig.1.6).

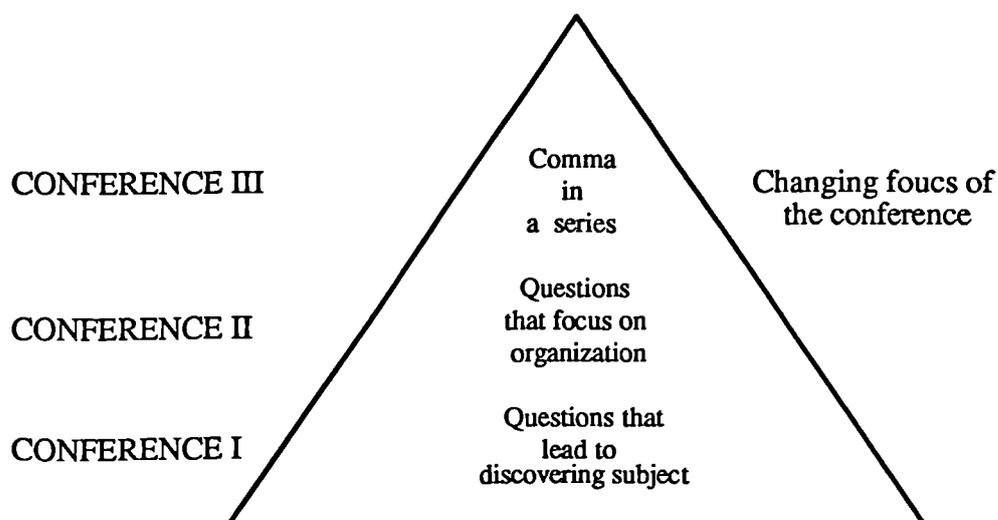


Figure 1.6. The general focus of conferences as they lead to a finished product

(reproduced from Graves 1983:276)

#### 1.1.1.2. The Cognitivists

Proponents of this camp like those of the personal growth/personal expression focused on the writer, however they were more interested in studying the mental processes of composing. Flower and Hayes (1980a) identified the basic mental acts of choices and decisions that writers make as they compose. Through protocol analysis (a technique developed by cognitive psychologists to look closely at the psychological processes, typically those used in problem solving) they attempted to identify and describe the underlying psychological processes involved in composing typically those used in their subject's writing tasks. They perceived any piece of writing as a problem-solving task. This enabled them to derive a cognitive model of expository writing. Figure 1.7 is their schematic representation of the model. This model they believed will serve as a guide to diagnose writing difficulties and to distinguish competent writers from incompetent ones.

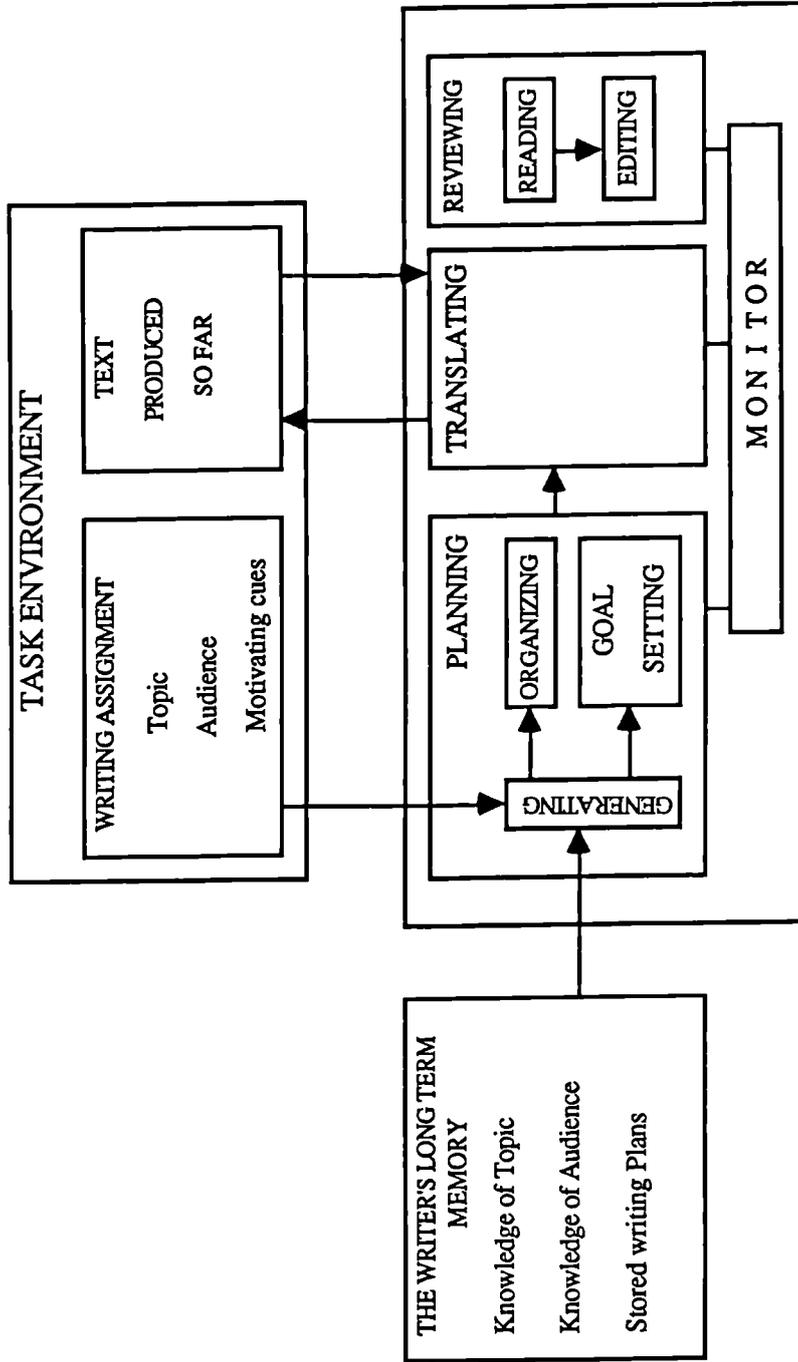


Fig. 1.7. Structure of the writing model .

(reproduced from Flower and Hayes 1980a:11)

In their model, Flower and Hayes divided the writer's world into three elements: the task environment, the writer's long-term memory and the writing process. The task environment included everything that influences the performance of the task such as the rhetorical problem and the written text. The writer's long term memory is the storehouse of topic, audience, writing plans and writing formulas. The writing process consists of three major processes: planning (generating, organizing and goal setting), translating (putting ideas into written form) and reviewing (reading and editing). Their research revealed that writers go through these processes recursively. The importance of this work lies in its contribution towards understanding the mental processes involved in composing. Writing is therefore "the act of dealing with an excessive number of simultaneous demands or constraints" (Flower and Hayes:1980b:33). This view is in contrast with the view of writing as the 'Pre-Write, Write, and Re-Write' model advanced by Rohman (1965). As a writer is composing the act of planning, retrieving information, creating new ideas, producing language, editing language, etc... interact with one another. Thus writing processes are on-going through out a writing task and writing does not begin and end with one draft.

In a more recent work, *Problem solving strategies for writing* (1985,1989), Flower maintains that to be able to write students should first work at identifying the problem. This can be carried out through extensive planning which includes defining the rhetorical problem, placing it in a larger context, making it operational, exploring its parts, generating alternative solutions, and arriving at a well-supported conclusion. Once the problem is identified and planning is carried out, students continue the 'writing process' by translating their plans and thoughts into words and by reviewing their work through revising and editing.

While no one can dispute the importance of Flower and Hayes' research in furthering the understanding of the mental processes involved in writing and their recursiveness, not many teachers of writing would agree that all types of writing are problem solving acts. A lot of the expressive writing carried out by learners for example might not involve problem solving acts.

The contribution of the above mentioned views to understanding writing is that writing is not just the single attempt of recording frozen thoughts in correct grammatical structures, it is a complex and recursive process, a process of developing more and more awareness of the self, a process by which experiences are defined and understood, a process by which the interpretation and articulation of ideas will eventually lead to growth into maturity. The main orientation of the personal growth or personal expressivists is best seen in a quotation taken from Berlin where he says that writing is "an art, a creative act

in which the process-the discovery of the true self-is as important as the product-the self discovered and expressed” (Berlin 1988:484).

The importance of the focus-on-writer approaches to teaching writing cannot be denied. The learner is at the centre of the teaching program and his experiences are of paramount importance and are the focus of all language activities. However, such an approach is not without its drawbacks for it might be inclined to focus mainly on the individual and his creative writing and thus be inadequate as a means of teaching learners styles, genres and techniques for improving their skills in other types of writing such as in the writing of reports , listing instructions, etc...

This brings the discussion of the focus-on-writer approaches to the teaching of writing to an end. In what follows two other approaches identified in the literature will be discussed. The first, focuses on both the writer and the reader, and the second focuses on the context in which the writing is produced.

### 1.1.2. Focus on Writer and Reader

In his development of a theoretical model of written discourse, James Britton’s (1975) objective was to be able to characterize mature writing through tracing the developmental steps that lead writers to maturity. His aim was to trace the stages at which students acquire the ability to move from one type of writing to another.

“We were seeking a system of categories which would overarch the disciplines and which would be refined enough for us to be able to say, for instance, that a piece of writing in geography and a piece of writing in science, irrespective of subject, were alike (or different) with regard to function or audience or context. Given a refined and coherent system of classification it might then be possible to trace the stages at which school students acquire the ability to modify their writing to meet the demands of different situations and thereby move from one kind of writing to another” (1975:9).

Britton rejected the time-honoured text book categories (narrative, descriptive, expository and argumentative) on the grounds that they are prescriptive and do not observe the writing process. Besides, they are not of an equal status and a piece of writing can employ one mode to fulfil the function of another.

Britton (1975) suggests that any piece of writing is influenced by the following features:-

- (a) whether the writer became involved in the task set or performed it perfunctorily;
- (b) his expectations with regard to the reader - usually the teacher (we came to call these set of expectations a writer’s *sense of audience*);
- (c) the teacher’s expectations with regard to the class - as a group and if possible as individuals;

- (d) *function* - that is, the demands that different tasks make upon the writer (a story, a poem, a history essay, a science report, etc.);
- (e) the varying language resources which individual writers bring to their writing (how far, for example, these resources include reading experience);
- (f) whether the writing is a means to some practical end or not.

(reproduced from Britton 1975:10)

In theory, the model that Britton wanted to develop had to be multi-dimensional; it had to be able to place any piece of writing at some point on a series of different scales or dimensions representing the above mentioned variables. But in actual fact Britton (1975) was only capable of developing a two-dimensional model concentrating mainly on the *function* and *audience* categories. In his development of the function categories, he drew heavily on Jakobson's (1960) notion of the hierarchy of speech functions. Britton collected samples of students writing from all curriculum areas and then classified them according to his model of written language functions and writer-reader relationship. He envisaged each piece of writing in his data as representing a stage in a process—the process of mastering different kinds of writing. The fact that in their early writing experiences, children use the written form of their expressive speech led Britton to consider expressive writing as the matrix from which all other types of mature writing develop. Hence, Britton arrived at a model that consists of three main categories placed on a continuum whereby expressive writing is the starting point from which both the poetic and the transactional types of writing develop (figure 1.8). Expressive writing assumes a close relationship with the reader and it is an area where the rules are least demanding. As the learner develops the ability to progress towards the poetic and the transactional types of writing, he learns how to cope with the demands of such tasks and hence he grows into maturity in writing. This point is clarified in figure 1.8. below:

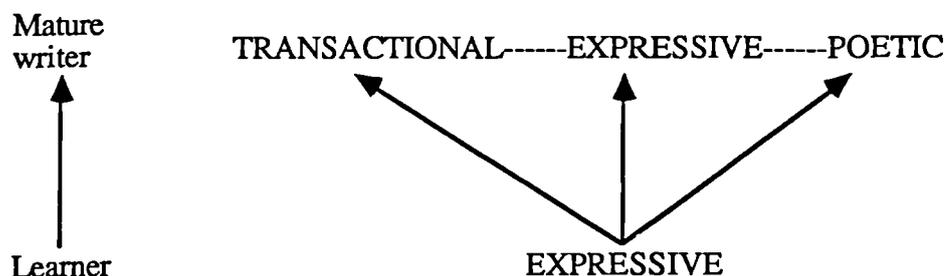


Fig. 1.8. The expressive as a matrix for the development of other forms of writing

(reproduced from Britton et al. 1975:83)

In short, Britton views writing as fulfilling either one of two roles; the role of the participant or the role of the spectator. The difference between these two roles is that the

former views language as a means of informing, persuading, instructing i.e getting something done, whereas the latter views language as something to be enjoyed and appreciated for its own sake. “The more fully an utterance meets the demands of some kind of participation in the world’s affairs, the nearer will it approach the transactional end of the scale: the more fully it satisfies the spectator-role demands, the nearer it will move to the poetic end. The move in both cases is from an intimate to a more public audience” (1975:83). Thus determining the function of a given piece of writing is a matter of distinction between the role of the writer as either a participant or a spectator.

Relating the two roles of writing to the three function categories, Britton says:

“..transactional language is fully developed to meet the demands of participants; poetic language is fully developed to meet the demands of a spectator role; and expressive language is informal or casual, loosely structured language that may serve, in an undeveloped way, either participant or spectator role purposes” (Britton 1978:18).

Figure 1.9 below illustrates the point just made:

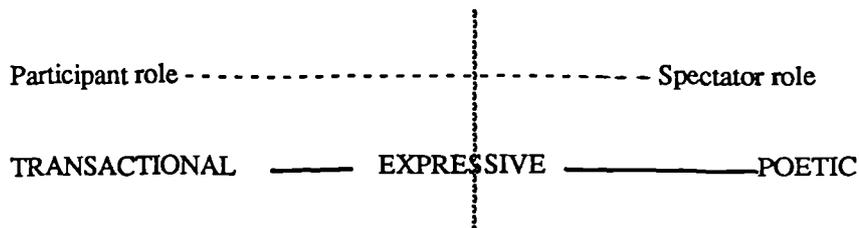


Fig. 1.9. The three main function categories

(reproduced from Britton et al. 1975:81)

Besides the category of *function*, the second category which Britton concentrated upon was the writer’s *sense of audience*. Influenced by Piaget and Moffett, Britton views writing as a process of growth from writing for the self to an unknown audience. His attention was mainly directed towards the teacher-pupil relationship because he saw this category as dominating all school writing. He suggested many sub-categories that could distinguish the different teacher-student relationships ranging from the personal to the impersonal. The latter is the pupil-examiner relationship whereas the former is that of the student writing to the teacher as a trusted adult, which Britton equates to the student writing for oneself i.e. the trusted reader.

The following is a full list of Britton's audience categories:

- 1 *Self*  
Child (or adolescent) to self
  
- 2 *Teacher*  
Child (or adolescent) to trusted adult  
Pupil to teacher, general (teacher-learner dialogue)  
Pupil to teacher, particular relationship  
Pupil to examiner
  
- 3 *Wider audience (known)*  
Expert to known layman  
Child (or adolescent) to peer groups  
Group member to working group (known audience which may include teacher)
  
- 4 *Unknown audience*  
Writer to his readers (or his public)
  
- 5 *Additional categories*  
Virtual named audience  
No discernible audience

(reproduced from Britton 1975:66)

A major finding of Britton's work is the presence of an overriding influence of school demands on students' writing. Britton's examination of pupils' writing in relationship to 'audience' revealed that as students' writing developed, they seemed to have a tendency to write for a wider audience but that tendency was overshadowed by their inclination to write for the teacher as examiner. His examination of students' writing in relationship to 'function' too revealed an inability on the part of the eldest learner to utilize the poetic type of discourse. According to Britton, the predominance of the transactional writing as compared with the poetic one was not unexpected and was due to the influence of the examination system. Bereiter (1980) too pointed out that there is a disappointing message implied in Britton et al's research and that is "as soon as we begin to look beyond syntax, vocabulary, and the like and try to investigate functional aspects of student writing, we begin to find out more about the school system than we find out about children" (Bereiter 1980:76-77) as indeed was one of the findings of our study.

Underlying Britton et al's research is the assumption that writing is intended to be read for what it actually says and not for what it displays of the mastery of the technical skills as is practiced in most writing classes (1975:21). Like Moffett, Britton feels too that the subject is in the learner himself, the implication of which is that the teacher should

concentrate on the learner rather than the subject for there is much more to the act of writing than applying rules; it is the act by which the writer "draws on the whole store of his experience, and his whole social being, so that in the act of writing he imposes his own individuality" (1975:47). Another finding made by Britton that is of particular interest was that when writers wrote perfunctorily they seemed to satisfy only the minimum demands of the task whereas when they wrote to satisfy themselves and to fulfil the requirements of the task, they seemed to be more capable of bringing the full force of their knowledge, attitudes and language experience to their writing. The implications of this is that an awareness on the part of the teacher to the sort of tasks that they set their learners is essential. A point that we shall dwell on in chapter three in our description of the tasks that Damascus University lecturers set for their learners.

### 1.1.3. Focus on Context

The first camp focused on the writer, his self expression and the cognitive processes of composing; the second focused on the writer and the reader. The last focuses on the context and perceives writing as a social act taking place within a specific context and for a specific audience (Coe 1987). This model seems to be the outcome of a fusion between the 'cultural heritage' model, a model that is related to the transmission of culture, and the 'process' oriented models. Proponents of this camp maintain that knowledge, language, and the nature of discourse are determined for the writer by the 'discourse community' to whom the writing is intended. As this approach was first promoted in L2 writing, we shall therefore describe this model in detail in our survey of the ESL/EFL approaches to writing (section 1.2.4).

If one is to compare Kinneavy's (1971) perceptions of writing in the early seventies with that of Johns (1990) in the nineties, one cannot overlook the great developments that have taken place in the field. Both Kinneavy and Johns tried to explain writing in terms of its focus on the different sides of the communication triangle. Kinneavy (1971) explained his theory of discourse in terms of the product or text resulting from stressing either end of the communicative triangle i.e. if the focus is on the *writer* then the aims are expressive writing, if the focus is on the *reader* then the aims are persuasive writing, if the focus is on the *context* then the aims are referential writing and if the focus is on the *text* then the aims are literary writing (Fig. 1.10).

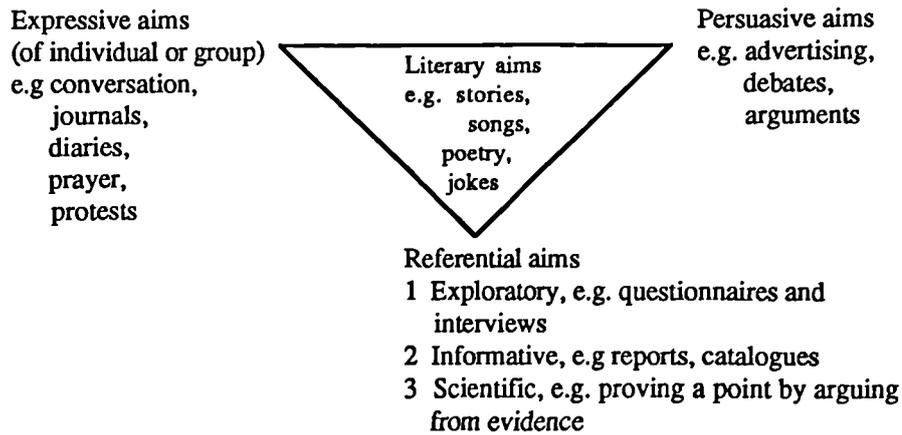


Fig. 1.10

(reproduced from Beard 1984:57)

Johns (1990) too used the communication triangle to address ESL composition theory. However, she saw in the focus on the writer, the process oriented approach to writing, and in the focus on the reader, the interactive approach to writing, and in the focus on the context, the social constructionists view to writing. Each of these approaches however catered for the rest but with varying degrees of emphasis.

The works of the educationalists and researchers reviewed so far is evidence of the large body of beliefs and assumptions emerging that are different from the two earlier product-oriented approaches; the 'skillist' and the 'cultural heritage model'. The impact of those new perceptions and approaches on the development of ESL/EFL writing perceptions and pedagogies will be the centre of our discussion next.

## 1.2. Perceptions and Approaches to the Teaching of ESL/EFL Writing: Past and Present

Silva (1990) posits that between 1945-1990, instruction in ESL/EFL composition underwent a number of developments. These developments were parallel and to a certain extent the outcome of the influence of developments in the teaching of writing to native-speakers. However, Silva goes on to say that the uniqueness of the ESL/EFL context necessitated distinct perspectives, models and practices and that the approaches identified in the literature were each dominant for a certain period of time and then faded away but never disappeared. In this part of the work too, the discussion of the approaches to EFL/ESL writing will be attempted through a consideration of the four basic features of the communicative act: the writer, the reader, the context, and the text. Again the reader must be reminded here that this categorisation has been carried out merely for the sake of clarification and does not mean that approaches to teaching writing always fall into clear cut categories.

### 1.2.1. Focus on Text

#### 1.2.1.1. The Controlled Approach

The audio-lingual era in the teaching of languages was the outcome of the structuralist and behaviourist schools of thought. Such schools equated learning to habit formation processes that are learnt by imitation. During that period the emphasis was on the spoken word. Writing was considered inferior to speech and only a means of reinforcing the language learnt through the other skills of speaking, listening, and reading.

One of the proponents of this approach to writing is Anita Pincas (1963), who maintains that 'free writing' should be avoided because it will encourage the learner to rely on his mother tongue resources and thus end up making mistakes. The best way for teaching the language is to deprive the learner from any chance of using his native language habits and to drill him with exercises from the target language. The learner must not be allowed to "create" in the target language at all. "Since free composition relies on inventiveness, on creativeness, it is in direct opposition to the expressed ideals of scientific habit-forming teaching methods which strive to prevent error from occurring" (1963:185).

She adds that to be able to write well in English a student must not only learn grammar and practice guided reading, he must also learn by imitation how to manipulate the patterns and how to choose variables from within such patterns. It is only after such patterns have been learnt that originality in the art of manipulation and choice making can be achieved. To fulfil this she proposes a method of controlled and organized habit forming exercises which she calls 'multiple substitution'. Through it a learner is led from one stage to the next, from the simple to the more complex, substituting first words in sentences, then sentences in paragraphs and then "literary devices" in whole essays and stories until he can finally write a "free composition".

Another advocate of this approach is Bracy (1971) who was opposed to the large gap between controlled writing and free writing. After intensive drills and exercise in controlled manipulation of sentences and paragraphs the student is turned loose to write on free arbitrary topics armed with no more than paper, pen, and a dictionary. For this end Bracy (1971) suggests ways of restructuring controlled topics to help the learner to gradually learn how to handle a topic rather than leave him face the enormous gap between paragraph manipulation and a broad topic. The latter usually leaves the learner with no choice but to resort to his mother tongue for resources and consequently end up with a translated version. Using the controlled method, the end result will be 'freeness' in composition similar to the already well-defined range of control in writing (Bracy 1971:244).

In the controlled approach therefore, there is no place for what the writer himself has to bring into the text and correctness of structures and form is given priority over content, ideas, creativeness and originality. A controversial approach especially when research has shown that over concern with grammatical form and error-freeness interrupts and impairs the learner's process of composing (Perl:1979; Krashen:1984; Shaughnessy 1977).

#### **1.2.1.2. The Free Expression Approach**

The free expression approach as its name suggests called for the other extreme and rejected any form of control in the teaching of writing. Quantity is given priority over quality and error is of little significance, what is important is the amount of writing a learner produces. To the proponents of this approach, grammatical accuracy and organization will come as a result of the idea writing and thus their insistence on the quality of the task on which the learner is to write.

Erazmus (1960), an advocate of this approach, stresses that rapid writing without concern with revision should be the student's main concern because "with the de-emphasis on errors and stylistics, the student can write freely without the inhibitions often attending composition writing."(1960:30).

In such an approach, the learner is told to write quickly with no attention to error, with no revision, and to leave the difficulties in expression to the teacher. His errors must be pointed out to him and he must be told how to avoid them but he receives no discredit. The teacher should apply more and more pressure on perfection as the learner becomes more and more fluent. Mechanics should be left to a later stage of the course. The subject content should be selected to reflect on the learner's own experiences. The individuality and the personality of the learner is highlighted to encourage the learner to draw upon his own experiences and not to resort to clichés and exaggeration - a view that is similar to Judy's (1980) experiential approach where the learner's storehouse of experiences is of prime importance. This approach is also in line with Elbow's (1973) free-writing; a stage by which the writer is encouraged to put down on paper all thoughts that come to his mind without any concern for anything but the idea. However, Elbow proposes another stage to follow whereby the ideas are sorted out, criticised, revised and edited. Although this approach bears some resemblance to the L1 focus-on-writer approaches, its main drawback remains that it is mainly concerned with the quantity of text that the learner produces.

Brière (1966) carried out a pilot study to test the efficacy of the free writing method promoted by Erazmus (1960). His findings are presented in the following:

“Since so many students at the “intermediate” level of learning to write compositions in a second language are still so pre-occupied with “correctness” that their output in total number of words is negligible and their fluency is greatly curtailed, and since the results achieved in this pilot study were statistically so highly significant (not to mention visually obvious), the experimenter is willing to posit that an emphasis on quantity and fluency will produce far better results than any emphasis on quality (which often serves to limit a student’s fluency rather than encourage it). (Brière 1966:150)

### 1.2.1.3. The Controlled-to-Free Writing Approach

In this approach writing is neither carried out through total control nor through total freedom in expression, alternatively teachers gradually relax control and move with the student towards more and more free writing. Students are given exercises in sentence manipulation first and then in paragraph manipulation. They work on given materials performing strict prescribed operations. This approach, like the controlled one is mainly concerned with accuracy and focuses on teaching surface level features. In what follows are some of the perceptions to writing and its teaching put forward by some of the advocates of this approach.

Wilga Rivers (1968), a prominent figure in the field of ESL teaching, defines writing as referring to a number of activities ranging from the simplest to the most complex: notation, spelling, grammatical structures and composition. She acknowledges that the aim of a writing course is to consolidate learning in listening, comprehension, speaking and reading besides giving the learner “practice in manipulating structural variants, adding the reinforcement of the kinesthetic image to the auditory and visual” (1968:244). She contends that composition writing must be delayed till the first three activities are learnt thoroughly. To her, the teaching of writing involves the teaching of a series of overlapping activities which are: copying, reproduction, recombination, guided writing and composition. Once one is learnt, the next which is more complicated should be introduced. The final stage is the teaching of composition which she defines in the following:

“In its most highly developed form, writing refers to the expression of ideas in a consecutive way, according to the graphic conventions of the language; the ultimate aim of a writer at this stage is to be able to express himself in a polished literary form which requires the utilization of a special vocabulary and certain refinements of structure. This we shall call composition.” (1968:243).

So, Wu Yi (1986:72) thinks that this definition of writing is limiting and limited. The creative aspect of exploring meaning and discovering ideas through composing have no place in such a course and the skill in writing is reduced to the ability to choose possible combinations of words and phrases to fit the ideas into a ‘polished literary form’.

Thirteen years after the publication of the first edition of her book *Teaching Foreign Language Skills*, Rivers (1981) still maintains that writing is a means of reinforcing the language learnt through the other skills. However, she redefines composition as “expressive writing”; writing that is used to convey information or express original ideas in the new language. The approach she adopts for the teaching of writing is in line with the one in her earlier edition focusing mainly on guided types of exercises that move gradually towards freer writing.

Slager (1980) defined ‘composition’ as writing “beyond the sentence level”. He chose to exclude the teaching of the writing activity from his course and he concentrated his efforts on presenting a sequence of guided and controlled exercises to teach learners paragraph and composition writing. This he carried out by presenting his learners with highly controlled assignments that led them gradually to the writing of summaries and writing from models. However, he made it clear that even when students are capable of carrying out all of these exercises successfully, they are still a long way from being able to write a free composition (1980:243).

Slager (1980) therefore acknowledges the fact that the employment of controlled and guided exercises on their own does not enable the learner to write freely on any topic. So (1986) feels that what is lacking in a course of this kind is that students are not given the chance to explore writing for a variety of purposes and audiences and are not shown how to reformulate, revise and edit topics on their own. Both, she thinks, are important to develop the awareness and judgement necessary for effective writing.

Robinett (1978) was aware of the ambiguity of the term ‘writing’. It could either refer to the mechanical act of penmanship or to the very complex process of composing, both of which, she believes, should be included in a course in ESL writing.

“The acquisition of certain mechanical abilities is the first stage in the communicative skill of writing; this includes the ability to put down on paper words, phrases, and sentences, leaving spaces between words, and starting sentences with a capital letter and ending with some mark of punctuation. Once students have mastered these conventions of writing, the next stage comprises learning to write compositions: developing sequences of sentences into paragraphs and arranging these paragraphs into a unified whole” (1978:195).

Robinett, therefore acknowledges that writing is primarily an act of communication, yet she proposes the teaching of writing as the stringing of sentences to form paragraphs and the stringing of paragraphs to form essays. Moffett (1983) rejects approaches to teaching writing that make students think of words, sentences and paragraphs as building blocks that have an independent existence. To him both the message and the code are of an integrative nature and one cannot be taught in isolation from the other (Moffett:1983). Thus the foreign learner can always be helped to acquire grammar and form but that can

be successfully learnt through experiencing meaningful, purposeful writing rather than through practicing empty exercises.

The dissatisfaction with the adequacy of the controlled approach and the teacher's awareness of the ESL needs of writers with regard to producing extended versions of written discourse, led other educationalists to the advancement of an approach that combined traditional approaches with the findings of Kaplan's theory on contrastive rhetoric (Silva:1990). In his theory Kaplan (1967) defined rhetoric as the "method of organizing syntactic units into larger patterns" (1967:15) which he believed to vary among people from different cultures (1966). Rhetoric is not universal and varies from culture to culture and from time to time within the same culture. The thought patterns of English have evolved from an Anglo-European cultural pattern and are dominantly linear and are different from thought patterns of other languages. First language interference was seen therefore to extend beyond sentence level and the best way to help learners was to drill them with exercises that will help them at the rhetorical rather than the syntactic level (Kaplan:1967). For this end it was essential to provide learners with forms within which they could operate (1966:20). In short, this approach perceived writing mainly as "a matter of arrangement, of fitting sentences and paragraphs into prescribed patterns. Learning to write, then, involves becoming skilled in identifying, internalizing, and executing these patterns. The writer fills in a preexisting form with provided or self-generated content" (Silva 1990:14). An example of this method is the teaching of learners the recognition of forms of descriptive, narrative, expository, and argumentative prose, i.e. teaching students ways by which statements are ordered within paragraphs and paragraphs ordered within passages. Arapoff (1968,1972), Kaplan (1970, 1972), and Dehghanpisheh (1979) are all advocates of this approach.

Nancy Arapoff (1972), in an essay entitled "Writing: a thinking process", maintains that there is more to writing than the mere orthographic symbolization of speech. It is the "purposeful selection and organization of experience". It is the clarity of the purpose and the proper organization of facts that determine the effectiveness of a piece of writing. Hence, teaching writing is primarily teaching learners how to select and organize their experiences according to certain purposes and in doing that student writers are being taught how to think more clearly. "The process of learning to write is largely a process of learning to think more clearly" (1972:200). Although Arapoff wants her learners to learn how to think, she does not want them to think in their own language because they will end up translating word for word from their mother tongue and consequently make mistakes. The way about this is to present learners with reading passages, i.e. second hand experiences, and ask them to make use of the facts displayed in them through selection and manipulation. In this way the ultimate objective of writing which is writing accurately with no error will be preserved.

The implications of Arapoff's views on the teaching of ESL/EFL writing is that writing should be taught through a purpose controlled process that proceeds from the simple to the complex. It is the purpose of writing that determines the complexity of the process of selection and organization of information required for a certain task. The focus of the teacher therefore should be on expository prose because that is where the writing purpose is most often explicit.

Similarly, to fill the vacuum between the controlled and the free-approaches to teaching writing, Dehghanpisheh (1979), focused on expository writing too and introduced the "controlled paragraph rhetoric".

The problem with such an approach according to Gorman (1979) is that it does not encourage the learner to write with any degree of spontaneity and neither will it enable him to think more clearly. It is mainly concerned with grammatical accuracy and its main objective like that of the controlled method is correctness in form. This is yet another example of an approach that emphasizes correctness at the expense of meaning expression. However, what is interesting here is that the teaching of the different L2 organizational patterns and modes of discourse is highlighted. An important feature that many writing teachers take for granted.

So far, the teaching of writing to non-native speakers of English have concentrated mainly on the teaching of language and form. Writing is seen as no more than the production of correct surface level features with meaning serving to accomplish that objective. ESL/EFL writing is also perceived as a sub-servient skill that is useful in consolidating the learning that takes place in the other basic skills of reading, listening, and speaking. In short, writing is seen as a marginal part of education. Teachers failed to see the role of writing in the educational process, they failed to see that purposeful, meaningful, problem-solving writing is not part of education but education in itself.

### **1.2.2. Focus on Writer**

This approach was the outcome of the feeling of dissatisfaction with the traditional approaches to teaching writing. The main drawback of those approaches is that they neither fostered thought nor its expression (Silva:1990). Both approaches; the controlled and the controlled-to-free writing ended up concentrating on the linearity and prescriptivism of writing and teaching the formal aspects of writing as an end in itself and thus discouraging creative thinking.

The first to introduce findings of English writing research of the process-oriented approach to ESL writing was Zamel (1976). In her article "Teaching Composition in the ESL Classroom: what we can learn from research in the teaching of English" (1976), she

highlighted the importance of the insights gained from English writing and recommended the treating of L2 writing as a process in the L2 classroom. Ann Raimes (1979) had similar views too and both encouraged colleagues to learn from L1 composition theory, research and practices and to apply such techniques in the L2 classroom.

In a later article "Writing: the process of discovering meaning", Zamel (1982) called into question the traditional approaches to the teaching of ESL writing on the grounds that writers do not always know beforehand what exactly they want to say since it is the process of writing itself, i.e the process of generating, formulating, and refining one's own ideas, which leads to meaning discovery. Thus to be able to write skilfully, competence in the composing process was more important than linguistic competence.

The implications of such an approach to writing are first to impart to learners the fact that they need not know exactly what it is they want to say before actually saying it. Students should be given enough time to write and rewrite because several drafts may be needed. Revision should be emphasized because the writing process is a recursive one. Teacher-student conferences between drafts are important because they serve as a kind of guidance to the areas that need to be attended to. Peer-collaboration will also help learners develop the ability to review their own writing through the eyes of another reader. In order to avoid cognitive overload, students should be taught to concentrate on meaning and content first and to leave surface-editing to the final stages of composing. Form must not be taught as an end in itself but as a means of expressing and discovering meaning.

A year later, Zamel (1983) continued to challenge the notion that ESL writing pedagogy is the sequential completion of a number of separate tasks. She conducted another study on six advanced L2 writers and provided support to the view that L2 writers compose in a way similar to that of L1 writers and that the lack of composing competence in L1 was reflected in students' L2 writing ability. She found that her skilled L2 writers revised more and spent more time on their essays than the unskilled ones. They concerned themselves with ideas first and revised at the discourse level, moved backwards and forwards in their texts and left editing till the end of the writing process; all of which are similar to the L1 writing strategies described by Pianko (1979) and Sommers (1980). The L2 less skilful writers on the other hand spent less time writing and revising, focused on surface level features of writing, and edited from beginning to end. Again these results were similar to the findings made by Sommers (1980) on her L1 unskilled writers. The implications of this study was that students must be given every opportunity to explore their own ideas with reference to topics that are of interest to them. Teacher-student conferences and peer-collaboration should be at the heart of such programs and, most important of all, students should be given the chance to teach teachers what they need to know and hence end up with syllabi that are student centred.

Whereas Zamel carried out both of her studies on ESL skilful writers, Ann Raimés (1985) chose to study unskilled ESL writers. Raimés (1985) found out that even with low proficiency students, writing served for generating language. Raimés' subjects unlike Zamel's (1983), wrote more, exhibited more commitment to the writing task and produced more content. Her conclusion was that L2 writers were different from L1 writers because they were not as inhibited by their attempts to edit their work. The recommendations that Raimés makes to the teaching of writing is to make the best of this generative power; students must be given more of everything; more time; more opportunities to talk, listen, read and write in order to marshal the vocabulary they need in order to make their own background knowledge accessible to them in their L2; more instruction and practice in generating, organizing, and revising ideas; more attention to the rhetorical options available to them; and more emphasis on editing for linguistic form and style. Attention to process is therefore necessary but not sufficient (Raimés 1985). We should neither use the teaching strategies used with native speakers nor should we treat ESL students as learners who need large doses of language instruction, a middle ground is called for (Raimés:1985:250).

Like Zamel and Raimés, Taylor (1981) introduced insights gained from English writing research into ESL writing. Writing is not the mere act of recording pre-sorted, pre-digested ideas but it is a procedure of discovery that not only helps to reflect on thought but facilitates and shapes it too. To support his views, Taylor (1981) cites the works of English writing researchers such as Murray, Perl, Britton and Flower and Hayes. He perceives the process of writing as a bidirectional movement between content and form. "One may therefore view essay writing as a simultaneous two-way street—a dynamic, creative process of give and take between content and written form" (1981:6). Like Zamel, he highlights the importance of revision in the process oriented classroom. But it must not be confused with editing or proof reading; teaching learners to revise is teaching them to "write and re-write, refine and recast rough ideas and sketchy drafts into a polished essay. This approach more closely reflects what we actually do when we write." (1981:5).

The value of the above mentioned studies and others carried out on the L2 writing process was to demonstrate that both ESL/EFL and native English writers experience the recursive nature of the writing process. Such studies also served in showing that a lack of competence in writing is often due to a lack of competence in the composing rather than the linguistic skills of the writer (Zamel 1982; Raimés 1985).

In the above described focus-on-writer approach to teaching writing, the learning of how to write became the developing of an efficient and effective composing process. The final product on the other hand became "a secondary, derivative concern, whose form is

a function of its content and purpose” (Silva 1990:16). Such an approach to writing have been well received by ESL/EFL composition experts, but not without some criticism especially from educationalists with English for academic purposes orientation. Critics of this approach argue that the process approach does not specify a particular context of writing and leave it all up to the writer to identify and appropriately address the task, situation, discourse community, and sociocultural setting in which he is involved. Proponents of the English for academic purposes approach require that there be a shift in focus from the writer to the reader or to the academic discourse community. Reid (1984a,b) argued that the process oriented approach to writing does not take into consideration variations in writing processes resulting from the difference in individuals, writing tasks, and situations; the development of schemata for academic discourse; language proficiency; level of cognitive development; and insights from the study of contrastive rhetoric. Horowitz (1986a) too feels that the process approach does not create a classroom situation that bears resemblance to situations in which student’s writing is usually exercised and gives students false impressions as to how university writing is evaluated. It ignores important types of academic writing such as exam essays. Moreover, in such academic contexts the process’ approach two most important tenets “content determines form” and “good writing is involved writing” often do not hold true. Horowitz (1986a) asserts that this approach overemphasises the individual’s psychological functioning and neglects the sociocultural context of the academic world. In short the dissatisfaction of such academics with the process approach led to the development of an alternative approach known in ESL/EFL as the ‘English for academic purposes’. But first and before a description of this context-oriented approach to writing is given, a description of a lesser popular approach to writing known sometimes as the ‘interactive approach’ will be presented. This approach focuses on the writer and the reader.

### **1.2.3. Focus on Writer and Reader**

In this approach, written discourse is seen as an interactive process of negotiation between the writer as writer and the writer as reader. This is similar to Taylor’s (1981) view of writing as a bi-directional movement between content and form. Widdowson (1983), a proponent of this approach, maintains that it is the absence of the audience and the lack of immediate reaction which demands that the writer enacts both roles. Since there is no possibility of immediate reaction the writer has to anticipate what effect his message is likely to have on his reader and provide for any possible misunderstanding arising from any lack of shared knowledge. The writer has to “continually shift his function from initiator to recipient, from ‘speaker’ as it were to ‘hearer’, enacting the interaction by playing the role of each participant”. Widdowson (1983:40) cites some examples to clarify his point, of which the following is one:

The Greek revolution deserves its fame. It is unique in the annals of mankind. What makes it unique is precisely the directed efforts, the continued and systematic modifications of the schematic of conceptual art, till making was replaced by the matching of reality through the new skill of mimesis.

This can be derived from the following discourse:

*The Greek revolution deserves its fame.*

Why?

*It is unique in the annals of mankind.*

In what way unique?

*What makes it unique is precisely the directed efforts, the continued and systematic modifications of the schematic of conceptual art, till making was replaced by the matching of reality through the new skill of mimesis.*

(reproduced from Widdowson 1983:40)

#### **1.2.4. Focus on Context**

This approach is what Silva (1990) identifies as the 'English for academic purposes'. At the heart of this approach are academic discourse genres and academic writing tasks which aim at socializing the learner into the academic context and ensuring that he operates within the range of acceptable writing behaviours that are dictated by the academic community (Horowitz:1986b). The implications of this on the writing classroom are to recreate the conditions under which actual university writing tasks take place and examine and analyze academic discourse formats and writing task specifications; select and study source materials that are appropriate for a given topic; evaluate, and organize relevant data from these sources; and present such data in acceptable academic English form (Silva:1990).

John Swales (1990) in a book entitled *Genre Analysis* maintains that it was the failure of textual analysis to explain why genre texts acquired certain features that led him to the promotion of such an approach. Swales (1990) thinks that a genre-based approach will facilitate better understanding of academic discourse outside EFL/ESL/L1 classrooms and in turn influence the shape and the purpose of language learning and development activities within them. He demonstrates the value of such an approach through developing and making use of three key concepts: *genre*, *discourse community*, and *language-learning task*. He defines genre in the following:

“A genre comprises a class of communicative events, the members of which share some set of communicative purposes. These purposes are recognized by the expert members of the parent discourse community, and thereby constitute the rationale for the genre. This rationale shapes the schematic structure of the discourse and influences and constrains choice of content and style. Communicative purpose is both a privileged criterion and one that operates to keep the scope of a genre as here conceived

narrowly focused on comparable rhetorical action. In addition to purpose, exemplars of a genre exhibit various patterns of similarity in terms of structure, style, content and intended audience. If all high probability expectations are realized, the exemplar will be viewed as prototypical by the parent discourse community”(1990:58).

John Swales (1990) defined discourse communities as the sociocultural networks working towards a set of common goals and possessing familiarity with particular genres used for the communicative furtherance of those goals. Thus genres do not belong to individuals but are properties of discourse communities. Genres themselves consist of communicative events that possess features of stability, name recognition, etc... The genre-type communicative events consist of texts plus encoding and decoding procedures which can be viewed as tasks. Acquisition of genre skills depends on two types of knowledge, knowledge of the world (content schemata) and knowledge of prior texts (formal schemata) besides the experience with the appropriate tasks. Thus the teaching of genre skills is based on the development of acquisition-promoting text-task activities (Swales 1990:10). What binds all of the three key elements is the communicative purpose. “It is communicative purpose that drives the *language* activities of the discourse community; it is communicative purpose that is the prototypical criterion for genre identity, and it is communicative purpose that operates as the primary determinant of task” (1990:10).

Students go wrong when they think that genre-communities are mono dimensional. Swales (1990) is aware that a genre-based approach might encourage the unthinking application of formulas. He cautions against associating genres with disreputably formulaic ways of constructing particular texts in what he calls writing by numbers. This according to him belittles genre into a mere mechanism and excludes matters of choice offered in a language. Through a brief review of how genres are perceived in four different disciplines John Swales (1990) found that there were indications of something of a common stance. With this Swales demonstrated that it is indeed possible to use genres for teaching purposes without having to reduce them into courses of prescriptivism or formalism and without having to deny learners the opportunities of reflecting upon rhetorical and linguistic choices (1990:45).

The final part of Swales book offers some pedagogical activities concerned primarily with helping student writers explore, reflect upon and better express the features of their particular discourse communities. For that end Swales proposes that in the classroom students should be first exposed to the standard way of performing a certain genre and only when the teacher makes sure that learners have understood and could operate the standard and safe way will he let them carry out a certain genre freely in the way that suits their individual intellectual character or their perceptions of the particular writing situation.

In brief, this approach views writing as the production of prose that will be acceptable at the academic institute at which a learner is studying i.e the act of becoming socialized to the academic community by finding out what is expected and trying to approximate it. The *writer* in this approach is seen as someone oriented towards academic success and meeting certain standards and requirements. The *reader* on the other hand is a member of the academic community with a well developed schemata for academic discourse and clear and stable views of what is appropriate. The *text* is a conventional response to a particular task type that falls into a recognizable genre and the *context* is the academic community and the typical tasks associated with it. This approach, however, has been criticized for its emphasis on writing in various disciplines especially scientific and technical fields. Spack (1988) suggests that a humanities-based approach with primary focus on general principles of inquiry and rhetoric will be more viable and appropriate.

"Students will mature as writers as they receive invaluable input from numerous classroom experiences and from teachers who are conversant in other disciplines. To initiate students into the academic discourse community, we do not have to change our orientation completely, assign tasks we ourselves cannot master, or limit our assignments to prescribed rule-governed tasks. We can instead draw on our own knowledge and abilities as we strengthen and expand the knowledge and abilities of our students." (Spack 1988:47)

So far, a review of the main pedagogical approaches to the teaching of ESL/EFL writing has been presented. In the following concluding bit, the researcher's perceptions of what writing really involves and the best way to teach it in an EFL context will be presented.

### 1.3. Conclusion

Each of the different approaches surveyed in the literature focused on one or more of the different aspects of the communicative act, however no single approach can be said to be sufficient in itself to account for how writing can be best taught. Ann Raimes (1978:vii) maintains that the diversity of approaches available in the literature on writing are evidence of the complexity of the act of writing. Flower and Hayes' expression of the difficulty of the act of writing is evident in the following:

"It is no wonder that many find writing difficult. It is the very nature of the beast to impose a large set of converging but potentially contradictory constraints on the writer. Furthermore, to be efficient the writer should attend to all of these constraints at once; ..... Unfortunately, this ideal rarely occurs because of the limited number of items our short-term memory or conscious attention can handle" (Flower and Hayes 1980b:40).

To illustrate the complexity of the process of writing Frederiksen and Dominic (1981) presented an account of all the influences or constraints which act upon the process. Their example of how only to write the topic sentence of a paragraph, writers must select the meanings that they want to communicate and the language forms in which they want

to express what they want to communicate. In the process of doing so, writers are influenced by a number of constraints: cognitive, linguistic, communicative, contextual, and textual (see Fig. 1.11). The first is the influence of the writer's knowledge of the particular topic, the second is the influence of the writer's knowledge of the particular language forms, the third is the influence of the writer's assumptions of how much the reader knows, the fourth is the influence of the writer's understanding of the context that establishes the function of his/her writing, and the fifth is the influence of prior written text on what is to be written next. This is merely a description of the constraints on the L1 writer; one has to bear in mind that the L2 writer has the added linguistic constraints of the new L2 code and the cultural differences in the structure and organization of the writing of the new discourse community he will be addressing.

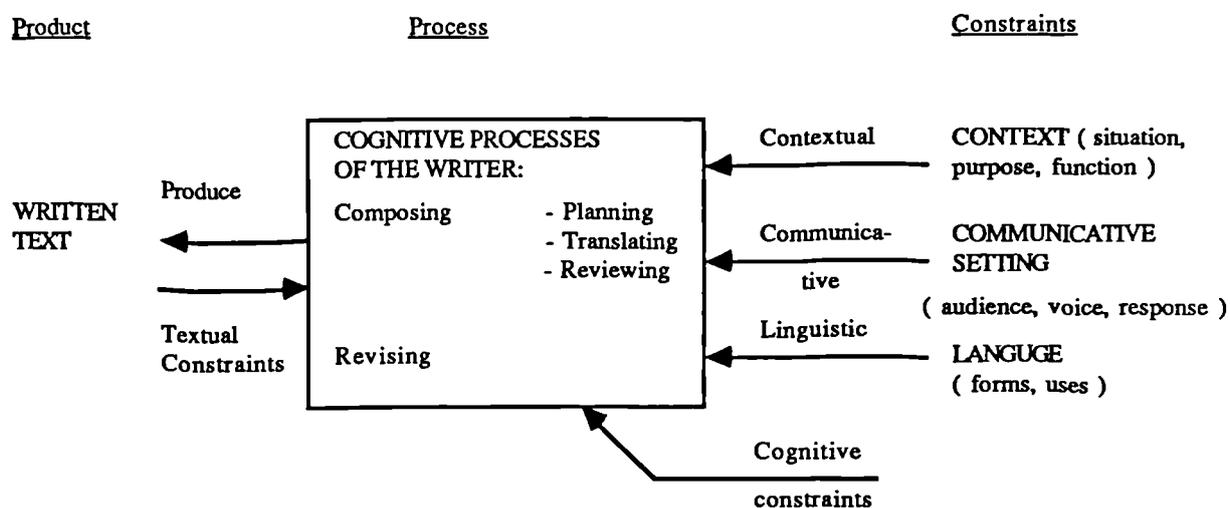


Fig. 1.11. Frederiksen and Dominic's constraints on the act of writing

(reproduced from Frederiksen and Dominic's 1981:19)

For communicative ESL writing to be produced, Ann Raimes (1983a) maintains that all the features of writing which are: *grammar, syntax, mechanics, organization, word choice, content, the writer's process, audience and purpose* need to be attended to (Fig. 1.12). Different teachers have stressed different features depending on their own perceptions of how writing can be best learnt (Raimes:1983a). However, one has to be aware that all of these aspects are interrelated and can hardly be separated.

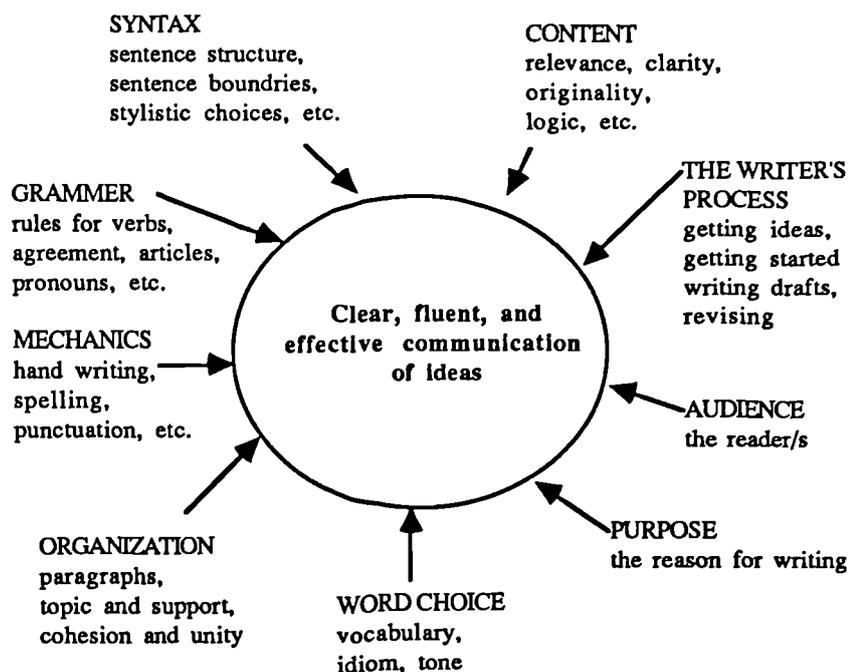


Fig. 1.12. Producing a piece of writing

(reproduced from Raimes 1983a:6)

The review of literature carried out in this chapter enabled the researcher to formulate broader perceptions and understandings of the nature of writing and how it can be taught in an EFL context. The approach upheld in this work is based on an amalgam of the focus-on-writer and the focus-on-context approaches to teaching writing. The former focuses on the individual writer and his experiences, the latter focuses on acquainting the writer with what is acceptable to the discourse community he will be addressing. With such an eclectic approach, all the basic elements of the communication triangle: the writer, the reader, the text, and the context will be catered for. The writer-based approach will cater for the individual writer, the context-based approach will cater for the reader, the context, and the text. In an L1 context, a writer-based approach to writing on its own might be sufficient because an L1 writer may use writing just to discover his own meanings whereas in an L2 context where writing is basically an act of communicating meanings to a specific discourse community in a specific academic institute, the importance of a context-based approach to writing cannot be ignored.

In short, the approach to writing embodied in this work perceives writing as the following:

firstly, writing is not a part of education but education in itself. According to Raimes (1983b) teaching ESL writing is not only teaching learners about the new code and about the skill of writing but also about TSL: thinking in a second language. Writing does not only enable a writer to communicate his own meaning but it also enables him through

exploring a certain topic to develop a better understanding of that topic and in consequence experience more growth and understanding of himself and the world he is living in. Writing is a process of discovery through language. It enables a writer to discover what he knows and what he feels about what he knows and thus learn more about his world, evaluate and communicate it (Murray:1982). According to Gage (1986) writing like thinking can be at its best when used in search for a solution of some problem. Writing has some advantages over thinking too because “Writing is thinking-made-tangible, thinking that can be examined because it is 'on the page' and not all 'in the head' invisibly floating around. Writing is thinking that can be stopped and tinkered with. It is a way of making thought hold still long enough to examine its structures, its possibilities, its flaws” (Gage:1986:24). Through the process of finding the exact words to express what we mean we come to find what we exactly think. Through the process of finding and structuring ideas we search for the best ways to express them too. Writing is not only the discovery of *what* you think but *why* you think it too (Gage:1986:25). Unlike thinking, writing externalizes to a real audience what is private and with this it creates a responsibility that thinking often neglects. Teaching writing is therefore teaching learners not only the skill of writing but also how to become better and more responsible thinkers and critics.

Secondly, writing is a process of evolving meaning which does not necessarily proceed in a linear manner of think, plan and write. It is a recursive process whereby a number of activities; pre-writing, writing, revising, rewriting, and editing take place, however they all help to make meaning clearer and eventually lead to meaning discovery.

Thirdly, teaching writing is the act of socialising learners with what is expected from them by the discourse communities they are addressing and teaching them how to produce prose that is acceptable to the academic institute at which they are studying.

Teaching writing therefore as a process produced in a specific context for a specific discourse community implies that a number of developments need to be introduced to the traditional ESL/EFL writing classroom.

In essence, teaching writing means helping learners experience the dynamic process of composing. In such a classroom, learners will be familiarized with each and every stage of the composing process: gathering information, generating meaning, pre-writing, writing, revising, re-writing and editing. Learners will also be shown how to cope with the recursiveness and frustrations of the writing process. Teaching writing also means guiding learners through the various phases of the process and offering them feedback whenever needed. This in turn will teach them how to question their own drafts. In such a classroom, writing will be carried out to explore and exploit different language structures and forms and different meanings however, surface level editing will be left till

the end of writing so as not to interrupt the flow of ideas. The writing course therefore suggested here implies that teachers and learners shift their attention from the final 'product' to the 'process' and the 'context' of writing.

The approach upheld here adopts the learn-by-doing philosophy. It replaces the traditional chain-link way of teaching writing as the writing of words, then sentences, then paragraphs with discourse level writing. It does not ask learners to fit content into certain required forms, but gives learners the opportunity to look into themselves and into their experiences and to gather materials from various sources to help them arrive at meanings of their own. In such an approach learners will be exposed to the various ways of shaping their materials in forms that are acceptable to the discourse community they are addressing.

Bad writing is often the result of inappropriate assignments, thus topics given should be of interest to the writer because only when writers write to fulfil the requirements of the task will they bring in the full force of their knowledge and experience. To this end simulated writing tasks that resemble real life writing and writing that is integrated with other disciplines will provide more meaningful, purposeful, and interesting tasks for learners. Such type of tasks will also help students become motivated enough to want to write more and to choose to write more frequently which in turn will give them more confidence that they can write.

In such a classroom, learners will be exposed to various purposes of writing and a wide range of discourse. They will be given the opportunity to write for a variety of readership and to find out for themselves how the process of writing varies with writing for different readership and different purposes. The more exposure to different types of writing and to different readership, the more confidence students will develop towards new writing experiences.

Reading is an essential component of such a writing class. It provides examples of how other writers write. It also help learners internalize a lot of lexis, grammatical structures, and discourse patterns while accumulating more knowledge and ideas, all of which are essential for writing to take place.

Since the context of learning here is an EFL one, students will need to be familiarized with the cultural differences between the L1 and L2 discourse levels and thus need to work with a cultural and discourse repertoire much broader than those developed by students from "standard English" cultures (Bizzell 1987). The teacher's role will be to familiarize his learners with the academic institute in question so that they can produce prose that is acceptable to such discourse communities.

Last but not least, the approach upheld here aims at encouraging learners to take on more and more responsibilities of their own learning and that of their peers so that all learners will be writing together in a cooperative, supportive writing community.

The insights gained through the review presented in this chapter and through the researcher's limited experience as an EFL teacher will serve as the theoretical background against which the courses in writing taught at Damascus University will be evaluated in chapters two and three.

## CHAPTER TWO

### The Educational Context

Having reviewed the recent schools of thought influencing L1 and L2 writing pedagogies and the old and the new approaches to the teaching of writing to ESL/EFL learners, and having formed the theoretical background necessary for our understanding of what writing may involve and how it can be taught, in this chapter we will attempt to describe and evaluate how composition writing is being perceived and taught at Damascus University, and the effects that that is having on the students' perceptions and learning of how to write. The following chapter will concentrate on studying the criteria that determine the teachers' setting of exam tasks and their evaluation and the influence of that on the learner's perceptions of writing. Chapters four and five will investigate the final product produced under the influence of the context described in chapters two and three.

#### 2.1. Education in Syria

Before describing the context in which the teaching of writing takes place at Damascus University, some background information of the setting against which this study takes place will be given.

Syria is a developing country and the problems it faces are similar to those faced by other developing countries. The drawbacks at the University level are those experienced at other levels of education which are mainly the over-large classes, the inadequate facilities, and the overemphasis on the reproduction of knowledge and examination passing (Hopwood:1988). The Syrian society sees in education a means of advancement in life (Hopwood:1988). Thus many people young and mature enrol as full time students<sup>1</sup>, however not all (especially male students) are capable of attending simply because many have to carry out other jobs to sustain themselves.

Education; primary, secondary and tertiary is considered a right for every individual and is provided for by the state. The government's policy is that universities should accept annually all applicants that have passed their Baccalaureate exams and satisfied the entrance requirements. In spite of the increase in the number of university entrants year after year, the Syrian government has been unwilling to disappoint students by restricting the number of university entrants. The open door policy and free tuition have therefore led to mass higher education and the pressure on Universities have exceeded most of the

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<sup>1</sup> There is no part-time tuition as such at any of the Syrian Universities.

expected projections (Hopwood:1988). This however, have led to untenable situations in which hundreds of students attempt to attend lectures where little teaching can take place and semi-educated graduates are produced (Hopwood:1988). Students at graduation complain that they are not competent in the language and that all that they have learnt is how to pass exams (Hopwood:1988). Damascus University, being the capital's University situated in one of the most densely populated areas in Syria provides for a wider variety of courses and thus finds itself facing the problem of large classes more than any of the other Syrian Universities. The department of English language and literature at Damascus University is one of the largest departments in the University. The low marks required for entering this department plus the general public's awareness of the importance of the English language in our modern life are two factors that contribute to the massive numbers of students in this department. Tables 2.1 and 2.2 show the number of students in each year between 1985-1988 and 1986-1990 respectively. Table 2.3 shows the number and percentage of passing students in year one, two, three and four of the academic year 1988-1989.

Year	Date	Total No. of Students
First year	1984-1985	2430
Second year	1985-1986	1870
Third year	1986-1987	1660
Fourth year	1987-1988	1564

Table 2.1. Number of students at the department of English language and literature in years one, two, three, and four between the years 1985-1988

Year	Date	Total No. of Students
First year	1986-1987	3200
Second year	1987-1988	1900
Third year	1988-1989	1700
Fourth year	1989-1990	1680

Table 2.2. Number of students at the department of English language and literature in years one, two, three, and four between the years 1986-1990

Year 1988-1989	Total No. of Students	No. of Passing Students	Percentages of Passing Students
First year	2800	800	28.57
Second year	1850	800	43.24
Third year	1650	470	28.48
Fourth year	1600	400	25.00
Total	7900	2470	31.26

Table 2.3. Number of students in each year of the academic year 1988-1989 with the percentages of the passing students in each of the four years

As is evidence in Table 2.3 the percentage of students who pass each year is quite low and so the number of students in each year increases even if the number of entrants is not that high. The problem in the large number of students has no doubt led to a shortage in staff which in turn resulted in even more teacher-centred mediums of instruction with little or no student-teacher relationship. Besides, students have extra problems to face with the lack of resources at the University. The library is out-dated and the number of books available for consultation is very limited. Other facilities like language labs, videos, over-head projectors, and microphones are all luxuries that the University cannot afford.

## 2.2. The Place of Foreign Languages in Syrian Education

The Arabic language is the medium of instruction in primary, middle, and secondary Syrian schools. It is only after completing the primary level that a foreign language (which could be either English or French) is offered to learners. During a period of six years of middle and secondary education learners are subjected to foreign language instruction at a rate of three hours a week. The academic year usually extends between 25-30 weeks.

## 2.3. The Department of English Language and Literature at Damascus University

One of the major requirements for enrolling at a Syrian University is the successful completion of the Baccalaureate exams which takes place at the end of the final year in secondary education. However, besides holding the Baccalaureate degree (in the literary

section) an average of no less than 60% in the subject of English is a requirement when applying for a place at the department of English language and Literature.

The department offers a variety of compulsory courses spread across a period of four years at the end of which students are granted a degree of Licence in the English language and its literature. A detailed description of the courses offered in each year and the number of instruction hours assigned to each are given in appendix A. The great majority of entrants and graduates are females. However, due to socio-economic reasons only a small number of the female graduates will make use of the degree after they have graduated. A large number of graduates go into teaching English at middle and secondary schools. Others undertake various administrative jobs in ministries, embassies, and private firms to work as translators or public relations officers. To graduate students are expected to obtain passing marks in each of the courses on offer. Each year is divided into two semesters in each of which six compulsory courses are given and a student can proceed from one year to the next if s/he fails no more than four courses.

#### **2.4. The Context of Teaching Writing at Damascus University**

To investigate the problems that students face when they write and to assess the usefulness of the writing course taught at Damascus University, a longitudinal study of the final written products produced by learners across four years was attempted. However, it was soon discovered that looking at the product disregarding the task and the context in which it has been produced would leave a lot of the findings unexplained as is made clear by Kinmont (1990) in the following:

“There are clear benefits to be gained from the systematic analysis of actual scripts but there are now equally clear indications that the context in which writing takes place, the role the teacher adopts in relation to it, the purpose of the writing and the audience for whom it is intended, are all important factors in the undertaking, and will have a significant bearing on the finished product” (Kinmont 1990:8).

Wilkinson et al. (1980), in a study of the development of children’s writing concluded too that there are strong grounds for believing that the nature of the writing task, and the context for writing, exert a considerable influence on the outcome. Similarly the presence of an overriding influence of school demands on students’ writing was one of the major findings of Britton et al’s (1975) study of the development in children’s writing described earlier in chapter one (see page 31).

##### **2.4.1. The Research Strategy**

Studying the product therefore on its own without a consideration of the context in which it has been produced will be lacking because a lot of the constraints on writing may have

been caused by certain classroom practices and tasks. For example, in a classroom where the focus of the teacher is centred around linguistic criteria, it is only natural to find that the students' focus in writing is centred on the production of correct linguistic forms.

By investigating the context, our aim is to form a clear picture of how writing is actually taught at the University from two perspectives, that of the student and that of the teacher. As it was not possible for us to attend lectures, we had to resort to other means such as interviewing students and teachers and studying course books, notes and written lectures. The researcher's familiarity with the department and with many of the students, instructors<sup>2</sup> and lecturers made easier her access to the required information. The sources of such information and the sort of questions that were asked at the interviews were the following:

**1) Interviews with students from each of the four years:**

These were carried out informally in the form of casual chats. These were the easiest to carry out because students were more than willing to help especially when they knew that the purpose of the research was to improve on the approach used in the teaching of writing at the University.

Questions addressed to the students:

Why is there a course in writing at the University?

Do you find it useful? What do you think of the course in general?

Is there a set textbook for the course? Do you use it?

How do you find the textbook?

How does the instructor/lecturer go about teaching you writing in detail?

How often do you write?

Do you get any feedback from the teacher?

How often do you speak in the classroom?

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<sup>2</sup> Instructors are young graduates who have been offered a grant from the Ministry of Higher Education to do a PhD abroad, however while waiting to go abroad they are requested to work as assistant lecturers at the University.

## **2) Student's notes that have been taken during lectures**

These were not easy to get for two reasons: many students could not manage note taking (especially in year one) and students often found that they did not need to take notes because the lecturer was reading from the book (the third and fourth year lecturers). The easiest notes to get were those of the second year because the lecturer wrote everything he said on the board word by word and expected his learners to copy down everything. Even those who could not attend copied other students' notes.

## **3) Interviews with instructors:**

Again, this was carried out rather informally in the instructors' common room. Instructors were very helpful and interviews with them were carried out in the form of friendly chats. Their personal knowledge of the researcher and the topic of research made this even easier. Unlike the lecturers, they were always available in the department and some of them even offered their lecture notes to be studied by us. This helped us to form a clearer picture of what actually goes on in the classroom.

### Questions addressed to the instructors:

Can you please describe to us what goes on in your classroom.

What type of tasks do you assign your learners?

How often do you ask the students to write?

## **4) Interviews with lecturers from each of the four years:**

Making appointments to see lecturers was the most difficult of these interviews. They were rarely present in the department because it was summer time and they did not have to do any lecturing. Even when we managed to make appointments with them after a long series of attempts, the meetings were very formal and brief taking place in corridors, offices, and various places outside the University. The fact that what they said was written down was a source of discomfort for some. They were cautious of what they were telling us and their answers were very short. None was prepared to give away their lecture notes or their marking schemes.

### Questions addressed to the lecturers:

What is your objective from teaching the course?

How do you go about fulfilling that objective in detail?

Do you use any textbook? If yes, which?

What determined your choice of a specific textbook (if there is any)?

What type of tasks do you assign your learners?

How often do you ask the students to write?

**5) An interview with the head of the department:**

This was carried out quite formally again. His answers were short and straight to the point. We asked him about the objective of the writing course in general, the syllabi and the course books for each year and course given at the University, the distribution of hours of teaching, the time load of teaching on instructors and lecturers, the policy for marking, and the policy for accepting new students in the department.

**6) The composition text books taught in each year.**

These books were easy to find in the University bookshop.

**7) The researcher's own observations and experiences as an EFL learner, a graduate and an instructor in that same department.**

My own experiences as a student in that department with thousands of students in each year and not enough places in the lecture theatre for us to sit. My experiences of having to make the choice between giving up attending or taking a lecture standing up, my feelings of frustration at times because we did not get the chance to practice writing and even when we practiced it we never got the chance to see it marked. My frustrations when I was given a low mark and not told or shown why. My feelings of assurance at times that my comparatively high level of language proficiency would help me pass. My use of my limited knowledge of the language structures in correcting my fellow classmates' compositions and their appreciation of that. Then my limited experience as an assistant lecturer teaching language at the University, all of which helped me reflect on what actually goes on in the writing classes at Damascus University.

In what follows the details and findings deduced from our interviews and investigations with all the above mentioned subjects and materials (course books and students' and teachers' notes) will be presented. However, before proceeding to present our findings it must be made clear to the reader that the study carried out represents the context of teaching writing at Damascus University only between the years 1985-1990, i.e. the time when data and materials for this research was collected.

## **2.4.2. Findings**

### **2.4.2.1. The Objectives of Teaching a Course in Writing**

The ultimate objective of the four year course at the Department of English Language and Literature at Damascus University is to graduate learners knowledgeable in English

Literature and at the same time capable of communicating both productively and receptively in the foreign language (Personal communication, Head of the department of English Language and Literature at Damascus University, 1990). The writing course is therefore expected to help fulfil this aim.

#### 2.4.2.2. How is Writing Perceived at the University?

At Damascus University writing is a skill that has to be learnt just like any other of the basic skills. When compared with the other skills of reading, listening and speaking it became apparent that it is the only skill that is taught as a separate subject in each of the four years and students get a fair amount of instruction on it. One reason for that is the fact that writing at the University, with the exception of very few oral exams which are gradually being abolished due to the continuous increase in students' numbers, is the only means of assessment in all course topics. At the university there are no courses to help the learner improve his reading abilities, it is assumed that the learners' skills in reading will improve with the enormous amounts of reading of novels, plays and poetry that they have to do in each of the four years (and which most often they fail to do because of the linguistic difficulty of the books chosen). With the exception of lectures in phonetics, pronunciation and intonation, the speaking and listening skills are thought to be learnt during lectures and seminars through listening and interacting with teachers. However, the huge number of students does not make this easy on the learner who rarely gets the chance to speak or to hear when sitting with hundreds of students in massive auditoriums.

In a department whose main concern is to teach literature, there is a general feeling that non-literary topics like composition and grammar are marginal ones. Members of staff at the university view writing as a subsidiary course that will help reinforce the lexical, syntactic and grammatical structures that are being taught through other literary subjects and through the other skills of reading, speaking and listening. According to them writing is neither a content topic nor a topic that will help learners develop intellectually but a tool that will help them show proof of learning because all major university exams have to be carried out in the written form.

Teachers of other content topics at the university view composition teachers as inferior to them because they do not teach content and all that they are responsible for is policing the grammatical correctness of the student's writing (personal communication, first year composition lecturer at Damascus University, 1990).

As for students, writing is a compulsory course that they have to do in each and every year. However, it is a topic that is different from any other. In all other courses the faithful reproduction of the teachers' lectures and the content of the set textbooks will most often guarantee success, because the educational system at Damascus University is

one that equates learning with memorising and cramming information - an approach that does not seem to teach learners much as is expressed by James Britton in the following:

“...learning involves ability to put an idea into your own words. Rote learning, of course, doesn't. Rote learning means you can get high marks or give back what the teacher has given you whether you understand it or not. Credit is given for verbal expressions that don't necessarily involve understanding. Teachers are using writing to test whether a student has learned something rather than using it as a means of hastening that learning” (reported by Britton in Mayher et al 1983:89).

Such systems have encouraged learners to work out the formula and learn it by heart and apply it to the required exercise. In a similar way learners have come to think of writing as a formula in which they can insert ideas (Gage:1986). The interviews that we carried out with students from all four years revealed that they find the composition paper as one of the most difficult papers to pass for the simple reason that there is little that they can cram and reproduce in the exam. It is so difficult for learners to predict what composition might come up in the exam paper too. The best that learners can do is comply with the teacher's guidance on the technical aspects of writing but this may or may not guarantee success. There is no doubt that such a system has influenced the learners' perception of what written composition is. Students have come to view writing as a topic that is separate from learning. A damaging view at a time when research has shown that writing is not only a tool that facilitates learning about how to write but also a tool that facilitates learning in all fields of knowledge, a tool that promotes creative thinking and critical judgement (Gage :1986). “The process of making the material their own- the process of writing- is demonstrably a process of learning” (reported by Britton in Mayher et al 1983:86).

#### **2.4.2.3. The Setting Where the Learning of How to Write Takes Place**

The natural setting where learning to write takes place in all four years at Damascus University is formal, with class-based teaching as opposed to individualized learning. This formality is evident in the arrangement of the desks in the classrooms where all face the teacher. Students sit listening to the teacher with no freedom to move or to speak. The only person to talk during lectures is the teacher and he addresses the class as a whole. The teacher does not interact with individual learners and learners do not interact with one another. When asked by the teacher to carry out a certain task, all learners will be engaged in doing one and the same task at the same time individually and once they finish they have to wait for the teacher's instructions on what to do next. There is no element of self-sufficiency and there is no freedom of choice in what to write, when to write and how to go about doing it.

After describing the department's objectives, perceptions, and setting of the writing class, the next step is to describe what goes on in each of the writing classes across the four years at the University.

### 2.4.3. First Year Composition Teaching

Composition lectures and practical classes for year one are spread over two semesters with an average of 6-8 lectures and practicals per semester. In each year the administration divides the bulk of students into a number of sections. This is carried out to make it easier on lecturers and instructors to cope with the huge numbers of students in each year. Sizes of sections vary for lectures and practicals. Thus the same student might be in section 3 for lectures and in section 6 for practicals. The reason for this variation in size of classes is due to the fact that the department would like students to get more attention and practice during practicals. This division of students into sections is done alphabetically and has nothing to do with the abilities of the learners. Practical classes are headed by instructors and are less crowded. There could be around 200 students per section. Instructors are often young postgraduate students at the department and that is often an advantage because students feel more at ease and less inhibited from them. Lectures on the other hand are much bigger in size. There can be over 500 students in one lecture. The lectures are a series of theoretical instruction with minimal interaction between the lecturer and the students. Lecturers are usually experienced people carrying high degrees in postgraduate studies from either a British or an American University.

When practical classes were first introduced at the University, their objectives were first the practical application of the main lectures' theoretical instruction and second the *continuous assessment of learners by keeping record of their attendance and contributions* to such classes. At that time, the number of University entrants was much less but nowadays, with the huge number of students in each year, it seems impossible to keep record of those who attend; besides it may not seem fair to give extra marks to those who contribute in such classes because others might have wanted to but never got the chance or they were inhibited by the overwhelming audience.

To pass the first year composition paper, the student is required to write an exam composition and an out of class assessed paper at the end of each semester. The latter is known at the university as the seminar paper and is assigned 20 marks out of 100. The seminar paper which is written outside the classroom is rarely done by the learner himself. He is usually helped by either a relative or a friend or by using some other student's previous composition paper. The instructor offers a number of topics from which the student can choose. On the other hand, the composition examination that students have to sit for at the end of each semester is assigned 80 marks, 60 of which go to composition writing and the remaining 20 go to a question from the set textbook on

materials given during the semester. In order to pass this course or any other students must get no less than 49 marks out of the 100 assigned for both the practical and the exam paper.

#### **2.4.3.1. The Objective of the First Year Lecturer**

According to the first year lecturer, the objective of teaching composition to first year students is to help them learn how to write a grammatically correct paragraph by the end of the first semester and a grammatically correct essay by the end of the second (personal communication, first year lecturer at Damascus University, 1990).

#### **2.4.3.2. The Linguistic and Composing Proficiency of the Department's Entrants**

The reason for the emphasis on the grammatical aspect of writing is the fact that when students join the University there is a large gap between their conceptual and their foreign language proficiency. They are often in their late teens with lots of ideas to express but with a limited L2 repertoire of lexis and grammatical structures. To form an idea of the level of English that students are exposed to in their final year at High School, an examination of the book taught in the year prior to their university entrance was carried out. (see appendix B for a copy of the content pages of the High School English language book<sup>3</sup> and appendix C for a copy of a sample lesson from that same book)

Students exposed to this level of English at High School at a rate of three hours a week find themselves at the university faced with 12 different topics in each year, 10 of which are taught in the medium of the foreign language (English). Such topics are Prose, Poetry, Drama, Translation, Grammar, Composition, etc... Most of these require them to read and study materials at a much more advanced level of English. They are also required to pass exams in those topics written in the medium of the English language. Specific detail of the courses and the number of hours given on each are given in appendix A.

Moreover, students in each year at the University are required to sit for a composition paper, a paper where they are required to compose in L2. At High School, however they rarely experience composing in the foreign language and all they are required to do in L2 is fill in the blanks, form short sentences, and do some controlled grammatical exercises.

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<sup>3</sup> The English language book set by the Ministry of Education for the Baccalaureate exam is *English for Secondary Schools, Book Three, Literary Section*. 1984-1985. Printed by the Department of School Books.

There is no doubt that the composing techniques that students use in their L1 all through their schooling years will be of some assistance to them when they come to compose in L2. Research have shown that one's L1 writing process is transferred or is reflected in one's L2 writing (Edelsky 1982). Research have also provided information about the role of first language use in generating content (Friedlander 1990), but again the problem is that, in Arabic composition, the final product is of prime importance and its portrayal of the linguistic competence of the writer is given precedence over the writer's composing competence. There is the added problem of the rhetorical variation between the two languages (see Adams et al: 1992).

### **2.4.3.3. The Set Textbook for the First Year Students and How It Is Being Taught**

The first year lecturer is aware of the large gap between the level of English at school and that of the university. He therefore makes the teaching of the code his first priority (personal communication, first year lecturer:1990). The textbook that he chooses for his learners is a course in controlled composition: *The Written Word: book I* by Tom McArthur 1985, first published in 1984. (see appendix D for a copy of the content pages of that book).

According to its author the book was originally intended to help foreign postgraduate students working on diverse subjects to "write clearly, spell adequately, punctuate consistently, follow the rules of grammar, handle stylistic differences and, importantly, be aware of the options offered within what people see as 'good written English'" (McArthur 1985:10).

In the first place the choice of a book addressed to foreign postgraduate students studying in Britain with conceptual maturity that is relatively higher than that of undergraduate students living in Syria who probably have never been to Britain, is questionable. Although the linguistic level of the book is relatively simple if compared with that of their High School English language book, the topics chosen are not that interesting to Syrian learners simply because they cannot relate to them. Appendix E is a copy of a lesson taken from that book. The main text in that lesson on which most of the controlled grammatical practice is focused is about skiing-a sport that is hardly existant in Syria. Moreover, the course that the book offers is controlled to an extent that does not encourage "free expression" at all, because the author who has had a lot of experience in the teaching of English to various students in many parts of the world maintains that "too much freedom in writing means frustration". This could be seen as a way round the problem when students are facing difficulties as far as their linguistic abilities are concerned, but the problem that remains here is how meaningful and how familiar are the learners with the topics that the book offers.

The book has been recommended by its author as being suitable for large classes (up to 30 students) since it has a detailed answer section of all its exercises and therefore it does not add the extra pressure of marking on the tutor. Besides, it offers the learner a lot of guidance and control so that he could proceed on his own and at his own pace too. The choice of this book might have been determined by this fact, but it is well known at the university that students tend to buy books only when they know that their cramming would guarantee success. There is only a 20 marks question in the exam from this book, so it is doubtful whether many students will venture to buy it in the first place. There is no way the teacher can make all students use the book or even buy it. The lecturer might have introduced into his exam paper a question from the book with the intention that this might encourage students to learn it, but the problem is that 80% of the mark goes for composition writing and students know very well that that is the mark that is going to pass or fail them.

In his advice to learners wanting to use the book, the author makes it very clear that "writing adequately in a second language is often a slow, painful and frustrating experience" (1985:12) and that this book intends to make it as pleasant, realistic, and rewarding as possible, and to achieve this, 'simple writing' is what they should begin with. The problem here is that although the book starts with simple writing the topics and lexis used are not that simple (see appendix E). Thus although the formal schemata might be one that the student is familiar with, the student does not seem to be that familiar with its content schemata.

After describing the setting against which the teaching of writing in the first year takes place, the work proceeds to describe the content and organization of both lectures and practicals.

#### **2.4.3.4. Content and Organization of Lectures in the First Semester**

It must be emphasized that what actually goes on in the classroom during lectures is mainly lecturing; the teacher does most of the talking. The only form of writing that takes place in such lectures is note taking, that is, if students can manage it.

Our personal communication with the first year lecturer (1990) revealed that during the first semester, the lecturer does not make any use of the text book. In his first two lectures, he explains what composition really involves and the steps to be followed in writing a paragraph and an essay. He makes it very clear that writing is not a 'haphazard' process but a planned one where planning and defining the theme before embarking on the writing process are of vital importance. This is a point on which not many educationalists would agree nowadays especially when research has shown the complexity of the act of writing and its recursiveness (Flower and Hayes:1980a,

Zamel:1982,1983). The next couple of lectures are dedicated to dealing with the grammatical aspect of the English sentence, its types and variations with a lot of emphasis on how it differs from the Arabic one (the students' native tongue). The teacher therefore attempts to draw the learners' attention to the cultural variation between English and Arabic but only at the level of the sentence. Students are taught that every clause in English should be complete and must have a subject and a predicate. They are also taught how to identify each and every element in a complex structure because by learning how to identify the main and the subordinate clauses, the learner can spot whether any of the grammatical elements are missing. Topics like tense, agreement, finite and non-finite verbs, auxiliary verbs, etc... are dealt with extensively. The tutor here makes use of common grammatical mistakes occurring in past exam papers to help his learners avoid such mistakes. In other words, he demonstrates with errors that have been taken out of context without showing learners what a model of good writing would look like. The last two lectures are often dedicated to the teaching of the rules of spelling and punctuation. What seems to be lacking here is that students are not given the chance to discover things for themselves through their own experiences of writing, all that is expected from them is to listen and learn rules.

#### **2.4.3.5. Content and Organization of Lectures in the Second Semester**

In the second semester's lectures, the lecturer relies completely on the prescribed text book. Each unit in that book starts with a piece of text which is used as a model to exemplify all the rhetorical, grammatical and mechanical rules that are to follow later on in the unit.

Doing unit one for example, the lecturer first reads the opening piece of text or asks one of the students to do the reading. Students are expected to have prepared the lesson before coming into the classroom (see appendix F for a photocopy of lesson one from the book). The lecturer asks a couple of comprehension questions and then he moves on to the exercises. Using examples from the text itself the lecturer explains the first *spelling* exercise which in this case is on how to double consonants. With the help of the *grammar and structure* exercises in the unit, he shows learners how the present tense can be used for making general statements and how the past tense can be used for making historical statements. Here again students are referred back to examples from the text. Examples adapted from the text are used to clarify the *grammar and composition* exercises on how to make connections using 'but' and 'while'. The units' *punctuation practice* deals specifically with the use of the full stop. The lecturer makes use of examples from the text too to clarify the *vocabulary exercises* on how to form new words by adding suffixes to ones already known to the students. The difference in the use of the articles 'a' and 'the' is clarified in the section on *grammar*. The *grammar and structure*, *grammar and composition* and *grammar* exercises are given special attention and most of

the exercises on those topics are done in the classroom with the teacher picking out students of his choice to answer each question. (This keeps students alert and forced to follow lest they are the ones to be picked). Interviews with a number of students revealed that many would find this type of lesson difficult to relax in because they don't know when their turn is going to be and whether they will be able to give the right answer in front of all this massive audience or not (personal communication, first year students: 1990).

Besides doing exercises in controlled composition and editing texts, the students are given guidance as to how to put paragraphs together to form an essay. Each unit in the book presents the students with a ready made plan of a composition with a list of the basic words to be grammatically combined together. The writer is left to make the choice of the number of paragraphs that should be needed and to adjust the tenses, the spellings, the singulars and plurals, the punctuation, the margins and the general layout of the text. No new information should be added by the learner (see appendix G for an illustration of this type of practice). Rather than help students compose, this difficult puzzle-like type of exercise restricts and limits the students with fixed forms and words and leaves them no chance to express themselves freely or to rely on that which they already know. The book proceeds to higher levels of skill through interrelated material on grammar, levels of formality, spelling, punctuation, word use and formation, composition and editing with control prevailing all through. While this type of grammatical control practice is necessary for learners at this level of proficiency, one cannot but question how well the learner will remember it when it is imposed on him from an external text that he can hardly understand and relate to, rather than him looking for it and wanting so much to express it through his own experiences in composing.

Personal communication with a few first year students revealed that they did not find the book that easy. Some of the texts and exercises were difficult but still they felt that they gained in grammar, vocabulary and punctuation. Moreover, students did not feel that they were being fairly treated. Whilst they had to work during most of the term time on exercises from this book and whilst they had to prepare so many exercises from this book for the exam, the mark that is assigned to this part is only 20%. 80% of the mark goes to composition writing which they hardly get any practice on and they never all through the year get any kind of feedback on. Students seemed to be happy with the first year lecturer but they complained about the fact that it is only the learner's language proficiency that counts. They were not happy about this because they felt that there was little they could do themselves to improve upon their writing proficiency as quickly as the teacher would have liked.

#### 2.4.3.6. The Content and Organization of the Practicals of the First and Second Semesters

Besides attending weekly composition lectures students are required to attend practical classes where the theoretical instruction of the lectures is supposedly put into practice. Theoretically speaking, attendance at the practical classes is compulsory but because of the large number of students (200 or more), instructors find it very hard to keep a record of those who attend and those who don't, hence the matter of attendance is left entirely up to the learner. Ideally, what goes on in the practicals should be in line with what goes on in the lectures. Unfortunately, some lecturers do not dedicate enough of their time to discuss and coordinate with their instructors on the type and kind of practice they would like their learners to have and the end result is little relevance between practicals and lectures and more confusion to the learner.

During the first semester, the instructor concentrates on teaching his learners how to write an English paragraph. In his first lecture he explains that one should open his paragraph with a topic sentence that introduces the theme, then he should write a couple of sentences illustrating the main idea and finally he should conclude by writing a sentence or two restating the original ideas. He cautions learners against introducing new ideas in the conclusion because it would not be possible for them to explain them there. All this he explains through an example. Students are then given a chance to write freely on one of the topics he gives them. The following are sample topics that the instructor gave in one of his lessons:-

Write a well-organized PARAGRAPH of about 100-150 words on one of the following topics:

- describe one of your hobbies.
- give a brief description of your town or village.
- what do you think of college education.
- describe briefly a place you've been to.

In such tasks there is no mentioning of who the audience are or what the purpose of writing is. Writing is therefore used as a language exercise and not as an exercise in composing and communicating. Students do not seem to have a say in what they would like to write about either and the type of tasks on offer belong to what Maley, in the preface to Tricia Hedge's (1990:3) book *Writing*, calls 'the hope-for-the-best "write and essay on X" approach'. The writing tasks are the same old boring topics that students have come across in their L1 writing classes all through their schooling years. Due to the large number of students, it is almost impossible for the teacher to correct everybody's

writing so he resorts to asking a student volunteer to write his paragraph on the board or to read it to the rest of the class. Personal communication with some students revealed that this experience can be very humiliating at times and it takes a lot of courage to be one of those who decide to expose their writing to be cross-examined by an error-hunting teacher in front of a massive audience. The attitude of the teacher is that of negative criticism without any kind of encouragement or emphasis on the positive aspects of the final product. Here it must be pointed out that those who volunteer are often the same faces and are the ones who are relatively more proficient in the foreign language. The rest are often shy and afraid of exposing their mistakes to be laughed at by the rest of the class. Some of these students choose to go to see the tutor privately so that they can be shown their mistakes without having to be embarrassed in the presence of 200 other students. In our interview with one of the second year instructors, he expressed his willingness to see each student individually -if his time permits- because according to him, he can then explain in detail why the use of a certain tense or word is wrong, or why the development of the paragraph is abrupt or why the layout is not right and so on and so forth (personal communication, first year instructor, 1990). This again focuses only on the surface level features of the final product but at least it is some kind of feedback.

Instructors are more available at the University than lecturers and most of them correct for the students individually and offer them help and support. The problem that remains here is that only the students who are well motivated or courageous enough to pester the instructor are the ones that seek help, but not all of them can get it considering the number of students and the number of classes that each instructor has to teach.

All through the first semester's seminar classes learners are given the chance to write freely on topics that the instructor chooses. However, writing in the classroom always takes place individually and each learner suffers in silence. The writing can take place either at home or in the classroom but again very few volunteers choose to expose their writing. The choice to attend or even to write is left entirely up to the learner and that is why many stop attending and even those who attend do not feel motivated to write and feel that it is pointless to write when no one is going to read and point out their mistakes. On the whole students who will carry on attending are the weaker ones or those who wish to impress the instructor by their attendance.

From the teaching of paragraph writing in the first semester, the teacher moves on in the second semester to instruct his learners on how to write whole essays. Although the book does not encourage writing freely, the instructor requests learners to write essays in and out of class on topics of his choice and student volunteers write theirs on the board to be corrected in front of their classmates. Again, the problems faced here by students are similar to those described in the first semester's practicals.

As far as essay writing is concerned, students are always advised to plan and divide a topic of an essay into central ideas and to avoid getting those ideas mixed up because each should be developed separately. Personal communication with the first year instructor revealed that besides students' weaknesses as far as language control is concerned, students fail to interpret the requirements of a certain task and consequently end up overgeneralising a topic. The shortage of ideas and the lack of ability to analyze topics, the tutor says, are the main reasons for this overgeneralisation (personal communication, first year instructor:1990). The instructor may call this a weakness in the learner but it seems more like a weakness in the task set. Students are not offered choice in the topics they would like to write about. In addition to that, students are not allowed to talk together to exchange ideas, nor are they given time to do some outside reading about the topic they are required to write on. It is hard to think of any other way by which students could cope with the question of finding ideas except by generalizing. The instructor did not seem keen on brainstorming either. When asked about his opinion regarding brainstorming, his answer was that brainstorming will not serve the purpose because then the learner would rely totally on the ideas discussed by others in the classroom and would not contribute much himself to the topic in question. (personal communication, first year instructor, 1990). One here cannot help but question what choices is the learner given and is it not the case that we always climb on the shoulders of others and take their views and build on them.

#### **2.4.3.7. Discussion**

In summary, the fact that the foreign language linguistic proficiency of first year learners is not in line with their conceptual one explains why the concentration in year one is directed mainly towards grammatical instruction. The lecturer takes the role of the grammar teacher and lectures on the basic grammatical rules and highlights areas where students are most likely to make errors. Even when students are not using the controlled composition book, that is when they are allowed to write freely in the practical classes, the emphasis is above all on grammatical correctness. This, no doubt, establishes in the mind of the learner the importance of grammatical correctness to writing. Another point that is highlighted in those lectures is the fact that writing is not a 'haphazard' activity but a planned one which causes the learner a lot of frustration when he comes to compose and finds out that the process of writing is recursive, chaotic and unorganized. Even the objective of the first year's writing course is to teach learners how to write a grammatically correct paragraph and a grammatically correct essay. In each paragraph they should open with a topic sentence followed by a couple of sentences explaining or supporting the first and then finish off with a concluding statement. The misconception that writing is a linear process of think, plan and write grammatically correct structures seems prevalent. Recent research into the writing process has shown that writing is a

much more complex process (Flower and Hayes:1980a; Zamel:1982,1983). It is a recursive process by which the writer keeps moving backwards and forwards changing and adding to his text till the meaning intended is approximated. It is perfectly justifiable to concentrate on grammatical correctness and mechanics of writing especially when students are just starting to learn how to write in a language that they are not proficient in, but the case put forward here is that the 'ideas' or 'meanings' expressed are hardly given any attention. It is as if learners are being taught that it does not matter what they say as long as they say it correctly. That is damaging because it defeats the main objective of writing as a means of 'communicating meaning'. There is much more to writing than just think, plan and write correct sentences from the first attempt. What seems to be lacking here is that learners are not given the chance to experience the complex process of composing and communicating meaning and they are not shown models of writing that are acceptable to the academic discourse community they are addressing.

Another problem that instructors have to cope with is the enormous number of students in each session. The instructor is the only one in charge and he is the sole audience of the students' writing and consequently very few compositions get the chance to be read and marked. Students, on the other hand, aware of the importance of grammatical correctness and at the same time not getting any kind of feedback, see no point in writing and consequently lose interest and stop trying altogether. No attempt on the part of the teacher is made to teach learners how to evaluate their own writing or that of others. No attempt is made to encourage learners to write collaboratively in groups and support one another to produce group compositions that would be less of a marking load on the teacher. No attempt is made to do one single blackboard 'shared writing', where students work in groups and each group contributes with the best suggestion made amongst the rest (more ideas on group work activities that can be carried out in large classes will be presented in chapter six).

Having described and discussed the first year's educational context, we shall move on to present a similar description of that of the second year.

#### **2.4.4. Second Year Composition Teaching**

Composition lectures and practicals for year two, like those of year one are spread over two semesters at an average of 6-8 lectures and practicals per semester.

*Composition lecturers for each of the four years are different and this explains partly the variation in the approaches used. Each lecturer focuses on a different aspect of the writing act depending on what he thinks is most important to his learners. Moreover, there is no coordination between lecturers and no outline put for all four years' composition courses. The number of students in year two is much less than that in year one (see Tables 2.1, 2.2 and 2.3). This decrease in student's number between years one*

and two testifies to the presence of a large gap between the level of High School English proficiency of entrants and that of the first year syllabus at the University. This high rate of failure in the first year is not always due to the fact that students did not work hard enough but because their language proficiency was not good enough to carry them over to the following year. Moreover, the University's regulations allow students to go on sitting for each paper indefinitely, that is until they pass it and get transferred to the following year-a very costly process that not only costs money but also costs some learners their chances of success because of the number of students failing and pooling in each year. The lectures for the second year writing course take place in large auditoriums just like those of the first year with over 500 students present at one time. During practicals, the case is different. The number of students is much less, around 200 students per section, and the students feel less inhibited from the instructor who is closer to them in age.

By the end of each semester, just like in the first year, students are required to hand in an assessed paper written on a composition that is marked out of 20 and they are also required to sit for a composition exam. The mark assigned for the exam is 80, 20 of which go to a question requiring them to fill in the blanks a missing cohesive tie and the remaining 60 marks go for the written composition. It must be mentioned here that interviews with students revealed that this paper is one of the hardest to pass in all four years and the percentage of those who fail it is very high. The reasons for this is probably due to the high standard of language proficiency that the second year lecturer expects from his learners. He is a very strict lecturer and examiner. He requires learners to speak all the time in English especially when they want to ask him something whether in the classroom or outside it. Many cannot cope and are afraid to ask him even when they desperately need help. His lectures are very theoretical and there are many things that they do not understand but they dare not ask. Students struggle to understand what he is talking about and dare not approach him. Most of them try to learn by heart the content of his lectures but to no end because he asks questions that none of the cramming that they do will help. His exams have little to do with what he lectures on during the semester. Another weakness in the system is that learners are never told that the cohesive ties that they learn about in the second year for example are the same good old conjunctions, pronouns, relative pronouns, etc... that they spend so much time learning in the first year in both composition and grammar classes. No attempt whatsoever is made on the part of the lecturer to link what he is teaching them to what they already know. Co-ordination between the lecturers of the four years seems to be non-existent. This sometimes causes learners a lot of confusion not to mention the time that teachers waste repeating things that learners already know.

#### **2.4.4.1. The Second Year Set Textbook**

The set textbook for year two is *The Written Word: book II* by Tom McArthur (1985), part two of the same book set for year one. However, this book is not taught at all by the second year lecturer. Instead he chooses to teach his students what he thinks is more appropriate for them. He prepares his own lectures from a number of references. He expects his learners to copy every word that he says in class and he makes the process easier for them by writing whatever he says word by word on the blackboard. The students' only contribution in these classes is the odd answer when cross-examined by the lecturer to check whether they have understood a certain point or not.

#### **2.4.4.2. The Objective of the Second Year Lecturer**

The objective of the second year lecturer is to “teach students how to write a coherent and unified essay rich in information that could be linguistically conveyed to the reader” (Personal communication, second year lecturer:1990).

Having described the setting against which the teaching of writing to second year students takes place, we proceed to describe the content and organization of both lectures and practical classes.

#### **2.4.4.3. The Content and Organization of the Lectures of the First and Second Semesters**

In what follows a description of what goes on in some of the second year lectures will be given:

In the first lecture, the importance of writing as a means of communication is emphasized and students are introduced to the different types of discourse.

The second lecture introduces the subject of cohesion. A definition of cohesion and its types is given and then the lecturer deals in detail with all types of lexical cohesion: synonyms, superordination, general noun, repetition and reiteration. At the end of the lecture, students are presented (on the board) with a piece of text full of lexical cohesive ties which they have to identify.

The components of grammatical cohesion: reference, substitution and ellipsis are dealt with in the third lecture where each is explained and exemplified. Again students have to join in to identify the types of grammatical cohesion in the piece of text that the lecturer wrote on the board. The remaining part of this lecture is dedicated to explaining what the lecturer called 'the mechanism of actual essay writing'. Through this step by step know-how of how to write an essay, the lecturer explains how the information on cohesion

given in the previous lectures becomes useful. In what follows is the step by step mechanism of the writing of essays given by the lecturer (this is an exact copy from one of the student's lecture notes and it is supposed to reflect the exact wording of the lecturer who speaks and writes on the board all that he says):

#### The Mechanism of Actual Essay Writing

1. First of all the opening sentence will have to be a short simple one talking about one idea. This sentence is often called a key sentence. If the opening sentence has one idea, then the next step will be to concentrate on explaining why this idea is true.

e.g Cheese burgers are nutritious.

2. The second step will be to elaborate on the key sentence. This is best done through the use of four explanatory sentences. At this stage comes the role of cohesion. The following sentence should repeat the first one but not in an identical way, but in terms of explanation. Explanation should take place in terms of why and how. Therefore, any thing that follows should be concerned with why and how the first sentence is true.

e.g They contain cheese, a milk product which is necessary for a good diet. They also contain meat with the protein necessary for good health. In addition to that they contain bread and vegetables which are part of our daily food supplies.

3. The third step will be to illustrate more by explaining each sentence appearing in step 2. This is done by writing about three sentences on each.

e.g we can talk about calcium saying that it is good for health..etc. We can talk about protein: where can we get it from? what is it good for? we can talk about bread and how good it is for energy and we can talk about vegetables being rich in vitamins.

4. The fourth step will be to give a lot of examples and a lot of details, in terms of explanation. Here care should be taken to be as specific and as concrete as possible.

5. The fifth step will be making sure that you know the right linguistic rules in order to connect lexical items from a lexical point of view, grammatical point of view and a semantic point of view.

6. The sixth step is to take care of the 'reference' relationship. It is a relationship between meanings. This is something semantic. When it comes to reference we have to talk about social aspects and we try to relate sentences which are implicitly understood. i.e those whose functional value is not clearly stated.

e.g they also contain meat with the protein necessary for good health.

The functional value of this sentence is additive, from a linguistic point of view once we see 'also' we immediately know that the writer has added something because it is relevant. But how is it relevant? We need to go back in the text to find out.

(reproduced from the notes of a second year student:1990)

While the first four steps can be quite useful to guide learners as to how to organize their writing once they know what they want to say, little relevance is seen between the first four steps and the last two. Whether this has been a mistake carried out by the learner who did the copying or whether it was the lecturer's own, is not easy to know but the main issue here is that during our interviews with the second year learners, a lot of complaints were made about the difficulty of those lectures and their lack of relevance to the exam composition writing that they have to do. The learners have not been shown the usefulness of such guide-lines through their own experiences in writing and through their felt needs to organize a text in a manner that will be clear to the reader.

In lectures four and five discourse markers, the last type of cohesive ties, are dealt with in detail.

How to recognize the functional value of sentences in the absence of markers is the theme of the sixth lecture. Students are taught that with the help of strategies like inference, implication, and pre-supposition the functional value of sentences can be recovered in the absence of markers. What they need to do is to trace the writer's chain of ideas and how he managed to organize them into a coherent sequence that would convey his intended message. Thus meaning in a text can be of three different types:

1. functional meaning; which can be understood from the sentence itself.
2. Contextual meaning; which can be recovered from the preceding or following text.
3. Pragmatic meaning; which comes from outside the text.

Personal communication with few year two students revealed that learners were confused and understood little about the relevance of such information to composition writing in the exam. They also found the terminology used and the concepts expressed very complicated (personal communication, 2nd year students: 1990).

In a later lecture, the teacher returns back to instruct on the categories of functional value and treats each and every one in detail.

1. Text-independent functions are those that have got their propositional meaning.  
e.g adults are more patient than children

2. Text-dependent functions are those that derive their meanings from other parts of the text.  
e.g the examination results are misleading. You should not expel my son just because he failed the exam.
3. Interaction-dependent or pragmatic functions are the effect of what is written on the reader.  
e.g the pragmatic value of the example in (2) is to argue.

(reproduced from the notes of a second year student:1990)

The lecturer emphasized that understanding the functional value of each and every utterance is at the root of understanding discourse. He also makes it clear to his students that what he is after is teaching them how to understand what they read in classes because that in his opinion will help him realize his objective which is to teach them how to write coherently. Whilst the importance of reading to the learning of how to write is indisputable, the approach used remains too theoretical and above the linguistic level of the learners.

It is hard to see the benefit of such information on the learning of how to write. This information is no doubt important but whether the students need to understand and memorize this is questionable. Recently some teachers at the University of Damascus have been calling for a change from teaching a course in 'writing' to the teaching of a course on 'writing and reading'. So the second year teacher might have been aiming at helping learners in how to read too, but even in that case it is hard to understand the good that such lectures will have on a learner whose level of English and linguistic concepts do not enable him to understand such materials.

The shift in focus between the first and second years' composition lectures is quite evident. While the first year's lectures concentrate mainly on grammar and mechanics of writing, the second years' are totally dedicated to explaining how cohesion and coherence can be achieved in texts. But the question to be asked here is how much the student is getting out of these lectures? Interviews with second year students showed that they are finding these lectures very difficult to understand and are benefiting little as far as composition writing is concerned for the simple fact that the information conveyed to them is too complex and they fail to see its relevance to the learning of how to write.

#### **2.4.4.4. The Content and Organization of the Practicals in the First and Second Semesters**

The second year's practicals, like those of the first aim at giving the learner some practice in writing while making use of the rhetorical instruction given during lectures. The second year instructor opens his practical classes by introducing his students to the four different types of essays; the descriptive, the argumentative, the narrative and the expository. He then dedicates a lecture to explain how each mode of discourse is

fulfilled. The problem here too is that even in the practical classes the information conveyed is too theoretical. To give the reader an idea on how theoretical the practicals are, the instructor's notes on the writing of the argumentative essay are given below:

### **Structuring an Argument**

Argumentative essays are structured logically in a chain of successive paragraphs as to lead to a certain objective or purpose.

There are three patterns of organization; the inductive pattern, the pro-and-con pattern, and the cause and effect pattern. These will be discussed each in turn.

#### **1. The inductive pattern**

This pattern is used to overcome the resistance of a sceptical or hostile audience. Its purpose is usually achieved by employing examples, case histories, or evidence and then drawing a general conclusion. The usefulness of such an approach lies in the fact that it keeps readers from saying too early: "I do not believe it!" Instead, they find themselves paying attention to the evidence, and perhaps gradually changing their minds. The writer must spend most of his time "letting the evidence speak for itself."

e.g.

**Premises:** The Syrian government has stated that 100 people died on the highways of Syria during the last Christmas weekend, which means that 75 more people died than on a normal weekend.

**Conclusion:** This means that the chances of dying on the highway are 4 times greater on a Christmas weekend.

**Deduction:** It is safer to put off any Christmas trip and wait for a normal weekend to travel on the highways.

#### **2. The pros-and-cons paper: (the dialectic method)**

This pattern treats an issue as a genuine issue -as an open question worth talking about. Instead of presenting an open-and-shut case, it appeals to the reader's intelligence. A writer may first, for example, discuss the advantages and the disadvantages of 'marriage without love'. The final step will be to weigh the pros-and-cons and reach a conclusion.

#### **3. The cause and effect pattern:**

The purpose of this type of argument is to trace a chain of causes and effects. This pattern builds itself up by presenting the causes of a problem in a historical order or in order of importance. Then, once causes and effects are sorted out, possible solutions are presented.

Students are then given the chance to write at home on each type of discourse discussed in the classroom. The following are sample topics on which students had to write:-

1. Is love essential for a marriage to succeed.(argumentative)
2. My favourite teacher.(descriptive)
3. The benefits of university education.(exposition)
4. Tell a story of how you lost something precious.(narrative)

However, due to large classes the writing that students manage to carry out either at home or in the classroom rarely gets the chance to be marked and the majority of students go to the exam having had no feedback whatsoever on their few writing attempts.

It is doubtful whether students in the exam will remember any of the theoretical information that they have been instructed on during the year. Rather than instruct learners theoretically on the different types of argumentative essays, a better way would have been to divide the classroom into three groups and then to give each group an argumentative essay written on the same topic but following a different procedure for structuring the argument. After giving each group some time to look closely at how the writer structured his argument and achieved his purpose, students will exchange models with another group and so the operation is repeated until each group in the class studies the three different types of structuring arguments. A representative from each group will have to report the group's findings on the board. In this way students, while working in groups discussing and talking to one another, would find out for themselves the three different ways in which an argumentative essay can be organized. Having been shown the model, now they can be asked again to write even in groups on a certain argumentative essay making a choice of the best way they think suitable to structure it. The teacher then will have to read or write on the board just three compositions but in this way all students will have benefited because each would have contributed in some way and of course the teacher would have been relieved from marking a large number of papers.

In the following practical class, students are advised to make outlines because that according to the instructor will help organize their thoughts and get their ideas down on paper in a logical order. The second year teacher instructs that an outline should be divided into five major units; one for the topic paragraph, three for the major points in the body of the essay, and one for the conclusion. Under each of these major units a sub-heading corresponding to the major ideas in each paragraph should be given. The topic paragraph should be comprised of two elements; a topic sentence and a short review of the major points in the essay. Each of the three major points in the body should consist of two elements; a topic sentence and some detail on that topic. The conclusion should be

comprised of three elements; a summary of the major points, a restatement of the thesis and a concluding statement. What is left for the learner to do is to fill his ideas under each of those sub-headings. The students are then given a sample topic, (the introduction of which has been written by the teacher) and on which they have to make an outline with the help of the teacher and then finish writing the whole essay individually. The topic that was given in that practical class was:

“Write with the help of the introduction and outline provided a well-organized and cohesive essay on the topic of how to pass the composition paper”.

The outline that both the teacher and the students put together was the following:

### How to Pass the Composition Paper

#### The topic paragraph

Composition is regarded by most students in the department as one of the difficult courses, even though our tutors do their best to make things easy for us. I am determined to pass this paper by doing what is required. The course requirements include attendance, assignments and passing marks in both the assessed and the exam papers.

#### Outline

- I. Topic paragraph
  - a) Thesis statement: difficult course and determination to pass
  - b) Review of the major points: to pass the paper students should do the following:
    1. attend all lectures and practicals
    2. do all assignments
    3. get passing marks in both the assessed paper and the exam
- II. First topic: attendance is very important for the following reasons
  - a) It shows you how to write a composition
    1. through the teacher
    2. through the textbooks
  - b) It shows you how to do your assignments
    1. through reading the set textbook
    2. through helping hints from the teacher
- III. Second topic: Doing assignments is very important and can be carried out through
  - a) Reading
    1. the lecturer’s notes
    2. The practicals’ helpful hints on writing
  - b) Writing
    1. Practice writing the different types of essays

- i. there are four kinds of essays to be written
    - ii. all you have to do is follow the formula
  - 2. writing the seminar paper
    - i. learn by correcting your practice essays
- IV. Third topic: getting passing marks in the assessed paper and in the exam
  - a) The assessed paper
    - 1. the seminar paper should be written after a lot of practice
    - 2. a lot of effort must be put into it
    - 3. it shows the teacher how much you've learnt so far
    - 4. you only need 10/20 marks to pass it
  - b) The exam paper
    - 1. the pressure of time (2 hours)
    - 2. 40/80 marks to pass
    - 3. success depends on showing the teacher what you've learnt during the year
- V. Conclusion
  - a) Restatement of thesis
    - 1. difficult course
    - 2. determination to pass
  - b) summary of the three major points
    - 1. attendance is very important
    - 2. assignments are important too
    - 3. marks determine whether you pass or not
  - c) concluding statement
    - 1. a clever student will do what is required in order to pass.

(reproduced from the notes of a 2nd year instructor:1990)

Guided by the outline made and the topic paragraph given, students are then asked to carry on writing the essay individually. It is also made clear to them that the outline just made is for an expository essay but still the same outline techniques can be applied to all four types of college essays: narrative, descriptive, expository and argumentative. With this we see for the first time an instance where the learner is given a model that is at least meaningful and he can relate to. Their writing from that model might be boring but still it is teaching the learner something.

In this introduction and outline written down mainly by the instructor with few students helping him, the state of teaching writing at Damascus University could not have been portrayed better. The opening paragraph makes it very clear that most students find this paper one of the most difficult to pass which is not surprising when one thinks of the constraints that a writer has to cope with as he is composing especially in a newly learnt foreign language. Whilst it is important to make students aware of the complexity of the

process of writing and the fact that most people find it difficult, the instructor did not attempt to show learning writers why writing is such a complex process, on the contrary he tried to reassure them by saying that if you do what we ask you to do i.e attend lectures, do assignments and get passing marks, then you will be able to pass this paper. The title of the essay is “how to pass the composition paper” and not “How to learn to write and write to learn”. The objective of the course in practicals seems to be to enable learners to pass the exam rather than to help them become skilful writers. In spite of that, the majority of students fail. They do attend lectures, some of them do the assignments but the tricky part is to get passing marks in the assessed and the exam paper. In the outline, the first requirement was that of attendance. The instructor thinks that attendance is important because it shows the learner how to write (the problem is that it tells and instructs but it never shows or gives the learner the chance to experience writing). That is done in two ways: through the teacher and through the textbook. There is no mentioning of the students' learning to write by experiencing the writing process themselves. In addition to that, students are not being shown models of experienced people writing and models of the writing of experienced people. The instructor also thinks that attendance is important because it shows the learner how to fulfil the second requirement of the course which is how to write assignments. This is achieved by reading the textbooks and the lecturer's notes to benefit from the hints that are given in the classroom. Although the hints given in the classroom might be useful but the problem is that learners are encouraged to write strictly by the book and by formulas, they are not encouraged at all to find out things for themselves through outside readings and through the simple act of writing.

The second requirement to pass the course is to do all assignments. Here one cannot help but question the point of writing assignments when they are never marked. The assignments require the learner to practice the four types of essays, the argumentative, the descriptive, the expository, and the narrative. Again the teacher makes it very clear here that all you have to do is to follow the formula. This is very damaging. John Swales (1990) acknowledges the presence of genres in writing but is against thinking of them as formulas to be filled in because that reduces the importance of language and the different meanings and forms that can be made by different individuals in different contexts. Another piece of advice that the instructor gives his learners is to write the assessed paper through revising or what he calls ‘correcting your practice essay’. Asking learners to revise their work is a great piece of advice but the question to be asked here is under whose guidance this revision shall be carried out. Will the student's own judgement be enough?

The last topic of the plan is about how to get passing marks in the assessed paper and in the exam. As to the first, the teacher advises them to carry out a lot of practice and revision; but with reference to what and under whose guidance and support shall this be

done if the teacher is having to teach 200 students in each session? It is quite evident from the teacher's notes that the objective of writing the assessed paper is to show proof of learning and not to show how much ideas the learner has got on a certain issue. The teacher also states the mark needed to pass. All you need is 10 marks out of 20. In the exam paper, however, the case is different. There is a time limit and time is very short so the learner must keep this in mind. Revision is not mentioned at all because it can not be managed with such time restriction. Again the mark to be obtained is highlighted and the instructor makes it clear again that showing proof of learning is what the teacher is after. The ideas, experiences and views of learners on the issue in question have no role to play here at all.

In the conclusion the difficulty of the course is reiterated, but the learner must be determined to pass and the idea that "the clever student will do what is required in order to pass" emphasises the fact that the good student is the one that does exactly what the teacher wants him to do. The system of education has therefore reduced writing to the simple act of writing correct language to please the teacher as examiner in order to pass the composition paper.

The analysis carried out in chapters four and five seems to suggest that most of the students do indeed organize their topics in three main parts, introduction, body and conclusion. Conclusions were missing only when students had no time to finish their writing. But even when students organized their compositions as instructed, the analysis carried out in chapter four shows that the frequency of errors seemed to be influencing their marks much more than the organizational pattern followed. They did seem to be making use of the lecturer's notes but the problem remains that for many students exam time was one of the few times when they actually practiced writing and with the time limitation and exam pressures on them they were left with little time to recall and practice what they have been preached on. Besides there is little parallelism between the lectures and the exam. Whilst most of the lectures and even what is called practicals are theoretical in nature, the majority of the exam mark which determines success and failure is assigned to the actual act of writing which they hardly get any practice on.

#### **2.4.4.5. Discussion**

In short, although the second year practicals offer the learner some guidance on the practicalities of the process of writing, the fact remains that the second year lectures are a series of purely theoretical instruction mainly on how cohesion and coherence can be achieved in texts. The difficulties that students find in understanding the terminology involved and the concepts are the reason why the lecturer dictates to his students word by word all that he says in the classroom. Such lectures on the organization of texts might have been more useful to learners if they were presented in a more interesting and less

theoretical way. An example of this might be playing games where jumbled bits of text are given to groups of students who are then asked to put them back into their right order. It must be remembered that when students start their second year they are still struggling to cope with the linguistic demands made upon them by the new language. Trying therefore to teach them writing by going into such depths in the field of discourse analysis using such difficult terms will be more of a burden and cause for confusion to the learner than of help. Personal communication with second year students revealed that they found the exam question on cohesive ties difficult and few managed to supply the right cohesive ties. Students were also frightened of the lecturer because he was known to be very strict in marking. The high incidence of failure especially in the second year's composition paper is evidence too of the point just made.

The objective of the second year lecturer is to "teach students how to write a coherent and unified essay rich in information that could be linguistically conveyed to the reader."(personal communication, second year lecturer, 1990). However, it is difficult to conceive how this could be achieved through the theoretical instruction on only one aspect of the writing process, i.e. rhetorical organization. Even when the lecturer touches on the practical aspect of writing in what he called "the mechanism of actual essay writing" it is in a theoretical formulaic pattern. The instructor too concentrates on teaching students how to make an outline by following a formula. Once they have learnt this "formula", they can produce an outline for any type of composition and all that will be left for them to do is to fill the ideas in. Although such hints or formulas might be useful to learners at times, and for certain genres of writing, e.g describing a process, still the whole process of writing is being oversimplified. Had students been given more chance to write, they would have discovered that such formulas do not always work because writing does not always proceed in that simple linear manner. Moreover, many writers start writing not knowing exactly what they want to say and may even end up with meanings that they were not aware of before they started to write (Murray:1980; Zamel:1982, 1983).

Such detailed and theoretical instruction on the rhetorical organization of texts and on how to write essays will be of little or no use to learners as far as learning how to write is concerned if not made interesting and meaningful. Students are not given the chance to write on tasks that fulfil a specific purpose to some specific audience who are not as threatening as the teacher. They are not given the chance to write and experience the process. After all, writing can only be learnt through writing and re-writing (Moffett: 1983; Murray: 1980).

Again, instructors of second year students face the problem of the enormous number of students in each session. This in turn makes it impossible for the teacher to mark each and every piece of writing carried out by the students. This in the end leads to less and

less writing being carried out in the classes where writing is supposed to be practiced. Consequently many students end up facing their first writing experience in the examination.

#### **2.4.5. Third Year Composition Teaching**

In the third year there are no practicals and the mark assigned for the exam is not 80 as in previous years but 100. Again, like in first and second years, the lectures are spread on two semesters but with a difference. Two different lecturers<sup>4</sup> instruct during the first and the second semesters each emphasizing a different aspect of writing; both however concentrate on surface level features. In the first semester, the emphasis is on the techniques of writing whereas in the second the emphasis is purely on the grammatical and mechanical aspects of writing. The number of students in the third year is less than that of the second and thus auditoriums are less crowded.

##### **2.4.5.1. The Objective of the Third Year Lecturer**

Our interview with the third year lecturer revealed that his objective from teaching the course in writing is to teach learners how to discover the theme of a composition, make it clear and sustain it besides teaching them how to make a summary and acquainting them with the different modes of discourse (Personal communication, first semester's third year lecturer:1990). Here again we have the problem of a lack of co-ordination amongst composition lecturers and the result is that learners are instructed on the same topic, e.g. 'punctuation', for three years in succession.

##### **2.4.5.2. The Set Textbook for Third Year Students**

The composition book chosen for year three is *Mastering Modern English: A Certificate course* by A.R.B. Etherton (1966,1981). The book is intended to prepare 'O' level students to pass their G.C.E. exams. The book is therefore addressed to a British audience with a cultural background different from that of learners at Damascus University. The objective of the book seems to be no more than to teach learners how to write in a way that pleases the teacher so that they pass the exam. The author relied in the making of his book on extracts from examiner's reports in order to prepare students to the standard expected from them. i.e. he relied on what pleases the teacher as examiner in determining what good writing should be. According to its author, this book, like that of year one has the added advantage of being one that could be used by students both in the classroom and on their own. When lecturers and administration choose books they usually keep in mind the fact that there are enormous numbers of students in each year and that many students choose not to attend classes because of the overcrowded

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<sup>4</sup> In this work we only managed to interview one of the two third year lecturers

auditoriums or because of their socio-economic status<sup>5</sup>. The problem here again is that the teacher can never be sure whether students are buying the book and even if they did the linguistic proficiency needed for a learner to work on his own in such a book is sometimes higher than that of the students'. For an illustration of the difficulty of texts presented in this book refer to appendix H.

The book is divided into two main sections (see appendix I for a copy of the content pages), the first deals with the techniques of writing and the second deals specifically with areas of grammar that cause most problems for learners. The first semester's lecturer chooses topics from the first section which he believes will fulfil his objective of the course.

#### **2.4.5.3. The Content and Organization of the First Semester's Lectures**

The average number of students for year three is around 1600. They are divided into two sections. Thus as many as 500-600 students may be present in a single lecture.

Before giving a brief outline of the content of the third year lectures, it must be made clear that the lecturer goes by the book word for word offering his learners heuristic techniques that are supposed to help them cope with any composition that they may face in an exam.

In the first lecture, the teacher introduces his learners to the two types of composition topics; the 'vague' ones and the 'specific' ones. Examples of each are given too. Both the author of the book and the lecturer maintain that students must be prepared to write on both types of topics because they believe that composition is a "craft which can be studied, practiced and learnt" (Etherton :1981)

The lecturer makes it very clear right from the beginning that writing always involves passing a message to the reader, therefore there should always be a theme or a main idea dominating the work and giving it unity and shape. Finding the theme of a certain topic, making it clear, and sustaining it, is something that students should learn but first, the teacher advises, they should avoid 'vague' topics like those on 'patience', 'friendship', 'food', 'water', etc... especially during exams unless they enjoy writing and are good at it. First they should try to choose a topic where the theme is given. One here cannot help but question why learners should be given such general or 'vague' topics in the first place. Learners should have a say in what they want to write about and what is of interest to them, because only then will they be able to bring into their writing the full force of their knowledge. What seems to be determining the choice of topics is the need felt by the teacher to make the learners practice a certain form of the language or a certain

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<sup>5</sup> A great number of students are either housewives or in full time jobs

mode of discourse rather than exploring a certain topic. This defeats the primary objective of writing as a means of communication and discovering meaning.

When confronted with a 'vague' topic students are advised to try and find the theme by using one of the following techniques offered by Etherton (1981):

- a) P = Describe the part which your subject plays in the life of man.
- b) C = Describe the chronological or historical development of your subject.
- c) F = Give a factual account of your subject.
- d) A = Describe the advantages and disadvantages of your subject.
- e) T = Give an account of the different types of your subject OR of different attitudes to it.

(reproduced from Etherton 1981:2)

To make those techniques easier on the learner to remember, Etherton (1981) suggests that the first letter of each of the key words in the techniques just described be taken and used to make up the following:

### PC FAT

Which according to him can be easily remembered by students, if associated with the words **FAT POLICE CONSTABLE**.

Two more pieces of advice are given to the students. First they should state their theme straight away without any introductions in their topic sentence and then they should sustain it and avoid any irrelevant details or wandering off.

All this theoretical instruction on the part of the lecturer is followed by some practice which is meant to give students the chance to put into application the rules they have just learnt. The book provides exercises on some 'specific' and 'vague' topics where students are required to identify each and choose one of the **PC FAT** techniques most appropriate to tackle the 'vague' ones. The following are some of the vague topics given by Etherton (1981):

1. The wind, 2. Toys, 3. Maps, 4. Rain, 5. Babies, 6. Food, 7. Trees, 8. Fame, 9. Insurance, 10. Solitude, 11. Advertising

More topics are given and students are asked to write in a single sentence the theme they would like to use in topics of this kind:

1. Animals, 2. Finding a job, 3. An eye-witness description of *either* a disastrous fire *or* a disastrous flood, 4. Films, 5. What I enjoy in my work, 6. Give an account of

*either the animal life or the national pastimes of your country, 7. The work of any craftsman, 8. Newspapers etc...*

(reproduced from Etherton 1981:4)

The following lecture is on how to plan writing after the theme has been found. The lecturer and few students then cooperate together to find out the theme and put down on the blackboard the plan for a topic that the lecturer has chosen. The teacher insists that the following instructions must be followed: about 10-15 minutes of the one hour assigned for writing a composition should be spent on writing the plan. The ideas in the plan should be arranged to fit about 4-6 paragraphs. The plan need not be elaborate and the learner should be able to write the composition straight away from the plan. Again we see writing practiced by applying formulas. "*It is a waste of time to make a rough copy of the whole composition and then to make a final copy for the examiner*" (Etherton 1981:7). Re-writing and drafting are seen by Etherton as a waste of time and not as an opportunity for reflecting on one's ideas, evaluating them, and improving upon them to make them clearer to oneself and one's audience. This view of Etherton is outdated and is in opposition with modern approaches to writing. Such approaches have been relating more to real life writing and thus have been emphasising the importance of revising at a deep rather than at a surface level and proof reading with greater awareness of audience. Similarly Murray's (1980) view that writing is a process of discovery highlights the importance of the discoveries that a writer makes in the process of revising. This does not mean that some learners cannot write from a plan but it seems like the other way is more common amongst student writers. While the importance of teaching students how to divide their time and organize their writing cannot be denied, our experience as students no doubt reminds us how we used to write the plan towards the end of our writing rather than the beginning. We were unable to write it before we could see all our main ideas down on paper and at the same time we knew that there was no way by which the teacher would know *when* we wrote it.

After showing learners how to identify the theme and make an outline, the next step is to show them how to introduce, sustain, and conclude a composition. Etherton (1981) achieves this by giving more of his heuristic techniques on the different methods of how to start a composition, how to achieve continuity in a text and how to conclude it. In what follows more of Etherton's heuristic techniques are given. For the sake of exemplification, we shall present just the ones on how to introduce a topic. A composition according to Etherton can be started in a number of ways:

- a) F = start with a simple factual statement which will usually be your theme. (easy)
- b) A = start with action which is relevant to your theme. (fairly easy)
- c) D = start with dialogue which is relevant to your theme. (fairly easy)

- d) A = start with an anecdote or little story which is relevant to your theme. (difficult and NOT recommended)
- e) P = start with a proverb or a quotation which is relevant to your theme. (fairly difficult)

(reproduced from Etherton 1981:9)

To make it easy on the students to remember these techniques of starting, again the initials of each is used to form a word that the students can easily remember.

### **FAD AP**

Students are then given a number of topics to choose from and write an opening paragraph on. The following are some sample subjects taken from Etherton:

1. Give an account of a sports meeting you have recently attended.
2. My favourite season and why I like it.
3. Describe, with as much detail as you can, an important person in your community.
4. A public holiday.
5. Sounds which annoy me.

(reproduced from Etherton 1981:10)

Upon request from the lecturer, a couple of students volunteer in the following lecture to write their introductory paragraphs on the board to be cross-examined by the lecturer. The mechanical as well as the grammatical aspects of writing are the main focus of the error-hunting lecturer. Again personal communication with third year students revealed that it was mainly the proficient students that were courageous enough to volunteer because they were confident that they would not make that many mistakes. Most students worry about the lack of support and the humiliation they would feel when their errors are exposed in front of the teacher and the rest of the classroom.

In a similar way, the lecturer goes on to instruct his learners on how to maintain continuity and paragraphing and how to conclude a certain composition.

While no one can dispute the importance of exercises where learners are required to fill in a missing introduction, or conclusion, the problem remains in the topics on which students have to write. Most often there is no genuine purpose for writing and the topic therefore can appear either silly, or dull and uninteresting (like uncontexted topics on the wind, the trees, maps, and toys).

Towards the end of the course, learners are asked to read on their own two chapters from the book, one on subject matter, language and style and another on the different types of

compositions. The first emphasizes the importance of the following points in composition writing:

1. Originality and interest
2. Length
3. Relevance
4. The use of detail
5. The use of local colour.
6. Powers of observation
7. Personal views and experiences
8. Legibility
9. Vocabulary
10. Sentence structure
11. Use of correct tenses

These points might be useful to a learning writer but the question remains of how the learner is going to know what 'relevance', 'accuracy', 'originality', etc... mean if he is not shown an example of them. The problem here is that the lecturer is mostly dictating rules, the learner, on the other hand, is memorising them but he is often incapable of putting them into application. The reason for this is that the set textbook's level of proficiency is quite high and the students cannot understand many of the exercises because they are addressed to a British audience. These instructions might have been helpful but only if they had been practiced in exercises that were meaningful to Syrian learners.

The second chapter classifies compositions into different types: narrative, descriptive, argumentative or explanatory, personal reflective, factual or imaginative. The lecturer explains how to tackle each. Learners have to read the chapter on their own to learn about the differences between the different modes of discourse. One drawback of this is that learners are not given any chance to write and discover for themselves how different functions are fulfilled in different types of writing. Moreover, students just like in previous years are not shown any models of what the teacher thinks is a good or a passing essay.

#### **2.4.5.4. The Content and Organization of the Second Semester's Lectures**

In the second semester, composition classes take the form of grammar classes with intensive instruction on a wide variety of grammatical topics and punctuation.

The chapters that the lecturer chooses to deal with are those areas that have been known to be problematical to students. Examples of those areas are: punctuation, synthesis and sentence construction, adverbs, agreement, the future tense, and prepositions.

Students are required to read each chapter on their own and then the exercises in the book are carried out in the classroom either orally or on the blackboard with the lecturer correcting mistakes and explaining. These areas might have been areas of difficulty to the learners, but the same student has been subjected to instruction on the same areas of grammar in years one, two and three sometimes in the composition lectures and all the time in his/her grammar lectures. The point being made here is, rather than instruct learners on rules of grammar, it would be of more use to them if they were given the chance to practice writing and find out the rules for themselves through their own writing. The teacher can then assess the learner's areas of difficulties and give them extensive exercises for practice. Teachers also need to keep in mind that many of the errors that learners make are signs of a writer's progress in developing greater communicative competence. The analysis that we carried out in chapter four revealed a sharp rise in the number of errors made by learners from year one to two and then a fall in that number from year three to year four. Teachers also tend to forget that developing writers are having to cope with a number of things as they write. They are having to remember all the writing strategies that they have learnt, they are having to pay special attention to the organization of their piece of writing into a clear beginning, middle and end, they are having to think of all the ideas that they want to express, they are having to look for the word in their limited repertoire that will fit the meaning best. Thus if students abandon their attention to details of spelling, capitalization or third person singular 's', it should not mean that the learner cannot write. Personal communication with students from all years (details of which will be given in chapter three) revealed that many students tried to overcome that by playing it safe and restricting themselves to simple syntax and vocabulary. That might have earned them their success at times, but surely it cannot be regarded as signalling a high level of writing competency.

#### **2.4.5.5. Discussion**

The textbook, *Mastering Modern English*, was first published in 1966 when approaches to writing concentrated mainly on the teaching of form. The book also addresses a British audience sitting for a British exam which makes the meanings resulting from cultural differences even more difficult on the Syrian learner to understand. The approach to teaching writing in the third year like those of the first two years seem to be focusing mainly on form and not on content, on the product and not on the process of writing. Although the lecturer points out at the beginning of his lectures that the main objective of writing is to communicate meaning, there is hardly any mentioning of this in

later lectures. Most of the instruction and correction deals with form and language but not with meaning. It is true that Syrian students are foreign learners of English and need a lot of help as far as language proficiency is concerned but that seems to have been carried out at the expense of the essence of writing which is meaning making. Recent views on writing perceive it as a tool for learning not only about the code but also about any field of knowledge. It is a means by which writers look deep into what ideas they have and discover more as they go along, it is even perceived by some educationalists as a process through which writers grow into mature individuals (Dixon:1969; Moffett:1983; Britton:1975). Reflections of experienced writers on their own process of writing too have shown that it is the very complex process of drafting, revising, reading, writing, and re-writing that enables meaning to be made (Murray:1980; Elbow:1973; Judy: 1980). The objective of the book is not to help the learner understand and enjoy the process of discovering meaning but to help him pass the G.C.E. paper by doing what teachers expect him to do. The purpose of writing has become passing the exam rather than learning. Through the use of certain techniques, the book teaches the learner how to cope with 'vague' topics, how to start, maintain and end them. The impression that one gets from the book is that a composition topic is something that is imposed on the learner rather than something that the learner would enjoy discussing and learning about. The question here is why must a task be 'vague' in the first place? The topic should not be a puzzle that intrigues the student and confuses him but should be one that challenges him and interests him to an extent that he feels the need to inform or convince his audience about it. Teachers need to specify exactly what it is that they want their learners to write about and they need to set them tasks that are interesting and meaningful to them. Thus, instead of teaching learners the techniques of handling 'vague' topics we need to teach ourselves to give them meaningful tasks that they will enjoy discussing together and writing about and reading for one another. Students are advised by the lecturer to avoid 'vague' topics in exams unless they enjoy writing and are good at it, but shouldn't learners be *shown* that writing can be an enjoyable activity once one comes to understand the complex process involved in it and the benefits that come out of it? Besides, if the context of the exam is so threatening to the student and does not allow time for re-writing or relaxing on the part of the learner, then perhaps the setting of exams needs to be changed. Moreover, students need not always be reminded that a theme should always be dominating in their work to give it unity because, once they start writing with a clear sense of purpose and knowledge of their audience, unity will be a natural outcome. The book stresses the fact that "*it is a waste of time to make a rough copy of the whole composition and then to make a final copy for the examiner*" (Etherton;1981:7) and that students should learn how to write their final draft directly from a plan. However, research has shown that in reality, meanings in writing keep changing all through the process of writing. In short, the writing course for third year students is based on out-dated concepts of the writing activity, not to mention the fact that there are no seminar

classes for this year and thus very little if any writing actually takes place before students have to practice it in the exam. At the University of Damascus, therefore learning writing through “memorising rules and heuristic techniques” and through the ‘hope-for-the-best’ “write and essay on X approach” seems to prevail over the learn to “write by writing” technique.

#### **2.4.6. The Fourth Year Literary Essay Lectures**

In year four, instructions on the teaching of writing cease to concentrate on the surface level features of writing and focus mainly on teaching students how to write the “literary essay” and how to appreciate and evaluate other people’s literary writing. Instruction in this course like that of the third year is done only through lectures without any practical classes. Thus again we see another instance of a writing class taking place without giving learners much chance to experience writing. In the past, this course used to be given through lectures followed by practical classes that aimed at helping learners in how to write the ‘research paper’. Nowadays, with the abolishing of fourth year practical classes, the student is only required to answer theoretical exam questions on the technicalities of writing the ‘literary essay’. The students may for instance be asked to define terms like footnote, bibliography, etc... The other questions on the paper are; punctuating a piece of text, answering a question on the historical development of the English essay, evaluating a piece of text taken from one of the essays discussed during the year, and writing a short composition. The mark assigned for this paper is 100, out of which 60 goes to composition writing. One here cannot help but question the fairness of a system that assesses a learner mainly on that which it does not teach him. In addition to that, the composition question comes last on the exam paper. This is unfair to students who start answering the questions from top to bottom, unaware that the last question is assigned 60%.

##### **2.4.6.1. The Objective of the Fourth Year Lecturer**

According to the fourth year lecturer, the objective of teaching this course is to help learners develop sensitivity towards the language and be able to appreciate and assess how successful a writer can be in choosing a certain style, language, layout and ideas (personal communication, fourth year lecturer:1990).

##### **2.4.6.2. The Set Textbook for Year Four**

The text book used for this course is *Studies In The Literary Essay* by Fuad Shaban (1979). It is the only composition book in use at the University that is addressed for an Arab audience. It was written by a Syrian professor experienced in teaching this course for many years at Damascus University. In his preface, Shaban (1979) maintains that his book is intended to teach foreign learners of English the principles of writing and

research. The book consists of two main parts. The first instructs learners on the techniques of writing the 'literary essay' and the second presents an account of the development of the English essay followed by a selection of Essays written by prominent writers and essayists.(refer to appendix J for a copy of the content pages of the book).

#### **2.4.6.3. The Content and Organization of the Fourth Year Lectures**

The literary essay topic is only given during the first semester and the total number of lectures ranges between 6 and 8. The number of students in year four is around 1500, divided again into two sections. The studying of the first part of the book, the part that teaches the technicalities of writing the 'literary essay', is left entirely up to the learner. Students are required to read a number of chapters on their own and are expected to answer questions on them in the exam paper. The titles of the chapters are the following:

1. Research and writing
2. The book report
3. Quotations
4. Footnotes and documentation
5. Bibliography
6. Abbreviations and reference words
7. Punctuation and related subjects
8. Using the dictionary

All of these contain very useful information but the problem is that students do not learn these through their own experiences in writing and therefore are more likely to forget them after they have done the course. The lecturer concentrates on the second part of the book. He explains in detail the historical background of the development of the English essay and in the following lectures he requires students to evaluate certain essays from the book such as 'Preface to Shakespeare' by Samuel Johnson or 'art for art's sake' by E. M. Forster, etc... These essays are then discussed in class and students are invited to express their opinions on the style, language, layout and ideas expressed in such essays. The problem is that some of these essays are too difficult to understand and consequently few students express their opinions in class because they are inhibited and afraid to say anything that might show the teacher that they have misunderstood a certain point. The lecturer on the other hand does not explain the essays himself nor does he express much of his opinions. He also does not encourage learners to work in groups and help one another understand the required essays. He leaves it all up to the individual learner.

#### **2.4.6.4. Discussion**

The problem with the fourth year literary essay is that, when it was first introduced at the university, its aim was to help teach students how to write the research paper which was one of the requirements for graduation. Gradually and with the continuous increase in the number of students, this topic became more and more theoretical until the initial practical classes that helped to put all the writing of the 'research paper' into practice were abolished. It might seem hard to believe that a graduate has never had the experience of writing such a paper. He only knows about it in theory through memorising that information for the exams.

As to the second part of the lectures, no one can deny that it can be very useful to give learners the chance to be themselves the audience and the critics of somebody else's writing but a problem arises from the type of essays on offer. Students find them hard to understand, let alone to criticize; besides there is just one question in the exam relevant to this, with 20% only assigned to it. Interviews with students showed that they saw little relevance in having to struggle to understand and criticize such essays when that will not earn them their success in the exam. It would seem more reasonable if students were given the chance to be the audience for their peer's writing first before being ones for Samuel Johnson or E.M. Forster or Francis Bacon. Moreover, it would be of much use to them if they were required to evaluate texts with purposes that they can understand and relate to. In short, there is little difference between the exam requirements of the first and the fourth year students. In both, 60% of the exam mark is assigned to composition writing. Nonetheless fourth year students have to undergo theoretical instruction for a whole semester on how to write the 'literary essay' and how to criticize somebody else's writing.

#### **2.5. Conclusion**

With the continuous increase in the number of students year after year and with the lack of University funding, things at the University of Damascus seem to be getting worse. The study of the context of learning to write at Damascus University between the years 1985-1990 yielded a number of conclusions:

- 1) The course in writing is language-centred. It focuses mainly on the teaching of form, grammatical correctness and error-freeness.
- 2) Writing is not always taught at a discourse level but mainly as the stringing of correct words to form sentences and correct sentences to form paragraphs.
- 3) The course does not initiate tasks that would encourage learners to use the language communicatively and purposefully and it does not focus on language function.

- 4) The learner, his individuality, ideas and views are often ignored. Teachers view the learner as a passive recipient and not as an active and creative individual.
- 5) The educational climate is not a relaxed one, the learner is often humiliated and discouraged. His self-esteem and self-confidence are undermined by teachers and students. The human factor is not given much consideration.
- 6) The teacher is an authoritarian figure, he is the repository of knowledge with unquestionable views.
- 7) The learner is kept in the dark. He is not given the opportunity to take charge of his own learning or that of his peers. He is not made aware of what the course is good for and he is not given the chance to contribute to the ways in which it could be best covered.
- 8) No attempt on the part of teachers is made to coordinate with one another or to find out what learners already know and build on it.
- 9) Little or no attempt is made on the part of the teacher to introduce learners to the cultural differences between the English and the Arabic rhetoric and discourse communities.
- 10) It teaches writing mainly through dictating rules and formulas and does not give the learner much chance to practice writing and appreciate the importance of generating meaning, re-writing, and revising.
- 11) It denies the learner the right for any form of feedback, with the exception of the humiliating feedback that the odd student gets every now and then in front of hundreds of unsupportive students.

Having looked at the context in which the process of teaching writing takes place, the next step is to examine the criteria that determine the teachers' choice of tasks and their evaluation which no doubt influences the students' perceptions of writing. This shall be the subject of our investigation in chapter three.

## CHAPTER THREE

### The Writing Tasks and the Evaluation Criteria

In chapter two, the Damascus University context of teaching writing was described and evaluated in the light of the findings made in chapter one. This chapter will be dedicated exclusively to the study of the criteria that determine the teachers' choice of tasks and their evaluation and the impact of that on the students' performance and perceptions of writing.

One of the few occasions at the University of Damascus on which all students get to practice writing is during exams in what Frank Smith (1985) calls the 'only-one-chance' writing. One might argue here that practice should have taken place before and not during the exam, but the study carried out in chapter two revealed that under the educational circumstances prevailing at the University, practicing writing during term time is not often possible. This adds to the difficulties that students have to cope with while writing. Exams put students under a lot of pressure. They are the means that determine whether a student passes or fails the course topic and sometimes the whole year. In a paper like composition where there is not much to cram like in most of the other content courses, the pressure on the student is even worse. The limitation on time constitutes another source of pressure too. Time is limited with two hours assigned for all course exams irrespective of how complex or long the questions are. In years one and two there are roughly two to three questions to be answered but in the fourth year there are usually about five to six questions to be answered in the same time limit.

#### 3.1. The Research Questions

In an exam, teachers assign their learners a restricted number of composition tasks the choice of which no doubt reflects the approach to the teaching of writing adopted by the teacher. Learners on the other hand have to choose to write on one of those tasks-a choice that is often determined by what students think the teacher wants to see in that paper. The teachers have some expectations as to what they would like to see in that paper which no doubt reflects the teachers' perceptions of what good writing is. The students too have some idea about what the teacher would like to see in that paper which again reflects what students think teachers think good writing is. It is important for this work therefore to investigate what learners think of the teacher's expectations from them and the influence that that will have on their written performance. This, it is hoped, will add to our understanding of the way 'writing' is perceived at the University of Damascus. In essence, the objectives of this chapter are to find out what determines the teacher's choice of a specific exam task, what determines the learner's choice to answer one exam

task and not another, and what will determine the failure and the success of a certain paper from both perspectives, that of the teacher and that of the student. How students carry out the process of writing in an exam, i.e. how much drafting and re-writing do they actually do is an important issue that this work seeks to investigate too. In short, the research questions are the following:

- 1) What are the criteria that determine the teacher's choice of tasks?
- 2) What are the features in students' writing that determine the mark assigned for a certain paper?
- 3) What are the criteria that determine a student's choice to write on a certain task?
- 4) what do the students think the teacher is looking for in their writing and what sort of advice would they give someone about to sit for that same paper?
- 5) How do the students carry out the written task?

### **3.2. The Research Strategies**

To answer the first four questions, we carried out a series of interviews and questionnaires with teachers and students from each of the four years. We also helped in correcting 200 first year composition exam papers to investigate how evaluating actually takes place. We re-typed a corpus of 48 past exam composition papers, 12 from each year, correcting sentence level errors and giving them back to the same lecturers who originally marked them to re-mark them. Research question number five was carried out through watching students writing in an exam and through examining a corpus of past exam papers written by students from all four years. In what follows we will attempt answering questions number one and two. We will present an account of our interviews with each of the lecturers from each of the four years of the program. Our description of the students' interviews and our observation of students writing in an exam which will answer questions three, four, and five will be presented in the second part of this chapter (section 3.5).

### **3.3. The Teachers' Perceptions of Task and its Evaluation**

To find out how Damascus University lecturers perceived the task and went about evaluating it, interviews with each lecturer from each of the four years was carried out. Being aware that such interviews might be threatening to lecturers, the researcher resorted to general questions put forward in the form of a friendly chat. Each of those interviews took place on two stages:

1) Each lecturer from each of the four years was presented with a sample of past composition exam questions that he himself had set his students and was then asked about the reasons for his choice of such topics.

2) Each lecturer from each of the four years was presented with two written exam compositions taken from the writing of his own students written in reply to his own exam questions. The lecturers were not told about the origin of those papers but they were told that their evaluations and comments will be used in our research. The written exam compositions were not presented to the lecturer in their original form. The researcher re-typed them exactly as they appeared on the original answer sheet excluding of course any changes made by the lecturer himself while marking them. Moreover the choice of those papers was important too. One of the written compositions chosen was a highly marked one while the other was a very low marked one. Both extremes, it was hoped will highlight the criteria on which lecturers marked their papers. Lecturers were then asked to re-mark those papers and identify the reasons that influenced their assessment of both papers. This was carried out in the presence of the researcher.

In what follows is an account of our interviews with each of the four year lecturers followed by our findings:

### **3.3.1. Interview with the First Year Lecturer**

The first year lecturer was presented with the following set of tasks, a set that he himself had set for his students in one of the past exams.

**Write a well-organized essay of about 250 words on ONE of the following topics:**

- 1. What things of people's behaviour make you angry? Talk about things which annoy you at home, at public places and at University.**
- 2. What subjects do you like talking about when you meet your friends? Why?**

**(January 1988, 2nd term make-up exam)**

He was then asked about the reason that made him choose the topics in question, his answer was: "the tasks I set my learners stem from an assessment that I make regarding their abilities. I choose topics that I know my learners can talk about and I avoid topics where there could be a danger of misinterpretation on the part of the learner, but if it does happen that a great number of students misinterpret a task, I overlook content altogether and concentrate only on their language" (personal communication, 1st year lecturer:1990).

Thus in his choice of topics, the lecturer is aware that without ideas students cannot express themselves so he makes the effort of choosing a topic that he knows his learners can talk about. However, his aim primarily is not to get learners to think and explore a certain topic nor to hear what ideas they personally have got on it. His main interest is how the topic serves as a means through which the students will portray their linguistic knowledge. It is therefore not surprising to find students focusing mainly on that aspect of writing. His objective of teaching the course which we discussed in detail in chapter two and which is to teach students how to write a grammatically correct paragraph in the first semester and a grammatically correct essay in the second and his statement that, if students misinterpret a task, he overlooks content and concentrates on grammatical correctness testify to the fact that he is not as interested in their ideas as much as in their language competence. The lecturer has his own reasons for concentrating on grammatical correctness; he is aware that the linguistic abilities of his learners are very limited so he sees concentration on form as his top priority. Besides, marking is also another source of pressure on him, this same lecturer had to mark about 3000 exam papers in each semester, sometimes the department provides extra people that can help the lecturer, but some lectures refuse to allow anyone to do the marking but themselves. But of course it is much easier to mark surface errors than it is to mark ideas, the same way it is probably easier to teach form than to teach the process of writing and meaning discovery.

In the second part of our interview with the first year lecturer we presented him with two written exam compositions of two of his own students; one that had been marked by him as very high and another that had been marked by him as very low. The lecturer was then asked to mark each paper and write down the reasons why each paper got the mark that it did. All of which was carried out in the presence of the researcher.

Observing the lecturer marking revealed that from the very first minute the lecturer started marking he corrected all the grammatical and syntactic mistakes that he could find. He read each paper once and his main concern was the grammaticality and mechanics of writing as was obvious in the comments that he made. He paid little attention to content. Moreover, only the negative things were pointed out and no praise whatsoever was given to the positive things that were present in either paper.

In what follows is the low-rated exam paper re-corrected by the lecturer, marked and commented on. The underlinings are used to indicate areas in student's writing where the lecturer marked as incorrect:

*A place you would like to visit*

*I would like to visit England. There are many things which make me like to visit this country, first, that it has a very beautiful and wonderful land, this land presented to us the greatness of God who created this land.*

*second it has a very good and charming nature, which is full of green vales and rare flowers which we cannot find it in any other place, this nature makes anybody who love this nature, and write poetry about it's beauty.*

*Third of that the nice and beautiful beable in it, who treat you in a very good way, this way which makes you love them, and I loved them language which is very easy and common, I learned this language in the university, and by English films and books.*

*If you read anything about English you will admired its history, which full of greatness and bravory. England nature and climate make man live a hundred years without anything troubling him, the damp weather makes the street clean and created the beauty of everything garden, flower, nature.*

*My uncle visited England and found it very beautiful and he told me about every great thing in that country and about the great civilization and great people, so I would like to visit it.*

The lecturer's Mark: 15/100

The lecturer's remarks:

Grammar and language rubbish

- 1) fragments; incomplete sentences and clauses
- 2) bad spelling

In this case only, we happened to meet the first year lecturer again towards the end of the period we spent at Damascus University doing this research. With the reasonably long lapse of time between the first time we interviewed him and the following time we saw him, we felt justified to present him with another copy of the same composition that we asked him to correct weeks earlier, but with a difference. We re-wrote the same composition but corrected all the grammatical errors and then presented it to the lecturer to mark without telling him anything about our earlier attempt.

In what follows is the composition, the lecturer's comments and his mark:

*A place you would like to visit*

*I would like to visit England. There are many things which make me like to visit this country. First, it has a very beautiful and wonderful land. This land shows us the greatness of God who created it.*

*Second it has a very good and charming nature, full of green valleys and rare flowers which cannot be found in any other place. This nature makes anybody who loves it write poetry about its beauty.*

*Thirdly, the nice people in it treat you in a very good way which makes you love them. I loved their language which is very easy. I learnt this language in the university and through watching English films and reading English books.*

*If you read anything about England, you will admire its history, which is full of greatness and bravery. The English nature and climate make man live a hundred years without anything troubling him. The damp weather makes the streets clean and creates a beauty in everything ... gardens, flowers, and nature.*

*My uncle visited England and found that it was very beautiful and he told me about every great thing in that country, its great civilization and its great people, so I would like to visit it.*

The lecturer's mark: 60/100

The lecturer's remarks:

- 1) correct grammar
- 2) well-developed ideas (when the ideas were still the same but grammatical errors corrected)

The mark on the same paper, when only few surface errors have been corrected jumped from 15% to 60%. This is a good piece of evidence revealing that what teachers actually correct is mainly surface level features.

In what follows is the highly-marked exam paper re-corrected by the lecturer, marked and commented on. The underlinings again indicate areas which the teacher marked as incorrect:

*A place you would like to visit*

*The importance of travel*

*Travel is the way by which we can learn useful things about human life. It is a means by which we can learn and enjoy ourselves at the same time. We all know that amidst the complexities of our modern life and the swift advance of change people find themselves in lonliness; this loneliness makes them search for enjoyment. They can find this enjoyment in travel. Nowadays, in the later part of the 20th century people find themselves unable to remain in the same place for a long time especially after the invention of the plane which can take people to places in a short period of time.*

*It is a well-known fact that travel is the best teacher, because it widens and deepens our life. I would like to travel to America, because it is the land of knowledge and science as it is the most civilized country in the world. All educated people like to visit this country; however, I would like to visit America, because in that part of the world I can learn the English language well, as I can achieve my hope in life, that is to become a professeur in the university where I can teach the students of my country the English language. I believe that learning and knowledge are the most important things in life because the man without knowledge is worthless.*

*Social life is complicated as it differs from one country to another. Thus every country has its customes which differ from our customes. My duty as a responsible individual is to take the customes and the good behaviour of the American people inorder to teach our people and to make them acquainted with the customes of the civilized countries.*

*America is the land of beauty. It is the country in which I can enjoy myself and in which I can visit attractive places. In spite of the beauty of America, I am not going to forget my duty towards my occupied land Palestine so that I am going to write books about the rights of my people. I will publish these books about the rights of my people. I will publish these books in America in order to change the public opinion about our case. Thus I can say that my visit to America might make me happy, because there I can achieve all my dreams and all my hopes.*

*The duty of every person is to co-ordinate with his friend bearing in his mind that the economic advance of every country depends on our knowledge, and on our education. I must say that, because I believe in the proverb ^actions speak louder than words ^ I am going to achieve all my thoughts, and I must also return to my country because ^ East or West home is best ^. This visit might be a good experience to me as it might be a good teacher, because it is known that travel is the enemy of ignorance, so that through my visit to America I can fight the ignorance in my country.*

The lecturer's mark: 65/100

The lecturer's remarks

- 1) grammar and language correct
- 2) a few spelling mistakes

65% has been given to a composition with a long irrelevant introductory paragraph on 'the importance of travel' when the task assigned was about 'a place you would like to visit'. A closer look at this composition too revealed a lot of irrelevant ideas that have been rote learnt and reproduced not only in this years' paper but in all four years across the program (in this particular study, we investigated the exam papers of the same students across their four years at the University). In the lecturer's comments, there were no remarks made on the ideas or the meanings expressed in that piece of writing and the mark was mainly given to the large quantity of correct language.

A closer look at the 1st year exam questions (see appendix M for some samples of past exam questions for all four years) shows that the topics set are most often ones that the student is quite familiar with, however they are meaningless and purposeless. They do not create in the learner the need to write and they do not challenge him to think either. The lexis used in the setting of the tasks is often in line with the level of language proficiency of the learners. If there happens to be a word that the lecturer is not sure whether his learners are familiar with, he explains its meaning in between brackets. The words 'leisure' and 'overcome' are two examples of words whose meanings were explained in two past exam questions. The learner, on the other hand, cannot afford misinterpreting what the teacher wants especially when no dictionary is allowed into the exam which is further evidence that learners are being assessed mainly on their knowledge of L2 grammar. Teachers feel that if they allow dictionary use in exams, then they will not be able to assess how much the learner actually knows. Surely a dictionary will be of great use to learners not only to check on the meaning of words that appear in the exam question but also to enable them to check the spellings and meanings of the words they themselves would like to use in their writing. This will help them produce less error and at the same time will help them learn because the process of looking for a word that is needed as badly as in an exam will consolidate it and the learner will possibly always remember it. The grammatical structures used in the questions are quite simple and the teacher seems to be avoiding complex structures. There are certain restrictions on the length of the final product but teachers are not usually very strict as far as this is concerned. The reason why it is there in the first place is to give the students an idea of how much writing is expected from them. Too long an essay will take extra marking time and too short a one will not give the lecturer the chance to form an idea of how proficient a writer is.

### 3.3.2. Interview with the Second Year Lecturer

Similarly the second year lecturer was presented with the following set of tasks that he himself had set for one of his past exam papers:

**Write a coherent and unified essay on one of the following topics:**

**(a) There is good reason to believe that one very obvious source contributing to the formation of a curious black spot in education, to the low standard of teaching, and hence to the decay of University life, is the existence of a number of very cheap and extremely unreliable private schools. These are usually controlled by a group of assumingly qualified teachers and tutors who differ as to morality but agree to the need for subordinating their mind to wealth. The specific purpose of these privately owned schools (academies), it is argued, is to provide students with good education. Don't you think that teaching has now become little respected for its own sake and that an academic disaster may very well follow as a result of such practice that amounts to no more than an academic deception in pursuit of money, a business surely based on cheap popularity? If yes, why? If not, why not?**

**(b) Many teachers and tutors, it is often pointed out, have little to say of any use to society. In fact, a good illustration of this is the apparent acceptance by some educationalists of the view that no great harm would be done if students with an inadequate knowledge of English or any other subject were allowed to pass. But would they like to be operated on by a surgeon who has gained his qualifications in a similar way, or would they like to have their children instructed, even free of charge, by the very same people they have helped graduate and gain their degrees? What do you think of this odd phenomenon? Present arguments to support your position.**

**(2nd year composition paper: June 1990)**

When asked about the reasons for his choice of such topics, he gave the following reasons:

“I like to choose debatable topics from our own society. The topics that I usually choose are explanatory and my aim is to see whether students are able to use the different methods of explanation. These methods are psychological and have their equivalence in the language. Illustration, exemplification, definition, comparison, contrasting, analyzing, etc... are all examples of these methods. I also expect the learner to make use of the information given in the question. For example, in a topic like the one on "private

schools", I expect students who choose this topic to write about what takes place in private schools and the features and characteristics that contribute to their making. I also expect students to talk about the standards of qualification of the staff members in such schools and why teaching is not as respected nowadays as it used to be in the past. Moreover I expect learners to use cohesive signals to prepare the reader for what he is to find later on in the text so that he will not be shocked" (Personal communication, second year lecturer:1990). Thus the second year lecturer says that he is after the ideas and their clear and logical representation. A closer look later on in this chapter at how he marks his papers will show the extent to which he is guided by his objectives.

The question asked here is to what extent are the composition questions given in year two in line with the linguistic level of the learners. It must be made clear here that the level of linguistic competence of second year students is relatively low. Debatable topics are quite interesting to write about but only when learners have had some practice in handling them. Unfortunately, that does not apply to second year students. The lecturer also expects his learners to make use of the information he gives in the setting of the question itself, but the problem is that the length of the questions, the complex structures and difficult lexis that he uses does not enable the student to make much use of that information either. Personal communication with second year learners revealed the difficulties that students face in trying to work out the meaning of a certain task (evidence of this will be presented later on in this chapter in section 3.4.2.1 dealing specifically with the students' interviews).

The next step was to present the second year lecturer with the second year written composition papers of the same students whose first year papers were given to the first year lecturer. Again these papers were one highly marked and one low marked. These same papers had been marked years earlier by that same lecturer but they had been re-typed in exactly the same way they appeared originally in the exam paper.

In what follows is the low marked paper with the lecturer's marks and remarks. Underlinings are areas which the lecturer marked as incorrect:

### *Smoking*

*If anyone asked me about the most bad thing for health, I would say smoking. For many reasons, first of that, smoking is the only way for wasting health and money at the same time, furthermore, smoking can causes many dangerous diseases, such as, lungs cansar which is the century deseas, and their isnt any way for recovering from this illness. that smoking can effect on lungs, heart, on breathing, that the smoker get tired from walking a very short distance, that his breath is very short, and smoking efects on larynx, vocal cords, on teeth, that we can recognize the smoker from his black teeth, more than this smoking makes man angry all the time.*

*Second, that we all know the majority of people are smokers, and they used to spend half of their income from money on cigarrittis, that they smoke more than one packet daily, so smoking is a very bad way for wasting money, not only the smoker loses money but also all the government will loses, furthermore, that the young boys and girls are trying to imitate their parents in smoking and this is a very bad thing for their health, so we must do our best to prevent them from smoking.*

*Third, that smoking is not only effected on the health of smokers but also effects on the health of the people who live with smokers, that make pollutes the air, and the child whose father and mother smokes has ability to be a smokers, and the smokers cannot avoid or stop smoking because of their weak will and we must prevent people to smoke in the puplic place in the university and...*

Watching him correcting, we found out that he started marking mistakes straight away before even reading the whole paper. In marking the originally low marked paper he corrected each and every grammatical mistake that he could find such as the wrong use of tense, the wrong use of the comparative, the wrong use of the possessive, the wrong use of the third person singular "s", etc...; he also marked the wrong use of lexis, the wrong spelling, the lack of sentence boundaries, and what he called 'false arguments'. In short the whole paper was marked with his red pen and the mark he gave was 10/100. He refused to make any further comments on what made him give this paper such a mark and said that this student should not have been in the second year in the first place.

In what follows is the copy of the high marked paper with his corrections on it:

### *The place of women*

*Work is the means by which we make our lives useful. It is as necessary for man as it is for woman, because work enables woman to supply herself with her urgent material needs and to enjoy the luxuries of the modern world. Thus, working women can secure a good future for their families and for their society.*

*A century ago people used to think that woman's place is in the home; moreover, they used to believe that her duty is to look after her husband, her house and her children. Nevertheless, men are in charge of our society, because they hold the most influential positions and control most of the important jobs.*

*Today, however, these thoughts have changed completely. In most countries, women have got the same rights of men; they have got the right of work and the right of education, nevertheless, they still have to catch up and to feel disadvantaged compared with men in many respects.*

There is no doubt that the woman who does not work, loses her dignity as a human being and her position in her society. Thus, amidst the complexities of life and the swift advance of change, women find themselves forced to work. Nevertheless, from my point of view, I think that women should work in order to live as useful members in their society.

As far as woman's work is concerned the best thing women can do is to assert their creative existence, and as a matter of fact they can satisfy their desires to render services to the community. However, the woman who does not work, hinders the progress of her family, society, and nation; she is a heavy burden on her society, because she steals part of what other people gain, whereas, there can be ^no gains without pains^.

Self-reliance is a way to success. However, women should depend upon themselves in order to create a successful position in society. It is time women realized that work is essential for them as human beings and as members in this modern world. Furthermore, women should realize that the economic wealth of nation depends upon the work of every individual and the co-operation among all of them. Nevertheless women should bear in their minds this proverb: ^Don't put off till tomorrow what can be done today^, because we all know that ^Action speak louder than words^.

As to the second paper, the lecturer marked a few whole sentences and made a few comments such as 'irrelevant' and 'false arguments'.

*His remarks on this paper were:*

- overuse of discourse markers (which might have been due to his overemphasis on teaching them in his lectures)
- not very informative
- conclusion missing? Summary missing?
- not original
- rote learning

And in spite of all these comments he passed the paper with 58/100 (which was one of the highest marks that he usually gives ). This was evidence that a paper that portrayed linguistic proficiency will still pass no matter the relevance or amount of information revealed in it. In spite of the fact that the paper was, as he put it, non informative, not original, with ideas memorised and fitted in here and there, and without a conclusion the paper still passes and gets a relatively high mark. Ideas do not seem to matter any more, what matters is that they are expressed in correct language even when the way in which they are organized seems to be imported from the learner's L1.

### 3.3.3. Interview with the Third Year Lecturer

Similarly the third year lecturer was presented with a sample of past exam tasks that he himself had set. In what follows is the sample of tasks presented to him:

Write a well-organized essay (not more than 200 words) on one of the following:

1. The benefits and pleasures you derive from your study of English.
2. A memorable place that left a lasting impression on your mind.
3. A woman politician you admire. Give reasons.

(June 1987, 2nd term paper)

When asked about the reason why he chose such topics. He answered: "I choose such topics to give the student the chance to write good English. I give them a choice of one out of three tasks. I try to choose a straightforward theme because the students are often incapable of deriving or choosing a limited theme out of the general one. I only give one topic on a wider theme for the more adventurous student. Before assigning any exam question I try to assess how much ideas the learners have on that specific topic because it is important that I should choose ones that I know my students are familiar with. I am also aware that most students find it difficult to conduct an argument and even when they do their arguments will be lost in their grammatical mistakes, so I avoid giving them such type of essays" (personal communication, third year lecturer:1990).

The third year teacher just like the first two was given two written past exam compositions to mark. These two papers were the third year ones of the same students whose papers were given to the first and second year lecturers. Again one was highly marked and one was low marked.

Watching him, it was observed that, like his colleagues, he read each paper once and started marking errors straightaway. In what follows is a copy of the low marked paper with the lecturer's corrections, mark and comments. We underlined the mistakes that he marked and we used brackets to show the sentences which he thought were borrowed from Arabic or were meaningless or too general.

#### *The benefits and pleasures of learning English*

*(Studying English is a very interesting matter for me), that I can derive many benefits and pleasures from the study of this language. First of all, that English language is important for traveling abroad, studying English can give me the ability to use this language in many parts of the world, and in traveling abroad I will not find any proplem or any obstacle.*

*that language is important matter to communicate with people, to work outside our country and to spend our holidays abroad, so this thing can give me a great pleasure.*

*Second, that studying English language can give me the ability to read any English novel, or book, or drama, furthermore, I can translate any book into Arabic, to give others the ability to read any English book, and the most exieting matter that I can understand any English or American program or film from the T.V without any help from the other.*

*Third, that English language is very important in our country, that we can find many relevant works to our study, as teaching this language (in our schools and in university), and more than this, that we can work in translation, to translate books and films, and this is interesting matter to spend our time in useful and exieting work.*

*So we can derive many benefits and pleasures from our study of English, but this thing demands a great talent which is individual, to turn English language into interesting useful matter.*

He failed this paper but refused to give it a mark. The following were his reasons for failing it:

- the structure is not English
- there is a lot of translation of structures, ideas and lexical items from Arabic
- paragraphing is non-existent
- absence of theme (topic sentence is not clear)

The errors that he marked were the ones on spelling, lexis, structure, punctuation and what he called 'general statements' and 'meaningless statements'.

In what follows is the highly marked third year paper, corrected, marked and commented on:

### *The benefits and pleasures of learning English*

#### *Where There Is Will There is success*

*(Amidst the complexities of life in the modern world and the swift advance of change and progress, the individual finds himself in perplexity. Thus, as far as I am concerned, education is the means by which I make my life useful. It is the most valuable asset in my life because it gives me the right to think as I like, to read anything I wish and to express my opinions in a new language.)*

*There is no doubt that my study of English enables me to supply myself with the intellectual needs and to enjoy the literature of the ancient civilizations. Moreover,*

*learning English enables me to assert my creative existence as an outstanding student and to promote a positive representation of my nation's values and ideas. Thus, as far as I am concerned, my study of English helps me to enjoy the English literature which is part and parcel of the human civilization.*

*Self-reliance is the way to success. Therefore, I have a tendency to think that I should rely upon myself in order to attain success and to live as a useful member in the community. Thus, learning English is the means by which I make my life useful to the future generations. Furthermore, learning English broadens my outlook on the world in general and on England in particular.*

*"Man is the architect of his own fortunes ". In my opinion learning English enables me to be the master of my own destiny. However, it is certainly true that learning English affects my own character since it helps me to safeguard my own dignity as an educated citizen in this complicated world. Thus, it is well-known that character is the soil, abilities are the seeds. If the character is good, the harvest will be plentiful.*

*"As you sow, so will you reap". Thus, through studying English I try to work hard in order to reach the top of the ladder bearing in my mind that man can not reach the top of the ladder if doubt makes him afraid to put his foot on the first rung. Moreover, despite the difficulties which face me sometimes, I always try to bear in my mind that the bud may have a bitter taste, but sweet will be the flower and that difficulties are meant to judge the strength of the will.*

*Self-confidence is a way to success. Therefore, I always try to reach the top of education depending on my own efforts. Thus, through learning English, I can communicate with foreigners without facing difficulties. Moreover, I can learn about human civilizations in general as well as about the English civilization in particular and as a matter of fact I can learn about the mistakes of the previous generations and do my best to avoid making these mistakes bearing in my mind that " By other's faults, wise men learn ". There is no doubt that learning English is a great pleasure for me because it enriches my own knowledge and helps me to secure the enjoyment of my family and my parents who always encourage me to do my best and to bear in my mind the famous proverb which says "Never put off till tomorrow what can be done today".*

*Thus, through learning English I try to render favours to my country and to my nation. Moreover, I can do my duties without complaining as well as I can help the progress of my country because I tend to think the "actions speak louder than words".*

*Blessed are those who make the barren places of life fruitful with kindness and happiness. therefore, I try to achieve my duties and to learn English and as a matter of fact I can be one of those who are blessed.*

When correcting the second paper, he did not read the whole paper. Once he realized that the student in question is quite competent in the language he stopped marking the paper, which is not uncommon when lecturers have to correct thousands of papers in a limited period of time. Still he made it clear that the writer of this paper has digressed from the theme and has made statements without explaining why. e.g the student made this statement:

*Thus learning English is the means by which I can make my life useful to the future generations.*

without explaining how. Still such a paper passes with a very high mark. The lecturer said: "you will be surprised to know that I would give such a paper 70% in an exam"(Personal communication, 3rd year lecturer:1990).

The third year lecturer therefore makes it very clear that *good* English (which for him means no more than grammatically correct English) is what he is really after. And this he thinks can be achieved by giving learners topics that they are familiar with and have some ideas about. He also restricts himself to the choice of limited themes to guard his learners against being lost in the overgeneralization of a topic. He is also aware that his students make lots of mistakes and that the logic of their arguments gets lost in the complex structure of argumentative essays which he usually avoids giving (personal communication, third year lecturer:1990). All of this testifies to our assumption that what the teacher is really after is 'correct language'. Compared with second year questions, the length, grammar and lexis used in the tasks are much more in line with the students competence. However, emphasis on form is evident in the setting of the task itself. the third year lecturer guides his learners as far as the layout of their composition is concerned; the composition has to be in three paragraphs, it has to be an x number of words and it has to be properly punctuated and free of spelling mistakes. In short, the act of writing even when students are at a considerably higher level of proficiency is still used for no more than assessing language-control. One final note here is that the lecturer spotted the Arabic structures and forms in the first paper. However, in the second which was clearly a translated version of an Arabic composition, he overlooked this important factor simply because the learner portrayed competence in the language.

#### **3.3.4. Interview with the Fourth Year Lecturer**

The same process was carried out with the year four lecturer. He was presented with a set of past exam tasks that he himself had set. In what follows are the exam questions and an account of our interview with him.

- I. In no more than 200 words, discuss only one of the following topics:
- a) "Frailty, thy name is woman"
  - b) "Nature is a ray of light from the Divinity"
  - c) Life now is better than it was a hundred years ago.
  - d) "Marriage without love is prostitution"
  - e) Our changing society

(June 1988)

When asked about the reasons that determined his choice of such topics the fourth year lecturer's reply was: "During the year, students have been exposed to a number of literary essays written by prominent writers. They were required to assess how successful were those writers as far as the style, language and ideas were concerned. A fourth year student in the English department is expected to be able to write on a topic taken out of a literary work. The above mentioned topics, have been chosen from the literary essay book that learners have been studying during the year" (personal communication , 4th year lecturer: 1990).

The analysis showed that students did not seem to be answering the questions with much of a literary style. They barely had the time to write a few quick sentences on the composing task. Although brief and condensed, students did not seem able to understand some of those topics. The topics "frailty, thy name is women" and "nature is a ray of divinity" are two examples. In the first topic, their problem was in the meaning of the word "frailty" whereas in the second they did not understand the meaning of the whole topic. The students therefore ended up with 40% of the choice as no choice.

We then presented the fourth year lecturer with two of his students' written exam compositions, one highly marked and one marked low, re-typed as they appeared in the exam paper. Similarly, he was asked to mark each paper and comment on the factors that contributed to giving each the mark that it has been given. All this was done in the presence of the researcher.

In what follows is a copy of the low-rated paper, corrected, marked and commented on:

*Life now is better than it was a hundred years ago*

*Life now is better than it was a hundred years ago, that life is developing to be more complex more than in the past, that life a hundred years ago, simple never change at all.*

*and man was not conscious, but now man is conscious, and he is developing with his new civilization, and new discoveries.*

*Man now can read everything in many languages to know many cultures, and to develope his life. he can have the T.V to know the news of any part of the world, and for entertainment in his house. man can continue his study easily because of the university, more than this, woman can continue her study and can work in any jobs she wants, so woman can have better rights now, not as before woman was for house only and her job is to have children, and, she cant study anything.*

*Now man is free from the conventions, and he can do anything he wants. that society now is larger and free from myth and conventions, so woman can marry the man she wants and man can do that, and woman can give her opinion in any matter, but in past woman can't do that, and people are conscious today there are no myth no silly ideas as in the past, and for medical treatment is greater and better than that in the past. man today can make machine by himself. can use his time, in great thing.*

*So life today is better than that in the past. life can satisfy man's need in 20th century, and the modern civilization.*

Observing him, the lecturer read the first paper once and marked the errors in it straightaway. He was very sensitive to the poor punctuation, so he marked the unpunctuated long sentences. He was very sensitive too to all the grammatical mistakes. Almost every single part of the student's text was marked in red. The teacher also marked the expressions that were borrowed from Arabic. His final comment was addressed to the learner saying "what are you talking about? very poor, non existent English". He added that he would certainly fail this paper but refused to give it a mark.

In what follows is a copy of the second paper, the high-rated one corrected, marked and commented on:

### *Our changing society*

*Where there is a will there is a way*

*Amidst the complexities of the twentieth century life and the swift advance of change and progress, the individual finds himself in perplexity. Hence, change in life is expected on many levels. On one hand, there are many changes in the education of our society. It is certainly true that education is the most valuable asset in our lives. It gives us the right to think as we like, to read anything we wish, and to express our opinions. thus, education is the means by which we make our lives useful. Hence more and more people are going to school and university nowadays.*

*Education enables people to supply themselves with the intellectual needs, and to enjoy the luxuries of the present age. Thus, the persons who learn in our society safeguard their dignities as human beings. In addition to that, they can satisfy their desires to render services to the community. There is no doubt that education plays an important role in our developing society.*

*^Actions speak louder than words^ . Hence people tend to achieve their hopes. They no longer believe in words. Thus they use every powerful means, inorder to make our society a civilized one. In fact, civilization is the means by which people try to follow the European countries. Therefore, people tend to work more than they did in the past. They realized the importance of work in society. Nowadays, people are able to know that if they want to reach the top of the ladder, they must not afraid to put their feet on the first rung.*

*Character is the soil, abilities are the seeds. If the character is good, the seeds will grow, and the harvest will be plentiful. If the character is bad, there will be no harvest at all. Thus, people are becoming more aware of the importance of their characters in life. They are beginning to know that success in life depends on character rather than abilities. Hence in order to achieve success, they must depend on themselves, and that is what they are trying to do. There is no doubt that people in our modern society have strong wills. They are ready to face any obstacle, because they know that if they want to gather honey, they must suffer the stings of the bees. Thus, people are becoming more optimistic, because they know more than before that man is the architect of his own fortunes.*

The second paper was more of a challenge to the fourth year lecturer. he had to read it twice before he could mark it. It was written in perfectly correct language yet it was neither coherent nor informative. In spite of its relative correctness in form, the lecturer still picked on the slightest mistakes such as a word like "realized" and marked it as wrong because it was spelt in the American way instead of the English one. Moreover, He showed no tolerance to words that were not exactly the typical ones that he thought should have been used in that context for example the word *supply* in the following sentence:

*Education enables people to supply themselves with the intellectual needs and to enjoy the luxuries of the present age.*

Any statements that were not explained or that were overtly general in nature were marked too. His final comment was: "there is not much logic in the arguments but reasonable language carries the student over". The mark he gave that paper was 57% (a relatively high mark compared to his scale of marking). Yet again, we see another piece of evidence that what the lecturers are really after is not meaningful discourse but correct

sentences even when these sentences are presented in forms and structures that are imported from L1.

In another study carried out by us whereby a sample of 48 written exam composition papers, 12 papers from each year, were taken out of the university and re-typed. The grammatical mistakes of those papers were all corrected without any alterations to the meanings or to the basic structures in the texts and the papers were then given to be re-marked by the same lecturers who originally marked them. It was found that all the papers that were very low marked and were a failure got higher marks and often passed regardless of the ideas expressed in them. Findings therefore suggest that the examiner is mainly correcting surface level features and that writing proficiency is equated with language proficiency.

### **3.3.5. Discussion**

Watching lecturers from each of the four years marking composition papers written under exam conditions and taking part ourselves in marking 200 first year composition exam papers revealed to us that it was mainly student's grammatical, syntactic and lexical errors that determine the mark given to a paper. More evidence on that are the instructions given to us when helping to mark the first year exam papers. We were told that three 'deadly mistakes' will fail a composition paper. In appendix K is a copy of the marking scheme given to us by the first year lecturer to be guided by as we were correcting. The sample of exam papers of one of the students who got some of the highest marks in her composition papers across the four years at the University (and which we used in this chapter) is evidence to the fact that an error free paper is certainly a passing paper regardless of the ideas expressed in it and regardless of how acceptable the form, organization and structure is to the L2 discourse community. A closer look at the papers of that student across four years revealed that the learner has cleverly adopted the technique of cramming a set of cliché sentences that could be adapted to any composition topic that she is given. In spite of the fact that that produced an incoherent text often with a lot of irrelevant information, that did not constitute a problem and the learner still managed to get some of the highest marks given in that topic. This student like many others has sensed that what the lecturers are after is mainly correctness in form and that was what she actually reproduced in her exam paper.

What is the impact of this on the teaching of writing? The learner is not being told that ideas don't matter but the fact that what the teacher lectures on and what he corrects is grammar rather than meaning have encouraged some learners to concentrate mainly on grammatical correctness regardless of what ideas are being expressed. Learning writers have sensed that when they produce an error free piece of text even on mindless topics, they still manage to pass and get high marks. Composition writing at Damascus

University is therefore not the writing of ideas, but merely the writing of correct sentences.

So far, we have looked at the task from the perspective of the lecturer. Findings suggest that the task is there only to serve as a means to assess learners on their language proficiency. All teachers do is assign a task on an x-topic and mark the final product. How the task gets to be written is of no concern to the teacher.

### **3.4. The Students' Perceptions of Task**

The previous part of this chapter has concentrated mainly on the lecturer and the criteria that determine his choice of tasks and evaluation. In the following section, the influence of that on the learner's choice of tasks and perceptions of writing will be investigated.

#### **3.4.1. The Research Questions and Strategies**

To find out how student writers perceived the composition task, the researcher sought to answer the following questions:

- a) What are the criteria that determine students' choices of exam tasks?
- b) What do the students think the lecturer is after?

To carry out this investigation, five students were chosen randomly from each of the four years. The reason for the small sample of student informants was the fact that when this research was carried out it was summer time and few students were around at the University. The research strategy was to present each student with a set of past exam tasks and ask him/her the following questions in the medium of L1. The researcher's knowledge of the students' inhibitions and difficulties in expressing themselves in L2 led to this choice. The questions asked were the following:

- 1) Imagine that you are sitting for a composition paper and you are given this set of questions, which topic would you choose to write about and why?
- 2) By setting such tasks, what do you think the lecturer is really after?
- 3) What advice would you give someone about to sit for that same paper?

#### **3.4.2. Findings**

The findings deduced from the students' answers to each of the above research questions are presented below. Each question will be dealt with in a separate section. For a detailed account of the students' replies to our interviews, refer to appendix L.

### 3.4.2.1. Criteria Determining the Students' Choice of Tasks

The interviews carried out with students led to a number of conclusions. Students' choice of tasks is governed by a number of constraints.

The students' desire to pass the exam is of prime importance. They seem to be choosing the topics that they think they can write about; topics that relate to their lives and experiences; yet they know that to pass a paper they need to reproduce in their exam papers that which the lecturer has been instructing them on. The following two remarks, one made by a first year student (A1) and another by a third year one (B3), show that some learners are aware of what the teacher is really after:

*"He just wants to know whether our English is OK or not. The questions that he sets do not require expressing different points of view, he just wants to get us to write. I do not think he is interested in what we have to say to our friends when we meet them" .(A1). (one of the tasks that this student was presented with was about 'what would you speak about when you meet your friends)*

*"I don't think that it would make a difference to our lecturer which ever topic we chose to write about because he is after testing our capability to write and to apply the rules of grammar and structuring that he teaches us during the year. He is also trying to test whether we are capable of conveying the meanings that we have in mind" .(B3)*

The following remark made by a fourth year student shows the learner's conflict between the ideas that he wants to express and what the teacher would like to see in the exam paper:

*"To check whether we can write grammatically correct compositions in a good style is what the teacher is really after. But the problem is that when I choose a topic to write about, I choose it because I need to express how I feel about a certain issue and what my beliefs are rather than to show how good my grammar is." (C4)*

No claim is being made here that students will ever choose topics that they are not sure will help them pass exams. However, the point being made here is that the act of writing which is primarily an act of communicating content and meaning is being reduced-through the practices prevalent at the University- into the mere act of displaying language structures and form.

Evidence that learners choose to write about the issues that were most relevant to their lives and experiences (provided that they can handle them grammatically and lexically) was found in the choices of tasks that they made. In the 1985 first year exam paper, students were given the choice amongst three topics. 58% wrote on the topic of "what

things in peoples' behaviour (at home and at University and at public places) make you angry", 27% wrote on "describe a place that they would like to visit" and only 15% wrote on the topic "tell a story that you've read and liked very much".

Similarly in the 1986 second year paper where the choice was between two topics only, 67% of the students chose to write on the topic "the place of women is at home", and 33% chose to write on the topic of "smoking". In a department where the majority of students are females, this is not unexpected, moreover the lexis that needs to be used in the topic on smoking (like names of illnesses or institutes that could help in stopping smoking) is not the sort that a learner would be exposed to in a department of English Literature.

In the interviews that were carried out with the third year students, the researcher chose for these interviews two different sets of past exam tasks taken from two different semesters in the year 1987. The choice of those specific questions was done on purpose. Both samples had a similar question on the importance of studying English. Although presented with two different sets of questions, the five students chosen randomly for the interview unanimously chose to write on this same question which happened to recur in both papers. When we carried out a study of the 1987 third year students' choices of exam tasks, we found out that in the first semester, 66% of the students chose to write on the topic "The importance of your study of English". 30% chose to write on the topic of "A memorable place that you have been to" and only 4% chose to write on the topic "A woman politician that you admire" (which is not unexpected in a society where there are hardly any women politicians). Similarly, in the second semester, 54% chose to write on "Studying English", 26% chose to write on "Changes in your town or village", and 20% chose to write on "Something precious that has been stolen from you". This proves the point that in their choices students tend to choose the topics that are most relevant to their experiences. This is an important point that writing teachers should bear in mind when setting writing tasks.

Similar conclusions were reached in our study of the choices that fourth year students made in the 1988 paper, 43% of the students wrote on the topic "Marriage without love is prostitution", 41% wrote on the topic "Life now is better than it was a hundred years ago", 14% wrote on the topic "Our changing society", 2% wrote on the topic "Frailty, thy name is woman" and 0% wrote on the topic "Nature is a ray of divinity".

In what follows some evidence to the point just made will be given from some of the students' replies to our questionnaires:

*"I would choose the one on "What subjects do you talk about when you meet your friends" simply because I have not experienced the "anger" mentioned in the other topic, the one on "What things in people's behaviour make you angry". As far as the topic I*

*chose is concerned, I think that there is a lot that I can talk about from my own experiences with my friends. I can remember exactly what we usually talk about and write it in the exam.” (B1)*

*“I would choose the one on “The benefits and pleasures you derive from your study of English” because we are studying the English language and its Literature in this department and that is the reason for our presence here in the first place, so there is a lot that we can talk about from our experiences” .(B3)*

*“I’ll choose the one on “Marriage without love is prostitution”. It is an issue that relates and is crucial to our lives” .(E4)*

Because of the time limit, the readiness of the ideas in the students' mind influences their choices too. In an exam, there is simply not enough time to explore a new topic especially when your future depends on such a choice. Students are also cautious not to run out of ideas shortly after starting to write. Thus they go for topics that they think they can write most on. Ideas should be there to be put down on paper straightaway and most often in the order that they flow and as quickly as possible as is evidence in some of the students' replies:

*“I would choose to write on the topic of “What is the thing you most look forward to doing in your future life...” because it is the sort of topic that I’ve often thought about. I have lots of ideas about my future life and having thought of it before I will not waste time during the exam looking for ideas. I also think that I can cope with this topic grammatically too” .(E1)*

*“The reason why I chose it was because I had plenty of ideas so I was able to write quickly within the time limit. During the exam there is no time to draft or to revise so it is of great help if the ideas are ready because then one will write them as they come and finish within the two hours time limitation” .(A2)*

Our interviews with the second year students revealed that they get very long questions that are difficult to grasp yet they appreciate how important it is for them to make the right choice because any misinterpretation of topic on their part will cost them their success. Their previous knowledge from other students of the strictness of this lecturer in correcting is a reason for more concern. The pressure of time requires them to choose a topic that they are familiar with or at least have thought about sometime before the exam. There is no time for drafting or thinking, all that they have got time to do is to write ideas as they flow and as quickly as possible. In what follows a comment made by one of the second year students reveals her exam fears and anxieties:

*"I chose the second one, the one on "Passing without being up to the standard", because lexically I understood this one better. My intention was to be able to understand exactly what the teacher wants us to write because he emphasized in his lectures the importance of understanding the central idea. It took me 50 minutes to decide on which question to answer and still I could not understand the first. The strange thing was that when I read the questions again after the exam I could understand everything with ease. Knowing beforehand that the questions in this paper are always very long and not easy to understand besides the fact that many students in the same classroom failed to understand the tasks and withdrew from the examination were the reasons why I felt so tense and afraid. The teacher's reputation as being a very strict marker was another source of anxiety for me too".(D2)*

In the fourth year's questions the pressure of time on students is even worse. Fourth year students are required to answer about 4 to 5 theoretical questions plus writing a composition. All of which have to be finished in two hours' time. How fair are the lecturers being on the learners is questionable. Writing the essay on its own may need two hours.

Another and perhaps the most important factor that seemed to be governing students' choices of topics was their ability to cope with a certain topic both grammatically and lexically. One of the students (student C1) avoided a topic that she found more interesting and would have liked to write about because she did not know the English equivalent of some of the lexis that she thought necessary for her topic. This she expressed in the following:

*"I'll choose the topic on "What was the event, or series of events which affected your life?" because I felt that the first topic (the one on reading) requires the use of more difficult words such as 'means of communication', the equivalent of which I did not know in English, and so I avoided it because that might have made me lose marks or even fail. Going back to the topic I chose I found it very difficult and I did not have much to say about it. I also found it difficult to introduce the topic and spent about 15 minutes just thinking of what to say and how to start".(C1)*

Student E1 considered whether she could cope with the topic grammatically before actually making up her mind. Another student (D3) avoided a narrative topic because he knew that such a topic demands a lot of change in tenses, an area with potential danger of erring.

*"I would choose the one on "What I hope to gain by learning English" because I have plenty of ideas to write on it. I feel the importance of the English language besides it is a descriptive topic, I do not need to use different tenses (an area where I usually make many*

mistakes). *I can use one tense throughout the composition whereas in the second topic the one on "Tell a story of something that has been stolen from you" a change in tense is needed. I would try to avoid long questions because I often cannot grasp the main topic or theme. I would also avoid the question on "Things that have changed in your town" because I do not like topics where one has to invent or imagine things in order to be able to write. In the exam this year I chose the topic on "What sort of career would you like to take in the future" because it was real to my life, it is something that I often thought about and had plenty to say about".(D3)*

*"I'll choose the one on "marriage without love is prostitution". It is an issue that relates and is crucial to our lives. The topic on "our changing society" is OK but I would avoid writing about such topics because my vocabulary might fail me. The one I chose does not require specialized vocabulary and the vocabulary needed is quite easy. The topic on "nature" is a very difficult one, I would not attempt it at all. Is it about God or about the universe? ... I don't understand what it is about. I also would not choose the topic "frailty, thy name is woman" because I did not understand the meaning of the word frailty".(E4)*

Students (especially third yearers) opted for those topics with limited themes because they knew from lectures that it is wrong to overgeneralise a topic. A general topic was also a source of threat lest the learner got carried away and did not know how to limit it besides the fact that the learner can never be sure what aspect of the topic the teacher really had in mind.

In short the constraints on student writers are the following:

- 1) Contextual constraints: At Damascus University the tense exam setting, time restrictions, and fear of failure exert a lot of constraints on the students.
- 2) Communicative constraints: students' writing is addressed to a very strict examiner who is mainly interested in correct language and the learners' purpose of writing is mainly to please the teacher and to pass the exam.
- 3) Textual constraints: students are worried about the effect of previous text on what is to follow and on how well the text is organized and whether that is the appropriate way to do it in L2 or not.
- 4) Cognitive constraints: students are having to think of how much they know about a certain topic and whether their knowledge is enough.
- 5) Linguistic constraints: the students' limited knowledge of the L2 code and the teachers' focus on the correctness of grammar exert a lot of pressure on the learners. Students are having to worry about whether they will be able to express all they need to in

the time allowed and in the right L2 forms, lexis and structures. Students seem to be worried about this more than anything else because they know that this is what the teacher is most interested in assessing.

### 3.4.2.2. What Do the Students Think the Lecturers Want to See in the Exam Paper?

In this section we shall investigate what the students think the teacher would like to see in their writing. Students are more intelligent than we usually give them credit for. They know that to pass a paper they need to reproduce in the paper what the lecturer has been instructing them on, as is evident in the following student's reply:

*"The teacher was after testing whether we could put into practice the information he taught us during the year."* (E4)

Many of them made very clear the importance of grammatical correctness in writing and cautioned against the making of the so called "deadly mistakes", a piece of advice that they keep hearing from some of their lecturers. This is evident in the following answer made by a first year student:

*"My advice will be: concentrate on writing the composition and not on the other minor questions because most of the mark is assigned to the composition. Remember also to avoid any deadly mistakes such as:*

- *forgetting the third person singular "s"*
- *using a relative pronoun like who, which, etc... and a subject in the same sentence.*
- *avoid putting two verbs in the same sentence.*
- *differentiate between the finite and the non-finite verbs.*
- *take care not to make spelling mistakes.*
- *and always make sure your composition has an introduction, body and conclusion"* (A1)

*"The teacher is after good language and good organization of ideas. He would not like to see grammatical mistakes. Three deadly mistakes will fail a paper because that means that the student is not competent enough in the language and does not deserve to be in the second year"* (C1)

Students are also aware of the importance of organization. One of the students did mention the fact that introduction-body-conclusion are essential parts that should be present in a composition to be acceptable to the lecturer, however they are not told about the importance of structuring to meaning making and to enabling readers understand the

text at hand. It is carried out mainly because the teacher would like to see it there as is evident in the following:

*"The teacher is after the correct organization and development of ideas. He also wants to see a coherent theme with minimal spelling and grammatical mistakes because we are in the third year and we are expected to write grammatically correct and error-free compositions."* (C3)

*"Make sure that your first sentence is the key sentence that introduces the topic of the composition. In the rest of the composition you should elaborate on each idea in the topic paragraph by using examples, definitions, etc... Last year I used to write any idea that comes to my mind while writing but in this year's paper, I am more aware that I need to comment on every idea that I make in my topic paragraph"* .(B2)

*"... The lecturer would like to find all the main ideas in the first paragraph, so a student should make sure that all such ideas are present there. Any misuse or lack of use of cohesive ties is considered a mistake by the lecturer, so be careful. A student must not present a new idea in the conclusion and the number of paragraphs that he presents should coincide with the number of main ideas that he uses in his introductory paragraph. Finally, spelling, punctuation and grammatical mistakes should be avoided"* .(E2)

*"... A student should write around two lines introducing the topic then he should write around three paragraphs in which he should elaborate why he said so and so in the topic paragraph. A conclusion that sums up all that has been said before and makes suggestions is a must"* .(A3)

*"A safe way to write a topic is to enumerate in paragraph one all the main ideas that you want to talk about. In each of the following paragraphs develop separately each of the ideas mentioned in the first paragraph. Then conclude your topic"* .(C4)

Findings therefore suggest that the students are keen on reproducing in their writing what the teachers have been instructing them on which is mainly correct sentences and correct organizational patterns.

#### **3.4.2.3. What Sort of Advice Would Students Give to Other Fellow Students Sitting for the Same Paper?**

The last question addressed to our informants aimed at finding out what sort of advice students would give someone about to sit for the same paper. The interviews carried out revealed that students saw in practicing writing and getting some feedback important factors to passing the exam paper. This is evident in one of the first student's replies (B1) where he advises other students to "try and write a number of compositions during the year and find someone to correct them". Students' experiences in their L1 writing have

no doubt taught them that writing can only be learnt through practice. But their problem is that even if they practice writing on their own, they cannot find anyone to correct it for them. The dictionary is also seen by one of the students (B1) as a tool useful in the process of learning how to write for checking on meaning, usage and word spelling. Unfortunately, students at Damascus University are forbidden to take the dictionary into the exam. Student B1 too saw in attendance an important factor to be able to succeed in the composition paper, because through it the student comes to learn about some hints that are useful in writing. Another first year student gave the following advice:

*“You better have a good L2 language background before entering the department of English” (D1)*

This learner had sensed that it is the learner’s language proficiency that will help him/her succeed. Learners are aware that students who face a lot of difficulties at the University are not necessarily those who do not work hard enough but those who did not happen to reach a high level of English proficiency before entering the department.

One of the students went as far as advising others not to write a lot as a tactic to minimize on the number of mistakes that one is likely to make.

*“Stick to short sentences because long sentences will increase the number of grammatical and punctuation mistakes that you make. Moreover stick to the use of either the simple present or any other simple tense whenever possible to avoid making mistakes” .(D3)*

This advice teaches learners to play it safe by not taking risks and this in turn defeats the objective of writing as a tool of meaning and language and form discovery. In short it seems that language, vocabulary, organization, punctuation and spelling are the areas that most students are concerned with when writing because these are the areas that the lecturer and instructors focus on most during classes and in their marking. Research carried out by Perl (1979) and Shaughnessy (1977) reveals that overconcern with low level features in writing will interfere and retard the composing processes of learners. Thus one can conclude that the emphasis that teachers put on sentence level features of writing could well be inhibiting rather than encouraging skilful writing.

### **3.5. The Writing Process of Learners**

Watching 23 second year students write in a composition make-up exam paper revealed that only 4 students attempted to write a draft. For most of them, time was not enough but even for those who found that they had extra time, (two of the subjects submitted their writing in less than one hour) they did not make the effort to revise or re-write simply because they were not aware of the importance of re-writing and its effects on the final product. They seemed to be pouring all the thoughts that came to their minds straight

onto paper and handing the paper in as quickly as possible. In the few cases where students did attempt to do some changes, they merely carried out sentence level changes to the verb, the word or the spelling but rarely to the idea.

Through our examination of past exam written compositions of learners from all four years, we found out that few students attempted any drafting. Their exam answer is usually a single attempt to give evidence of learning at full speed. Students might know deep inside that it is almost impossible to get everything right from the first attempt but because of the way they are taught writing they are made to believe in this fallacy. The way writing is taught at Damascus University is indirectly teaching the learner that he must get his writing correct from the first attempt in the limited time available without having to re-write. There should be no stopping to correct the first attempt. Students are indirectly taught not to waste anything that they write too. However, writing in reality is often the result of much effort and many new starts. Real life quality writing is often achieved through a frustrating process of writing and re-writing.

### **3.6. Conclusion**

Writing is primarily an act of communication. We write to communicate a certain message with an absent audience. Why we write and to whom influences the amount of content that we present and how we present it. In a genuine communicative act, the writer's objective, whether he is inferior or superior to his audience, is mainly to convey a certain message. His relationship with his audience might influence the degree of formality of the style that he uses but it rarely influences the content of the message conveyed. The context of writing at Damascus University, however, is different and that is mainly due to the authoritarian role of the teacher, the students' strive to please him and the type of tasks that lecturers set.

The learner's main objective is primarily to pass the exam. He is not as interested in informing as much as in succeeding at the first attempt. The purpose of writing for the learner is no more than a display of what he has been lectured on in the grammar of the language and the formal aspects of writing. Most students are clever enough to know what the teacher is really after and make sure that they display it in the exam paper.

As concerns who the writer is addressing in his writing there is no doubt at all that it is only the teacher. A closer look at some past exam tasks set for learners at Damascus University (see appendix M) reveals that, in all exam papers across four years, no audience have been specified. To the mind of the student writer therefore the audience is only the examining teacher.

The topics on which students are required to write are the traditional types of topics that do not challenge the writer to think or to explore a topic (see appendix M for more

samples of past exam questions). Such topics are ones like the happiest day in your life, your first day at the university, a memorable place that you have been to, describe your town or village, the danger of smoking, the place of women, etc... The choice of exam topics by a teacher seems to be determined by the need to practice a certain form or a certain mode of discourse or by just the 'hope for the best and write on an x-topic' approach. Exploring a certain topic does not seem important to teachers. In brief, the type of instruction that the learner is subjected to and the type of tasks that he is given make it quite clear to the learner that what the teacher is after is not his ideas and opinions but getting him to write a piece of text by which he could assess his language proficiency. With this the idea itself ceases to be the end but becomes the means of displaying language form. The questionnaires carried out revealed that the students' choice of task is determined first by the amount of ideas that they have on a certain topic, but only after assessing whether their repertoire of lexis and grammar will not fail them, otherwise they would have to opt for a topic that is less demanding on them as far as the grammar and the lexis are concerned. In this way they will avoid making sentence level mistakes in a topic that would have been more interesting to write about but may perhaps become a cause for their failure.

This calls into question the type of tasks that the learner is set. If the task does not present a problem that challenges the learner to think about and seek solutions that will bring about some changes in the concepts of his reader then the act of writing is no more than the inferior topic that most teachers look down upon (this was one of the findings that we arrived at through our interviews with composition lecturers and other members of staff in chapter two).

What is the writing course at Damascus University therefore teaching the learners? It is teaching them to pretend to be saying something when they are not (as is evident in the same student's highly-marked four year papers that we used for our interviews with the lecturers). It is teaching them to invent things sometimes just for the sake of pleasing the teacher (in one of the samples of data that we analyzed the male student pretended to be a female and wrote in the voice of a female because he knows that all examiners are male and tend to be more sympathetic with females especially when writing about an issue as sensitive as that of 'women's rights')<sup>1</sup>. The course is also teaching them to have to write on uninteresting issues or issues that they don't necessarily feel with or believe in just to please the teacher. It is teaching them to use the code to impress the teacher about their language proficiency. It is teaching them to communicate sentences and not ideas. It is teaching them to write the plan at the end when the teacher requires a plan to help guide their writing and organize their thoughts. It is teaching them that writing can be produced

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<sup>1</sup> At Damascus University, the student's name on the exam paper is concealed so teachers do not know whose paper they are marking.

correctly from one single attempt. It is teaching them to say that which they do not believe in at times because of the restrictions made upon them by their language proficiency. It is teaching them to memorize printed compositions and reproduce whatever is appropriate from them in the exam paper<sup>2</sup>. It is teaching them to believe in the truth of that which is written in correct form without questioning. A tool as powerful as writing that can be used to promote learning in all fields of knowledge has been reduced to the mere act of writing correct sentences.

Now that the Damascus University context of teaching writing and the tasks given and their evaluation have been investigated, the next step is to investigate the internal characteristics and the content and organization of the final products that students produce under the influence of the circumstances and constraints described so far.

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<sup>2</sup> Evidence of this was not easy to depict in the data; however the researcher is aware of such practices through her experiences as a student in the department

## CHAPTER FOUR

### Sentence Level Analysis

In chapter two a description of the educational context in which writing is being taught at Damascus University has been presented. The features on which the lecturers focus and the sort of instruction that students are subjected to in the classroom in each of the four years at the University has been dealt with in detail. Chapter three concentrated on a description of the criteria that determine the teacher's setting and evaluation of tasks. The influence of such criteria on the student's perceptions of writing was also discussed. This chapter and the following one intend to examine, in the light of the findings of the previous chapters, the sentence-level features and the textual-features of the writing that students produce across four years at the University. In chapter four a sentence-level analysis will be carried out to examine the learners' development in language proficiency across the four years and to investigate the degree by which surface level features influence the teacher's evaluation of the composition exam paper. In chapter five a process-centered analysis will be carried out to investigate the learners' development in presentation and organization of content and to examine the degree by which these features determine the mark assigned to the written exam composition paper. Process-centered analysis according to Connor (1987) complements sentence-based analysis. The overall objective of chapters four and five is mainly to determine the extent by which the educational context described in chapters two and three is transforming learners into better writers.

One more objective of chapters four and five is to compare the linguistic development of learners with their rhetorical one and to look for any correlations between the two. Are students who are more linguistically proficient more capable of meaning making? Traditionally teachers have always thought that if a learner is taught language proficiency first then skilful writing is something that would follow. Both skilful writing and language proficiency have been associated with one another and teachers at Damascus University seem to think of both as one and the same (personal communication; first year lecturer: 1990). Perl (1979:328) speculates that the learners' over concern with the mechanics of the language interrupts the flow of their ideas without substantially improving on the form of the texts that they produce. Scardamalia (1981) on the other hand contends that "recent evidence indicates that concerns with mechanics are not the major impediment to presentations of coherent ideas in discourse" (Scardamalia, 1981:100). Thus the question being asked here is 'is there a close relationship between syntactic form and idea expression?'. This will be examined by comparing the linguistic complexity and the content and organization in a sample of passing and failing papers.

Findings so far suggest that writing lecturers at Damascus University teach and evaluate language and form only. The aim of this part of the work is to show that teaching a course on writing in this manner may well be impeding the intellectual growth of learners.

In short, the objectives of this chapter are:

- 1) To assess the development of learners as far as the morphosyntactic structures of the language are concerned.
- 2) To examine the degree by which grammatical complexity and rate of error influence the evaluation of a certain paper.

#### **4.1. Review of Related Literature**

Researchers studying writers' proficiency and/or development have mainly concentrated on measuring the syntactic complexity, rate of error and type and density of cohesive ties used by learning writers. The literature is abundant in studies of this kind. To justify the use and replication in this work of certain measures of syntactic complexity, a brief survey of some of the measures that have been used by researchers investigating writers' syntactic proficiency and its development in both native and non-native speakers of English will be presented. But first a clarification needs to be made as to what exactly such measures will be establishing.

##### **4.1.1. Defining the Term 'Syntactic Complexity'**

The terms 'syntactic maturity' and 'syntactic complexity' are used interchangeably in this work to mean the ability of the learner to consolidate more and more grammatical structures into a single unit by the use of subordinate clauses, clause reductions, deletions, etc... According to Gaies (1980:53) syntactic complexity or maturity is equivalent to the "ability to compress an increasingly large number of ideas, or chunks of information, into fewer words" and this is "reflected by the longitudinal growth of T-Unit length" (Gaies:1980:54). The T-unit which has been proposed by Hunt (1965) as a measure of syntactic complexity is defined by him as "one main clause plus any subordinate clause or nonclausal structure that is attached or embedded in it" (1970a:4). Thus to achieve syntactically developed writing, writers sometimes need to expand the NP and/or the VP portions of their utterances through the use of complex syntactic structures such as sentence embeddings or ellipsis of repeated elements in compound sentences. This said, it is important to stress that no claim is being made that learners should always use complicated and intricate structures, for often the mode of discourse dictates otherwise. The following example taken from a third year exam paper written on the topic "describe a wedding that you have been to" shows how this relatively proficient student writer used short sentences to produce a stylistic effect to suit the narrative nature

of the topic. The symbol // has been used in the example below to indicate the end of a T-unit.

*... the hall was beautiful, //it was decorated with colourful flowers and vases, //the atmosphere was perfumed. //People were happy, //many friends and relatives came with flowers and presents for the bride and the bridegroom. //There was loud music, // young boys and girls were dancing//...*

Earlier on in that same composition, the student has made use of longer T-units again to suit the topic at hand.

*... To become her husband, he had to meet her father and to ask her hand for marriage//. Actually, the young man visited the family and met Mona's father and mother, // he told them about his desire to marry their daughter//. The family discussed the matter and found that the young man is a well-bred, polite, and responsible man, // he is suitable to marry their daughter and to be a member of the family. //The daughter was asked to say her opinion openly, // and of course she accepted to marry him. // Then the two families met together and decided that the wedding day would be the next week.//*

There is no doubt that a student who has learnt a considerable amount of grammar possesses a wider choice of structures. Mendelsohn (1983) contends that a foreign learner who is learning to cope with the language in more diverse and complicated situations need not only use simple sentences but should possess a fairly sophisticated repertoire of structures of which he could make use whenever appropriate (1983:300). Mendelsohn cautioned against the wrong interpretation of his definition of syntactic maturity as the ability to use different syntactic structures including complicated ones. This he believed might have a “backwash” effect on the teaching of writing if interpreted wrongly. Teachers might get the impression that the more complex structures should be assigned higher marks and thus encourage learners to use ‘absurdly complex structures’ when much simpler and clearer ones could be used (1983:300).

Larsen-Freeman (1978) posits that a subject’s growth in T-Unit length is no mystery because it is the result of the “learner’s increasing ability to control the processes of language production- addition, deletion, substitution and permutation. A child must learn to delete redundant NP’s in compound sentences, to embed less relevant information, to relate two or more sentences using logical connectors ...” (1978:441).

Some researchers expressed their reservation in defining the term “syntactic maturity”. Budd (1988) made it clear that the term ‘maturity’, when used in the general context of human interaction, would imply the ability to use the language in a grammatically correct form as well as in a linguistically appropriate style, yet various studies have shown that Hunt’s tests have only succeeded in measuring the degrees of proficiency of a finite range

of structural permutations achieved by different age group learners. Consequently Budd suggested defining "maturity" in a more limited way, i.e. as the learner's maturity in the ability to handle structural permutations only, because such a definition, he adds, avoids the temptation of treating Hunt's tests as the more comprehensive measures of linguistic skill that include appropriateness as well as grammaticality (1988:182).

A distinction therefore needs to be made here between the terms "syntactic complexity" and growth in "writing competence" for although they are related they are not synonymous. In fact some researchers like Barnwell (1988:190) maintain that T-unit length is a measure of performance and not competence. There is much more to writing than form: content, organization, development, coherence, purpose, audience, lexis, etc... are all important aspects that come into play during the process of writing.

We will therefore examine syntactic complexity as one factor in the writing ability of our university subjects. Other factors such as coherence, cohesion, content and organization at the level of the paragraph and the essay will be examined in the following chapter.

#### **4.1.2. Objective Measures of Syntactic Maturity**

The length of the syntactic unit and the degree of its complexity have been cited as indices of maturity in both oral and written communication (Sampson,1964:177). Their use in composition research is by no means new. Lorge (1939), Dale and Chall (1948), and Templin (1957) made use of the mean sentence length as an indicator of syntactic maturity. Harrell (1957) substituted the mean sentence length with the mean clause length. Other researchers like Hoppes (1931), LaBrant (1933), Heider and Heider (1940), Templin (1957) and Harrell (1957) advocated the use of the subordination measure too. In what follows is an argument for the use of the subordination measure put forward by Loban (1963):

"Both logical analysis and previous studies of language designate subordination as a more mature and difficult form of language expression than simple parallel statements connected by "and" or "but"... phrases and dependent clauses are verbal means of showing relationships; through them speakers communicate more complex propositions than are possible with simple independent clauses. Furthermore, subordination makes possible a more coherent organization of related statements" (Loban 1963:17-18).

##### **4.1.2.1. Hunt's T-unit**

In spite of the use of such measures, not much progress was made towards an easily applied and uniform index of language development of native speakers until 1965 when Kellogg W. Hunt investigated the syntactic development of the free writing of American school children in grades 4, 8 and 12. The improper use of "and" and the inadequacy of punctuation of the developing writers soon proved to Hunt that "sentence length" was an

unreliable index of maturity. Consequently he devised a new technique by which groups of words were divided into T-units which he identifies as follows:

" Any statement that has just one main clause I have called a T-unit, short for "terminable unit". The name comes from the fact that it is grammatically allowable for any statement containing one main clause, with or without subordinate clauses, to be punctuated with terminable marks at both ends: a capital at one end and a period or question mark at the end. Any T-unit can be punctuated as one sentence. In that sense this unit is terminable. But people write sentences containing two or more main clauses, and those sentences contain two or more T-units, so a T-unit is not always the same as a sentence, though often it is" (Hunt 1970b:198-199).

After a series of analysis that Hunt carried out on native speaking school children, he concluded that "the ability to combine more and more kernel sentences is a mark of maturity."(Hunt 1973:162)

#### **4.1.3. Measures of Syntactic Complexity in the Writing of Native Speakers of English**

In their measures of syntactic development of speech and free writing of school children, Hunt (1965), O'Donnell, Griffen and Norris (1967) revealed evidence that from kindergarten to graduation, students learn to use a larger and larger number of sentence combining transformations per main clause. Hunt's findings established the fact that, as students increase in syntactic maturity, they tend to write more words per clause and more clauses per T-unit and consequently more words per T-unit.

Moreover, studies of Blount, Johnson and Frederick (1969a,1969b), Hunt (1970a,1977), Faigley (1977), Stewart (1978), Crowhurst (1980,1981) have all shown evidence that syntactic complexity developed chronologically in the writing of their native English speaking subjects. The T-unit has therefore been widely used for the purpose of measuring language development.

In short, Hunt's findings (1965,1970a,1977) have established the T-unit as a reliable, valid and useful measure of the writing ability of native speakers. The number of researchers that have based their investigations of writing on Hunt's T-unit is far too great to be ignored. More important is that such studies have confirmed Hunt's findings and emphasized the effectiveness of his tests in measuring development in native speakers' writing.

#### **4.1.4. Measures of Syntactic Complexity in the Writing of Non-Native Speakers of English**

In what follows, the study will concern itself with a survey of the research that have utilized the T-unit and the error-free T-unit to measure language development of ESL and EFL learners.

Most researchers examining the writing or speech of foreign or second language learners seemed to agree on one thing; the measure to be used should take into account the number of errors made by learners besides the length of their syntactic unit. Examples of such researchers are: Scott and Tucker (1974), Larsen-Freeman and Storm (1977), Larsen-Freeman (1978), Perkins (1980), and Mendelsohn (1983). Non-native speakers are not only learning how to express themselves in the foreign code, they are also learning the code itself. They are therefore more liable to making errors. The introduction of a measure that takes into account the rate of error reinforces our assumption that much emphasis is placed by teachers of English to non-native speakers on correctness and error-freeness in writing.

The error-free T-unit was first developed by Scott and Tucker (1974) in their search for a method that could reflect both the syntactic complexity and the error frequency of their learners. In a study where they compared the written and the oral performance of twenty two Arabic-speaking subjects of a low intermediate level, Scott and Tucker (1974) utilized both measures; the T-unit and the error-free T-unit . Their objective was to rank order subjects' areas of difficulty and to describe some aspects of their transitional grammar. They concluded that the T-unit appeared to be a useful tool in the measurement of EFL learners' data especially that which was poorly punctuated or not punctuated at all.

In the years that followed the T-unit and the error-free T-unit found favour too among other researchers like Larsen-Freeman and Storm (1977), Larsen-Freeman (1978), Gaies (1980), Kameen (1983), and Flahive and Snow (1980) who were seeking to establish an index of development that would enable them to gauge their L2 learners' levels of proficiency.

Larsen-Freeman and Storm's (1977) findings of the efficacy of the T-unit and the error-free T-unit contributed much to ESL research. In a pilot study they analyzed thirty seven ESL learners' compositions which had been previously grouped impressionistically into one of five levels. Their aim was to identify the features that made each group of compositions distinct from the other. To achieve this they used a number of measures one of which was Scott and Tucker's error-free T-unit. However, Freeman and Storm chose a stricter criterion for judging an error-free T-unit. A T-unit had to be perfect, including spelling and punctuation to be considered error-free. Their findings revealed that the more proficient writers wrote more words per composition and longer T-units. Although the mean T-unit length did not prove statistically significant as a discriminator between groups, the number of error-free T-Units did discriminate at a statistically significant level of 0.001. The conclusion that Larsen-Freeman and Storm arrived at in this study was that measures of T-unit length and number of error-free T-units seemed to be a viable contender on which to base an index of development since they can be "easily

quantified, linear progression does seem possible and they would seem to be impervious to differences in language backgrounds.” (1977:132) One must bear in mind here that such results need to be interpreted bearing in mind that Larsen-Freeman and Storm grouped the sample compositions according to levels of proficiency first and then analyzed them according to "objective" criteria. Such evaluations therefore, were not independent and one would expect an unrealistically high correlation between the two evaluations because teachers concentrate mainly on the correction of surface level features. Another criticism of this study is that the distribution of the subjects among groups was unequal. There were five subjects in the top group and eleven in the bottom one.

In a later paper, Larsen-Freeman (1978) reported on the progress that she achieved in her attempt to establish a second language acquisition index of development. Again she put the T-unit and the error-free T-unit into use. The study was carried out on 212 ESL 200-word compositions written on the same topic in a limited time of 30 minutes. The subjects were divided into groups depending on their performance in the entire placement test. Findings revealed that subjects with higher proficiency wrote longer compositions, the statistical results of which were significant at the 0.001 level of probability. The mean T-unit length too did serve as a statistically significant discriminator among groups, but it did not discriminate very well among the top groups. The mean length of the error-free T-unit and the percentage of error-free T-units proved to be the best discriminators among the five levels of ESL proficiency. The uneven distribution of the subjects was a drawback in this work too.

Kameen (1983), set out to determine whether or not there exists a correlation between syntactic skill and scores assigned to college ESL students' compositions. His findings showed that it was the T-unit length and not the sentence length that discriminated between the "good" and "poor" writers. " ... in terms of length of writing Units, T-unit length and clause length appear to be much more reliable indexes of rated quality than is the time-honoured index of sentence length " (Kameen 1983:349). Kameen found that the differences between the "good" and the "poor" writers were statistically significant at the 0.05 level in terms of T-unit and clause length.

In a computer-assisted analysis of 152 compositions written by 14 EFL lower-intermediate level learners over a period of seven weeks, Arthur (1979) made use of such measures like the average T-unit length, the percentage of error-free T-units, and the average length of the error-free T-unit to measure his learners' grammatical sophistication. Although the T-unit analysis did not yield significant results in this short-term study of learners' development, Arthur concludes that "comparing two individual compositions was an unreliable procedure for evaluating change in composition skills over a period of seven or eight weeks" (1979:342). Of particular importance to this work was another

finding made by Arthur whereby he comments on the consistency in the evaluations made by a number of different teachers. Such evaluations, he comments, were based mainly on criteria related to writing speed, frequency of grammatical errors, and frequency of misspellings. Arthur was aware that teachers were mainly correcting surface level features and that the objective measures that he used were only testing for language proficiency and not for writing proficiency.

Two other researchers, Flahive and Snow (1980), concluded from their analysis of 300 ESL compositions taken from six different levels ranging from beginners to advanced that there is much more to writing than the length of the T-unit or the number of clauses per T-unit. They demonstrated that measures like T-unit length, the number of errors per T-unit, the clause/T-unit ratio and the complexity index which they adapted from Endicott (1973) (and which relied on giving students credit for the complexity of each syntactic structure that they used) are useful in determining the levels of overall ESL proficiency and in predicting the overall effectiveness of writing abilities.

In an assessment of the writing proficiency of 29 advanced ESL compositions at a centre for teaching English as a second language, Perkins (1980) utilized the T-unit length and the error-free T-unit as two of ten objective measures of writing proficiency and language development. Previous studies had examined whether objective measures of writing proficiency discriminate among different levels of proficiency. Perkins' study on the other hand investigated whether objective measures discriminate among different evaluations of compositions from the same proficiency level. He found that within a group of the same proficiency level, only objective measures that take the rate of error into account discriminate among holistic judgments of compositions. Perkins cites Gaies (1980) and Larsen-Freeman's (1978) findings as similar to his although theirs were looking at objective measures that discriminate among different levels of proficiency. Perkins' findings present further evidence to our hypothesis that teachers of writing mainly concentrate on evaluating surface level features of writing.

Ferris and Politzer (1981) also used average clause length, number of words per T-unit and number of clauses per T-unit as measures of the differences in the structural complexity of two groups of Spanish speaking junior high school students coming from two different educational and cultural backgrounds. Their aim was to investigate the influence of the different backgrounds on the writing skills of their subjects. Although their results indicated that the average clause length and the number of words per T-unit did not reveal significant results they still argue that "students who write large T-units are generally accepted as better writers by teachers and writing authorities because they possess greater flexibility in the kinds of sentences they can write" (1981:267).

The last in this survey is Mendelsohn (1983) who set about testing whether or not a correlation exists between the rate of syntactic error and syntactic maturity in the speech of 27 non-native speakers. His findings confirmed his hypothesis that one cannot do without an error-free measure in assessing learner's syntactic ability.

#### 4.1.5. An Assessment of the T-unit

The number of researchers that have utilized the T-unit in one form or another as a research tool is far too great to be ignored. According to O'Donnell (1976) the merits of this tool are that it can be easily applied and identified, it would not be affected by the learner's poor punctuation and at the same time it would preserve the learner's subordination and co-ordination of words, phrases and subordinate clauses. However, the students' co-ordination of main clauses will not be preserved (O'Donnell,1976:32; Gaies:1980:55), but that, according to Hunt, is no virtue for it is a sign of immaturity rather than maturity. To overcome this, Ann Medway (1984) suggested counting the number of co-ordinated predicates in each text and using them to determine whether any misleading lengthening of T-units is resulting from the learner's over fondness of this technique - a measure that will be adopted in this work.

There are of course some limitations on the use of the T-unit. The fact that it leaves out punctuation is a weakness in itself because being syntactically mature implies that one is able to punctuate correctly.

Assessing its usefulness as a measure of development, Gaies (1980) and Barnwell (1988) found it to be not as sensitive a tool for determining second language development as it has been found in studies on first language development. Considerable overlapping between adjacent groups have also been noted. The reason, Gaies (1980) suggests, could be that the ability of first language learners to subordinate and embed sentences develops rather gradually over a number of years, a process that is far more compressed in second language acquisition (Gaies 1980:58). However, Gaies still maintains that the attractiveness of the T-unit length in ESL research is due to two reasons. First, it is a global measure of linguistic development that is external to any particular set of data, and, second, it could serve as a useful statistical tool of comparison between first and second language data (Gaies 1980:54).

In his critique of some indices of syntactic maturity, O'Donnell (1976) argues that although the T-unit measures length, it does not discriminate between the various ways in which this lengthening can be achieved (1976:33); besides "there are no data to show how consistently these indexes measure the structural complexity of an individual student's writing in various situations" (In O'Donnell 1976:33). His comparison of the usefulness of the T-unit and clause length measures with Endicott's (1973) and Goloub and Kidder's

(1974) more specific measures of complexity features led him to the conclusion that the “T-Unit length is still the most useful and useable index of syntactic development over a wide age-range and that mean clause length is the best single measure of syntactic complexity at the high school level and beyond” (O'Donnell;1976:38). His rationale for this was that both types of measures, the T-unit length and the computerized measures of specific features of complexity, needed larger samples of data to reveal trends and between the two the T-unit was the least complex, the least costly and the easiest to depict and count.

Other researchers too questioned the reliability of T-unit length as a measure of overall language proficiency on the grounds that it is an index divorced from appropriateness and stylistic effectiveness and based solely on surface level features of syntactic complexity (Gaies 1980:55) (Barnwell 1988:190). Moreover Gaies (1980:56) maintains that this measure does not reward learners for their sophistication in the area of vocabulary. A learner might resort to the use of circumlocution to express a single unit of meaning that might otherwise have been expressed in one word. The following example taken from Moffett (1983:174) and cited by Gaies (1980:56) and Barnwell (1988:190) clarifies the point just made:

- (1) I don't like /what is left in the cup /after you finish drinking//
- (2) I don't like the dregs.//

Whereas the verbosity of the first T-unit has been judged as much more mature and has been given extra credit, the lexical sophistication of the second has been penalized.(Gaies, 1980:56) (Barnwell, 1988:190). Critics like Gaies (1980) and Barnwell (1988) argue that the weakness of T-unit analysis lies in its treatment of syntax alone ignoring the importance of vocabulary when syntax and vocabulary are very closely related.

Barnwell (1988:190) also cautions against the overuse of congested sentences. He cites an example of a very highly congested sentence like

“I know that that “that” that that student said was correct”

which he thinks might become a desirable practice amongst learners at a time when greater lengths of T-units have been equated with syntactic maturity. He thus proposes that “Unless a cut-off point is formulated as the terminus of full maturity, highly congested sentences become desirable” (1988:190).

The T-unit has also been criticized by Barnwell (1988) for its failure to deal adequately with second language learners' morphological errors.

It must be emphasized here that the researcher is aware of the limitations of the T-unit as a measure of syntactic complexity and that it is used here as an index of language

development and not of language effectiveness. The purpose here is to find out if foreign language students' mastery of the grammatical aspects of the written language improves as they move along the program.

In short, the T-Unit analysis is a sentence level measurement that does not deal with structures on a discourse level. That is why this work will be extended (in chapter five) to survey other types of measures that have been used to look at features other than that of syntax and error in the writing of learners of English as a foreign language. Measuring the effectiveness of a piece of written discourse by using measures of length alone or coupled with indices of error and syntactic complexity is theoretically unsound since it means leaving out such essential criteria as those pertaining to the interaction of a writer with his audience and with his text.

The measures that appear to be useful in discriminating between groups of ESL/EFL learners are the following:

- T-unit length
- Clause length
- Number of error-free T-Units
- Mean length of the error-free T-Unit

However, one should bear in mind that in the above mentioned studies variables like sex, age, major subject area, length of time studying English have not been controlled, nor have subjects been described in terms of some standardized measures of proficiency. Evaluation of subjects' writing in most of those studies has been based mainly on impressionistic evaluations which no doubt must have taken surface level structures and rate of error into consideration. That might have contributed to the fact that most researchers employing T-unit length, clause length, and the length of the error-free T-unit of ESL/EFL learners found that such measures proved statistically significant. One must also bear in mind that none of those studies considered the methodologies or the context in which the teaching of writing had taken place, a factor that this work chose not to exclude.

#### **4.2. Data Collection**

The written data which forms the basis of this investigation was obtained from the University of Damascus. A random sample of a number of students' exam compositions across four years was withdrawn from the University's depot to be photocopied. School curriculums and books in Syria whether in state or private schools are all set and unified by the Ministry of Education. Thus one can say with confidence that learners accepted to do this course in English Language and Literature at the University have been exposed to

the same syllabus all through their school education whether in state or private schools. They all had to sit for the same high school official exam known as the 'Baccalaureate' and they all had to study in books prescribed and distributed free by the Ministry of Education. Pupils joining state schools would only start learning the foreign language at middle school. On the other hand, pupils who join private schools start learning a foreign language (either English or French) at the primary level but once they reach the middle level they have to study in the same books as those of the state schools because they are required to comply with the requirements of the official exams set by the Ministry of Education. So although students who start off their school education at private schools might have the added advantage of being exposed to the foreign language at an earlier age, once they reach middle school they have to learn in the books prescribed by the Ministry of Education which means that during middle school they have to learn exactly what they have been learning during primary school. So when they start off at middle school they might be at an advantage compared to their fellow pupils who were at a state school but when they both finish high school they are both more or less at the same level of proficiency in the foreign language.

All entrants share the same mother tongue which is the Arabic language. Ages of the majority of entrants range between 17-19 at the time of admission.

This analysis is therefore carried out on a group of students that share the same L1. Moreover, the majority of students are of similar age groups, cultural backgrounds, foreign language and general knowledge backgrounds. They have studied books set by the Ministry of Education and they had to do the same courses at school. Moreover, they must have got similar marks in the English course in the high school exams, otherwise they could not have been accepted in the department of English language and literature at the University. One has to mention here that in each year there will be a few privileged students who have either studied abroad or who have been exposed more than others to the second language either through travel or through other sources, however only few of these students do languages and literature. The majority of the privileged students choose to do sciences.

The researcher has chosen data that had been written under exam conditions and that had already been assessed and marked by University teachers. Those teachers are the same ones who taught in the context described in chapters two and three. It was believed that such kind of data will be a true representative of the students' performance under the conditions in which they have to write and which in the end determine their success or failure in the composition course. A sample like this, it was believed, will give a true picture of the learners' performance at the university under the same pressures that they are exposed to and upon which they are always being assessed. At Damascus University exam composition writing is most often the only form of writing that a learner carries out

in this course, the result of which is detrimental to his success. A controlled test was not possible because it was felt that if students were to write when they knew that what they are going to write about would not determine their success or failure in that topic, they would not behave in the same way and thus would not give a true picture of their actual performance.

200 written composition exam papers of fifty Syrian students across four years at the University of Damascus were obtained. Although the choice of students was random it was determined sometimes by whether the four years exam papers of that student were available. Because we wanted to look at the papers with developmental issues in mind we had to make sure that each of those students' papers for each of the four years were available. The process of getting the administrations' permission to obtain past written papers of students was not easy. For the first time at the University of Damascus written exam papers of students were allowed out of the University<sup>1</sup>. The process of finding out each student's paper from one year to the next was another problem because of the thousands of students that sit for each paper in each year and the different numbers of resits that a student might do, besides the fact that these papers are accumulated in the University's depots haphazardly at times which added to the problem of finding the same student's papers across four years.

In the pilot study that we carried out prior to our analysis, we found out that a lot of the discrepancies in the analysis results was due to the variation in the modes of discourse of tasks on which students chose to write. So, to cut down on the number of variables in our data, we had to choose those papers of students who had chosen to write on the same tasks across four years. There is some evidence to support this decision in a number of works carried out by a number of researchers: Crowhurst 1977; Crowhurst & Piche 1979; Witte 1983a; and Afghari 1984, all of whom studied the influence of the mode of discourse on the written performance of their subjects. Finding a sample of students who have chosen to write on the same tasks across all four years was our next objective. That, however, was not easy because in each exam paper the student is offered a number of topics to choose from. Amongst 200 composition papers of 50 students across four years only fourteen students were found to have written on the same tasks in years one, two, three and four. The 56 compositions of these 14 students across the four years at the University were therefore chosen for the analysis.

### **4.3. The Analytical Procedures**

Based on the survey of the objective measures carried out in section 4.1, some measures that were thought to be useful in indicating growth in language proficiency have been

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<sup>1</sup> We were requested by Damascus University Administration not to expose any of the names or the marks of the students in our data. All names used in this work are fictitious.

replicated in this work. The types of measures that have been used in this study are the following:

1) One quantity variable

- Number of words in each composition

2) Five syntax variables

- Mean T-Unit length
- Mean T-Unit length plus co-ordinated predicates
- Mean clause length
- Mean length of the error free T-unit
- Mean number of subordinate clauses per T-unit

3) One error variable

- Percentage of the error free T-unit

#### 4.3.1. Segmentation of Samples

The investigator began the analysis by looking at each sample of texts to exclude any unintelligible material from the text so that it did not affect the counts. The measures were calculated from the following counts:

- 1) Number of words
- 2) Number of T-Units
- 3) Number of clauses
- 4) Number of co-ordinated predicates
- 5) Number of subordinate clauses
- 6) Number of error-free T-Units
- 7) Number of words in the error-free T-unit.

In what follows is a worked example that will illustrate how the counts have been carried out.

*The benefits and pleasures of learning English*

*I have chosen the English language for my study.//(1) I believe I can gain great benefits and pleasure.//(2) First of all, I can talk to every body in the world by the English*

language for this language is a universal language. //(3) It is a good thing if I can speak with any body in any place. //(4) I can visit England and enjoy its beautiful landscapes. //(5) I can visit France and enjoy the museums, the countries, and the ancient ruins. //(6) I can visit Canada, America, and Australia, //(7) and I can practice the every day life of anyone in these countries. //(8). It is a difficult situation for any foreign person that he cannot find anyone to talk with. //(9)

Secondly, I can satisfy my hobby which is reading. //(10) I like to read literature in its origin language. //(11) I prefer to read the novels of Dickens in English language for I can participate with every line in these novels. //(12) I like to read the poetry of T. S. Eliot, the novels of George Eliot, Jane Austin, Charlotte Bronte, D. H. Lawrence, and others. //(13) By reading the literature I can have more information, knowledge, and excitement. //(14) I can enjoy the English songs. //(15) Beside, I can read many writers and journalists and politics who are writing in English language from other countries. //(16) Nowadays, most of the authors prefers to write in English language in order to gain more popularity. //(17) So I can get more information about other lands. //(18).

There are many benefits I can get from my study of English. //(19) I believe that if one can speak in more one language, he will have more knowledge and education. //(20) Nowadays, anyone is unable to live far away in this world, //(21) he is in need to know what happens in America, Australia, Indea, Arab world, and in Europ, //(22) so if I can talk in English I can know about everything. //(23)

Every one is in need to learn foreign language, //(24) I would like to know more than one language. //(25)

The results of the analysis of the above example are given in what follows:

#### 4.3.1.1. Number of Words

Since all our data was entered on the computer, working out the number of words was simply carried out by the word processor. In the worked example above, the number of words is 330.

#### 4.3.1.2. T-unit Analysis

Each T-unit in our sample data was marked by the symbol // followed by a number to facilitate counting. In the worked example there are 25 T-units.

#### 4.3.1.3. Co-ordinated Predicates Analysis

The number of co-ordinated predicates within T-units was a count that was not used by Hunt, but Ann Medway (1984) used it in her study of the development of British school children. Hunt acknowledged the presence of co-ordinated predicates in the writing of his subjects, a phenomenon which appears early and suffers less falling away than co-ordination between T-units with 'and'. It is not an especially sophisticated device and in many writers who favour it, it has the effect of being responsible for considerable T-unit lengthening. Ann Medway (1984) reckons that the use of this extra count would reveal any 'misleading' lengthening of T-units of writers such as those occurring as a result of excessive fondness of this type of co-ordination.

In this work too the number of co-ordinated predicates was counted to check whether extra lengthening is caused by the student's fondness for this technique. In the worked example, all co-ordinated predicates have been marked by a square shape surrounding the conjunction used. In the worked example therefore, there are 2 co-ordinated predicates.

#### 4.3.1.4. Subordinate Clause Analysis

A subordinate clause is a clause that has to have a finite verb (a participle would not do). However, subordinate clauses were counted in the total even if no subordination conjunction was present. The following example taken from the worked sample illustrates the point just made:

e.g. I believe I can gain great benefits and pleasure.

In the worked example above each subordinate conjunction was marked by a circle to facilitate counts. There are 12 subordinate clauses in the worked example.

#### 4.3.1.5. Number of Error-free T-units

To avoid any confusion resulting from the process of determining what type of error an error is, every error with the exception of spelling and punctuation mistakes was marked. This was carried out by underlining all errors present in a text (pp. 139-140). The number of T-units with no error in them were then counted. In the worked example (pp. 139-140) there are 11 error-free T-units. It is worth mentioning here that this count might not have been very effective at times when a T-unit, for instance, had more than one error because it would still count as just one error T-unit. This can be misleading at times when one student for example happens to make three mistakes in one unit and another makes just one mistake. Both students in that case will then have one less error-free T-unit in their counts in spite of the fact that the former has made much more errors. It has also

been observed that longer T-units had more errors. To overcome this problem another measure, the length of the error free T-unit, has been added.

#### 4.3.1.6. Number of Words in the Error-free T-units

The number of words in each error-free T-unit was counted. In the worked example there are 115 words in the 11 error-free T-units.

From the above counts the following ratios were then calculated

1) Mean T-unit length

Number of words/number of T-units.

2) Mean length for T-units and co-ordinated predicates taken together.

Number of words/number of T-units + number of co-ordinated predicates

3) Mean clause length

Number of words/number of T-units + number of subordinate clauses

4) Mean number of subordinate clauses per T-unit

Number of T-units + number of subordinate clauses /number of T-units

5) Mean length of the error-free T-unit

Number of words in the error-free T-units / number of error-free T-units.

6) Percentage of the error-free T-units

Number of error-free T-units/ number of T-units

Through the use of the above described measures, two main issues of students' writing will be examined. The first issue concerns the development of learners as far as grammatical control is concerned and the second investigates the features of students' writing on which teachers base their evaluation most.

In what follows the results of the counts plus the results of our statistical analysis will be presented:

#### 4.4. Discussion of the Results of the Subjects' Growth in Syntactic Complexity

The aim of this part of the work is to trace any developmental trends in the writing of the same group of learners to see whether learners in general are developing from year one to year four as far as the morphosyntactic structures of the language are concerned. The test

ANOVA (analysis of variance<sup>2</sup>) with repeated measures has been used to detect any significant variation from one year to the next.

#### **4.4.1. The Quantity Variable**

##### **4.4.1.1. Growth in Student's Fluency from Year One to Year Four**

One would expect to find an increasing number of words in the writing of learners as they progress along the program. Their fluency in L2 is expected to increase with the continuous exposure to the foreign language. Findings suggest that as learners progressed along the program they wrote fewer and fewer number of words. The students' mean number of words was 353 in the first year, 350 in the second, 337 in the third, and 274 in the fourth. The reason for this might have been that the students were becoming more and more cautious not to make mistakes. The only significant results to be found in the variation of the number of words from year one to year four was between the first and the fourth year with a level of significance of  $p < 0.0091$  (see appendix O1), where surprisingly enough students wrote far fewer words in the fourth year than they did in the first and second. This is where the importance of the context in which writing took place comes into play. In the fourth year, students within a time limit of two hours, had to answer a long list of questions on the literary essay and on top of that they had to write a composition. Students having been instructed all the year through on the literary essay concentrated mostly on those questions first because that was what the teacher concentrated on. Because of the time limit they were left with little time to write the composition and that must have contributed to their bad performance in the fourth year paper.

Findings here suggest that the approach used to teach writing is impeding the learner because it is not helping him develop the spontaneity and fluency necessary to become a skilful writer.

#### **4.4.2. The Syntax Variables**

##### **4.4.2.1. Growth in Students' T-unit Length from Year One to Year Four**

The ANOVA test revealed a significance level of  $p < 0.0001$  with year one versus year three exhibiting the highest level of significance on the Scheffe's F-test (see appendix O2). The mean value for the T-unit length in years one, two, three and four was 13.8, 15.9, 17.9, and 13.7 words respectively. This shows that as students progress along the program they write longer T-units which indicates that they are gaining in syntactic complexity. However, in the fourth year students wrote shorter T-units than in previous

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<sup>2</sup> Refer to appendix N for a photocopy of the theoretical background used to calculate the analysis of variance by the StatView computer software.

years. The reason for this could have been the large number of questions that students were required to answer within the two hour time limit.

#### **4.4.2.2. Growth in Student's T-unit Length Plus Co-ordinated Predicates from Year One to Year Four**

This measure, although similar to the one preceding it, was used to depict any lengthening of T-units resulting from the over use of predicate co-ordination. Since the results of this measure are similar to the one preceding it (see appendix O3), one can conclude here that little lengthening in students' writing is caused by excessive predicate co-ordination. The ANOVA test showed a level of significance of  $p < 0.0001$  just like in the previous measure. Scheffe's F-test revealed significant results in year one versus two and in year one versus three, thus giving evidence that students' T-units grew longer as they progressed from year one to three. In the fourth year however, the mean length of the T-unit plus co-ordinated predicates was less than in the second and third years. It was 12.7 words in the fourth year, 12.1 in the first, 14.4 in the second and 15.7 in the third.

#### **4.4.2.3. Growth in Students' Clause Length from Year One to Year Four**

The ANOVA test revealed high significant values among groups in this measure. The high level of significance is shown by  $p < 0.0001$ . Scheffe's F-test revealed significance in year one versus two, year one versus three, year one versus four and year two versus three (see appendix O4). This suggests that as learners progress along the program they learn more and more about how to condense more words per clause by use of subordination, embeddings and deletions. Results of this measure and the preceding one suggest that learners are becoming syntactically more mature as they progress from one year to the next, a fact that many composition teachers at Damascus University are unaware of.

#### **4.4.2.4. Growth in the Students' Number of Subordinate Clauses Used per T-unit from Year One to Year Four**

The ANOVA test of repeated measures did not prove statistically significant at the 95% level of significance for the number of subordinate clauses per T-unit used by the same group from one year to the next (see appendix O5). But since a considerable amount of lengthening in the clause and T-unit was apparent in the results, it might have been due to an increased use of deletions and other forms of embeddings. More data were needed to make better judgements on this measure.

#### **4.4.2.5. Growth in Students' Error-free T-unit Length from Year One to Year Four**

The ANOVA tests of repeated measures showed highly significant results with  $p < 0.001$  (see appendix O6). Scheffe's F-test showed the most significant results in year one versus three, year two versus three and year three versus four. Thus one can conclude that as learners move along the course they tend to write longer T-units with fewer errors in them. In the fourth year however the mean length of the error-free T-unit was shorter than in the third. That again might have been due to the influence of the context of the exam.

#### **4.4.3. The Error Variable**

##### **4.4.3.1. Growth in Students' Percentage of Error-free T-units from Year One to Year Four**

The results showed that at the 95% level of significance,  $p < 0.01$  for this measure (see appendix O7). Scheffe's F-test showed the only significant value between year two and year four. It appears from the results that students made the largest number of errors in the second year and the smallest number of errors in the fourth. This suggests that as learners progress along the program they go through a stage of development. They explore the newly found code system and with this their rate of error increases to reach its peak in the second year but soon it decreases and reaches its lowest level in the fourth year.

Although the extra pressure of time limit in year four contributed to fewer words per composition and shorter T-units and clauses, it did not seem to cause extra occurrence of error. Students might have been extra careful. They might have been writing fewer words and shorter T-units and clauses just to avoid error making. If that was the case then the writing course taught might be impeding the intellectual growth of learners because it is discouraging them from putting their ideas forward.

#### **4.4.4. Conclusion**

The findings in this part of the work provide an answer to the first objective mentioned in the introduction to this chapter which is to assess the longitudinal development of learners as far as the morphosyntactic structures of the language are concerned. The results of the analysis seem to suggest that there is some growth as far as the handling of the morphosyntactic structures of the language are concerned. Learners did seem to be developing from year one to year three as far as language control is concerned. Students across the first three years wrote longer T-units, longer clauses, longer error-free T-units and fewer errors, however they did not show the same level of grammatical accuracy in

their fourth year. That may have been due to contextual factors such as the time restriction on them.

Thus although teachers at Damascus University show dissatisfaction with their learners' standard of linguistic proficiency, students did appear to be progressing as far as grammatical control is concerned. However, it was not possible for us to assess how significant this development was because there was no other controlled group to compare our results with. The only area where learners did not show progress was in the quantity variable. Contrary to what one might expect, students did not seem to be writing more from one year to the next. The students' fear perhaps of making errors and the large number of questions to be answered in the short time allowed might have resulted in this. One question here cannot fail springing to mind: if students do not develop as far as spontaneity and fluency in writing are concerned, will they ever become skilful writers? Moreover, in spite of the relative amount of development in the proficiency of the language that learners displayed between years one and three, learners were still a long way from acquiring anything near native speakers' proficiency, an objective that most teachers in the department aim for.

#### **4.5. Comparing the Results of the Analysis for the Passing and the Failing Papers.**

Findings in chapters two and three suggest that teachers concentrate mainly on the teaching of language and form and that what determines the teacher's evaluation of a certain exam composition paper is mainly correctness of surface level features. Meaning is given little attention and serves mainly as a tool for showing proof of code learning. In what follows, we shall try to look for evidence for this claim of ours. Is passing and failing in the composition paper at Damascus University determined by surface level features? To test for this two tailed T-tests were carried out on each of the quantity variable, syntax variables and error variable in the passing and failing papers. These measures were the number of words, the length of the T-unit, the length of the T-unit plus the co-ordinated predicates, the length of the clause, the rate of subordination, the length of the error-free T-unit and the percentage of the error-free T-units. In what follows a discussion of the results of the comparison between both groups will be presented:

##### **4.5.1. Results of the Quantity Variable**

###### **4.5.1.1. Variation in the Number of Words between the Passing and the Failing Students**

The two-tailed T-tests did not show significant variation at the 95% level between the number of words written by the passing and the failing students. The results nearing significance most were those of the number of words written in the first year where the

level of significance was  $p < 0.08$  (see appendix P1). However, there did seem to be a trend. The passing students did seem to be writing more words than the failing ones as is evident in the difference between the means between the two groups (see Table 4.1).

	Pass			Fail		
	n	Mean	Standard Deviation	n	Mean	Standard Deviation
Year One	6	399.3	116.4	8	319.0	35.5
Year Two	7	361.7	94.1	7	339.4	50.2
Year Three	7	384.0	140.3	7	291.5	52.2
Year Four	7	271.4	70.4	7	277.4	56.6

n = number of subjects

Table 4.1. The difference in the means and standard deviations between the passing and the failing students for the number of words used

The passing students wrote about 80 words more in the first year, 20 words more in the second year, 90 words more in the third year and almost the same number of words in the fourth year. It must be made clear at this point that the mode of discourse on which students had to write in the first and third years was the discursive type, whereas in the second and fourth years students were required to write on an opinion essay. Both groups did seem to be writing less on the opinion essay than they did on the discursive one. This suggests that the effect of the mode of discourse should not be ignored in an analysis of this kind. The reason for this large difference in number of words between both groups in years one and three could have been due to the fact that the more proficient writers were more fluent and thus more capable of 'waffling about', that in consequence might have influenced their passing of that paper. Another reason for that could have been the knowledge of the students of the extra strictness of the second and fourth year lecturers. It must be emphasized here that the number of passing and failing subjects in year one were not equal. Amongst the fourteen students that we studied from year one, 8 students failed and 6 students passed whereas seven students passed and seven failed in the rest of the years. The standard deviation between the passing students especially in years one and three was quite high. This indicates that the number of subjects used might not have been enough and that a larger sample would be needed if a study of this kind is to be replicated. In any case passing students did seem to be able to write more words especially on "discursive" topics.

## 4.5.2. Results of the Syntax Variables

### 4.5.2.1. Variation in T-unit Length between Passing and Failing Students

A close look at Table 4.2 below shows that the differences between the means in the length of the T-unit of the passing and failing students reveal a trend whereby in all four years the passing students wrote longer T-units.

	Pass			Fail		
	n	Mean	Standard Deviation	n	Mean	Standard Deviation
Year One	6	15.5	2.04	8	12.6	2.3
Year Two	7	17.7	3.6	7	14.0	2.4
Year Three	7	19.5	4.04	7	16.3	2.7
Year Four	7	14.5	2.3	7	12.9	2.3

n = number of subjects

Table 4.2. The difference in the means and standard deviations between the passing and the failing students for the measure of T-unit length

The two tailed T-test revealed significance between the passing and the failing students in the first two years only. The level of significance for the first year was  $p < 0.03$  and that of the second was  $p < 0.04$  (see appendix P2). Findings suggest that the level of syntactic complexity might be a factor taken into consideration by teachers as they mark composition papers. The large value of the standard deviation of the passing subjects in the third year (4.04) again indicates that a larger number of subjects would have yielded better results.

### 4.5.2.2. Variation in T-unit Length Plus Co-ordinated Predicates between Passing and Failing Students

Similarly, across all four years, the mean length of the T-unit plus its co-ordinated predicates was longer in the passing papers than in the failing ones as is evident in Table 4.3.

	Pass			Fail		
	n	Mean	Standard Deviation	n	Mean	Standard Deviation
Year One	6	13.9	2.2	8	11.1	1.4
Year Two	7	16.3	2.6	7	13.0	1.9
Year Three	7	16.7	3.0	7	15.1	2.8
Year Four	7	13.3	1.9	7	12.4	2.4

n = number of subjects

Table 4.3. The difference in the means and standard deviations between the passing and the failing students for the measure of T-unit length plus co-ordinated predicates

The two-tailed T-test revealed significance of  $p < 0.01$  and  $p < 0.02$  between the passing and the failing students of the first and second years respectively (see appendix P3). The mark therefore assigned to a certain paper might have been influenced by the degree of syntactic complexity exhibited in that paper. Comparing Table 4.2 with Table 4.3 reveals that the values for the passing students in Table 4.3 show a greater reduction in T-unit length which indicates that the passing students made use of more co-ordinated predicates than the failing ones. This suggests that some extra lengthening was caused by the passing students' fondness of predicate co-ordination (which according to Hunt is a sign of immaturity rather than maturity).

#### 4.5.2.3. Variation in Clause Length between the Passing and Failing Students

Although the differences between the means in clause length of the passing and failing papers reveal a trend whereby passing students always wrote longer clauses (Table 4.4), the two-tailed T-tests carried out between both groups showed high significance levels only in the first two years. The level of significance for the first year was  $p < 0.003$  and that of the second year was  $p < 0.008$  (see appendix P4). The results were not significant at the 95% for the third and the fourth years. Findings therefore reveal that students with longer clauses seemed to be the ones who pass which again suggests that teachers mark surface level features.

	Pass			Fail		
	n	Mean	Standard Deviation	n	Mean	Standard Deviation
Year One	6	8.8	1.0	8	7.2	0.6
Year Two	7	10.1	1.2	7	8.3	0.9
Year Three	7	11.1	1.2	7	10.2	1.7
Year Four	7	9.2	0.9	7	9.2	1.5

n = number of subjects

Table 4.4. The difference in the means and standard deviations between the passing and the failing students for the measure of clause length

#### 4.5.2.4. Variation in the Number of Subordinate Clauses per T-unit between the Passing and Failing Students

Although the results of the two-tailed T-tests did not reveal any significant variations between the two groups (see appendix P5), a quick look at Table 4.5 will show a trend whereby passing students seemed to be using more subordinate clauses than failing ones especially in the third and fourth years.

	Pass			Fail		
	n	Mean	Standard Deviation	n	Mean	Standard Deviation
Year One	6	1.76	0.2	8	1.74	0.3
Year Two	7	1.74	0.2	7	1.70	0.3
Year Three	7	1.76	0.3	7	1.59	0.1
Year Four	7	1.59	0.3	7	1.41	0.3

n = number of subjects

Table 4.5. The difference in the means and standard deviations between the passing and the failing students for the number of subordinate clauses per T-unit

Results seem to suggest that passing papers were those that utilized more subordinate clauses within T-units. More data perhaps would have yielded clearer results.

#### 4.5.2.5. Variation in the Length of the Error-free T-unit between the Passing and the Failing Students

Table 4.6 reveals a trend by which all passing students across all four years seemed to be writing longer error-free T-units. The results of the two-tailed T-tests at the 95% level of significance did not show significant variation between the passing and the failing

students in the first year, but in the second and third years there did seem to be a significant difference between the two groups. In the second year  $p < 0.04$  and in the third year  $p < 0.01$ . In the fourth year the level of significance was  $p < 0.07$  slightly exceeding the 95% level of significance (see appendix P6).

	Pass			Fail		
	n	Mean	Standard Deviation	n	Mean	Standard Deviation
Year One	6	11.9	4.3	8	10.4	2.2
Year Two	7	13.4	3.7	7	9.8	1.8
Year Three	7	18.8	4.7	7	12.4	3.7
Year Four	7	13.4	1.5	7	10.9	2.9

n = number of subjects

Table 4.6. The difference in the means and standard deviations between the passing and the failing students for the length of the error-free T-unit

While the means for the error-free T-unit length for the second year passing students increased, that of the second year failing ones decreased which indicates that failing students were making mistakes more often. This could be evidence that the failing students were those concerned more with meaning making and less with error-freeness and grammaticality (a point that will be investigated further in chapter five).

#### 4.5.3. Results of the Error Variable

##### 4.5.3.1. Variation in the Percentage of Error-free T-units between the Passing and the Failing Students

Although Table 4.7 reveals a trend by which passing students always seemed to be writing more error-free T-units, the two tailed T-tests for the first year passing and failing students did not show significant results. The reason might have been the fact that in the first year both groups were relatively unproficient in the language and made a fairly large number of errors. The results however did show high levels of significance between the two groups in the second, third and fourth years (see appendix P7). The levels of significance for the second, third and fourth years were  $p < 0.03$ ,  $p < 0.001$  and  $p < 0.009$  respectively. This suggests that teachers mark error.

	Pass			Fail		
	n	Mean	Standard Deviation	n	Mean	Standard Deviation
Year One	6	52.6%	25.5	8	35.2%	13.7
Year Two	7	49.0%	23.7	7	26.8%	4.7
Year Three	7	61.8%	17.9	7	33.2%	6.4
Year Four	7	64.5%	19.2	7	37.8%	12.1

n = number of subjects

Table 4.7. The difference in the means and standard deviations between the passing and the failing students for the percentage of error-free T-units

An interesting finding here is that in the second year there seemed to be a large drop in the percentage of error-free T-units for both groups but the drop was much greater for the failing group. One explanation for this could be the fact that students were trying to explore the newly found structures and lexis of the new code, another could be that students were under a lot of pressure due to the extra-strictness of the second year lecturer.

#### 4.5.4. Conclusion

The findings of this part provide an answer to the second objective put forward in the introduction concerning the degree by which grammatical complexity and rate of error influence the evaluation of a certain paper. Comparing features of syntactic complexity and error between passing and failing papers led us to believe that the passing papers were those that exhibited relatively more grammatical accuracy in the language. Passing papers, especially those of the first two years, were characterised by the use of longer T-units and longer clauses. Passing students, especially in the third and fourth years, wrote more subordinate clauses. Passing papers across all four years were characterised by longer error-free T-units and fewer errors. There seems to be evidence that error is more of a determinant factor in success or failure than any of the other variables—a damaging approach because it appears that learners who attempted to explore ideas with their limited repertoire of structures and forms were penalized and failed. More will be investigated in the next chapter to see if the failing papers were putting forward more meaning or not.

In this study too, the T-unit length, clause length, length of the error-free T-unit, and frequency of error proved convenient and useful measures in discriminating between the syntactically proficient and the syntactically less proficient writers especially when the data has been marked impressionistically by teachers.

Perhaps the most important finding made by this analysis is that developmental studies do not work on their own. Contextual factors have to be taken into account and the results of the fourth year papers were the best example of that. Factors like time and tasks assigned influenced the learners' performance. This finding on its own has its own educational implications. It highlights the importance of the context in which writing takes place, which implies that teachers should take such factors into consideration when assigning and evaluating tasks.

Having looked closely at the sentence-level features of a random sample of students' writing across four years, the next step is to look at the same data with a much broader perspective i.e. to look at the level of the text, and how well structured, organized and meaningful it is.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### Content and Organization Analysis

In chapter four, the internal characteristics of students' writing were investigated with two objectives in mind. The first was to measure the degree of development in grammatical complexity and error-freeness in the written compositions of a random sample of students across four years and the second was to examine how measures of syntactic complexity compare between the passing and failing students' papers, i.e. the degree by which grammatical complexity and error-freeness influence the mark assigned to a certain paper. Findings in chapter four revealed that students' writing across four years exhibited some signs of growth in grammatical complexity and less incidence of error. However, passing papers were those that displayed better grammatical control and less error. This chapter will concern itself with an investigation of the content and organization of the written product plus a comparison between the amount of content and appropriate organization presented by both the failing and the passing students. Our hypothesis is that meaning does not influence the mark given to a certain paper as much as syntactic complexity and error-freeness do. No claim is being made here that meaning and grammatical correctness are separate from one another, for the two are related and one influences the other. Besides, no one can dispute the fact that a more proficient writer is usually more capable of expressing what he really means. However, one cannot but question whether the learner who is not that grammatically proficient can be equally determined to express meaning even if the code fails him at times.

A study of development in writing that does not take both language and meaning into consideration is incomplete because writing is primarily an act of communicating meaning through language. The nature of the analysis used in this chapter is different from that of the previous one. Whilst the former's approach relied more on objective measures of counts, this one is mainly descriptive and comparative. This is due to the fact that meaning and organization are more difficult to depict than grammaticality and error-freeness. In short, the issues that this chapter intends to investigate are:

- 1) How much content the learner is trying to put forward from one year to the next and how coherently it is being presented.
- 2) How the amount and quality of content presented and its organization compare with the marks assigned to the papers.

### **5.1. Data Collection**

The data to be analyzed in this section is taken from the same sample of data that was used in the analysis carried out in chapter four. In the previous chapter we looked at syntactic complexity and rate of error in a random sample of 56 written compositions produced under exam conditions by fourteen students across four years. As our data is not controlled, it so happened that in their second and fourth years, students in our sample data produced writing on argumentative essays whereas in their first and third years they produced compositions on discursive writing. The former type of discourse requires the writer to produce an opinion on a specific matter whereas the latter asks for “waffling about” a certain topic. As the aim from this analysis is to look closely into the organization and content that the student writer is trying to put forward, we felt justified to carry out the analysis only on the argumentative essays of our sample data, first because samples of writing on the same mode of discourse were necessary for the researcher to be able to make judgements without the influence of other variables. Second, because the nature of the functional categories used in argumentative essays makes it easier for comparison than comparing discursive essays whereby the functions that learners might use may not be as predictable. This part of the data is therefore constituted only of the second and fourth year written exam essays of the same fourteen students whose syntactic maturity was analysed in chapter four. This choice however has one drawback and that is the fact that due to extra contextual constraints, students' performance was not at its best especially in the fourth year.

### **5.2. The Approach Adopted**

Analyzing meaning or rhetoric is not easy especially when it is to be carried out on the writing of unproficient foreign learners. While the literature is abundant in studies that carry out analysis of syntactic development, fewer studies attempt to look at how much ideas are being expressed and how organized they are for the simple reason that the latter is much more difficult to depict. It has been shown in the review presented in the previous chapter that many researchers devised and utilized a number of objective measures to study the development in linguistic complexity of both L1 and L2 learners of English. Unfortunately, studies of the development in idea expression and organization are limited. There exists another difference between these two types of analysis. Whilst the first has been characterized as objective because it relies mostly on counts and calculations such as counting the number of T-units and calculating their mean length or counting the number of errors and calculating their rate or counting the number of cohesive ties and working out the density and variations in their occurrences, the second on the other hand is much more descriptive. One study that has attempted to look at how EFL learners develop as far as rhetoric is concerned is a study carried out by Dahbi

(1984). To investigate the rhetorical development of a group of Moroccan University students, Dahbi (1984) devised a technique for analysis which he called “functional sentence mapping”. The aim of this analysis was to give the researcher a first hand feeling of how much idea development the writer carries out through the processes of subordination and coordination of ideas while at the same time giving an overview of paragraphing and communicative functions utilized by the writer. This type of analysis has been adopted in this work too to look at how unified a writer’s paragraphs are, how much idea development is carried out, and the type of functions a writer uses to achieve his purpose in writing. However, in this work “functional sentence mapping” on its own was found insufficient for depicting the relationship between content and the way it is organized. For that objective a further method of analysis has been used to examine the content and organization at the level of the paragraph and the essay in each of the compositions in our data. This analysis has been adapted from Kirszner and Mandell’s (1985:232-234) revision check-list for student writers and it will be discussed in detail in section 5.3.2.

In this work too as in Dahbi’s, it has been found that the two alternative measures available in the literature, “propositional analysis” (see Kintsch:1974 and Meyer:1975) which is based on comparing texts from the point of view of the presence or absence of a determined set of propositions and “topical structure analysis” (see Witte:1983b and Givon:1983) which starts from the thematic topic of the sentence and ends with a mapping of the discourse topic, were not suited for the data in question for a number of reasons. “Propositional analysis” was not suitable because the data contained non-standard constructions such as conjunctions or transition words and phrases whose propositional analysis would have been impossible. There was another problem associated with the use of this type of analysis and that is the size of the corpus that had to be analyzed and the micro-level at which the focus of such analysis would be. The limited language proficiency of the learners again made the use of the second type of analysis, the “topical structure analysis” problematic, because often one cannot find a justification as to why a certain grammatical structure like the predicate for example is fronted and highlighted by the learner. This type of analysis assumes that the writer can handle properly the process of thematization within the sentence, which is not often the case with foreign learners. Besides, the high level of subjectivity that is needed in order to determine what a sentence topic is and the hierarchical relationship between the sentential topics and how they develop into forming the discourse topic are amongst other problems that made this type of analysis unsuitable for the objectives of both studies. Moreover, “topical sentence analysis” does not deal properly with the content of a text because it bases the topic mapping on the occurrence and recurrence of single nouns and noun phrases. It also does not address the functional aspect of the composition, namely how each sentence contributes to the unfolding of the communicative behaviour that is

requested by the topic assignment; that is to say how each student interprets the task at hand and goes about fulfilling its requirements. For example, it does not clarify how he introduces his discourse and how clear or obscure it is and how involved or detached the writer is from his subject matter. It was questions like this that led Dahbi to develop what he called “functional sentence mapping”.

As the corpus of this study is similar to that of Dahbi’s, i.e. in both cases it is compositions written by foreign learners, and in both cases compositions are investigated as communicative events taking place in the context of the classroom, we therefore felt justified to use the measure of rhetoric that has been used by Dahbi (1984) but with certain modifications to suit our needs and our data.

In what follows, the work proceeds to explain in detail the two analytical procedures used in this work: the ‘functional sentence mapping’ and ‘Kirtzner and Mandell’s check-list’ for the content and form of the paragraph and the essay. This will be followed by findings and discussion of results of each in turn.

### **5.3. The Analytical Procedures**

Two main procedures have been used in this chapter. In the first section, section 5.3.1, the depth of subordination, i.e. idea development of each essay, was examined together with the functions used to fulfil its communicative objective. The results of both were then studied in all the data to look for signs of development. The results of the passing papers were also compared with those of the failing ones to look for the criteria on which teachers base their evaluation. In the second part of the analysis, section 5.3.2, there is more meaning focus and the analysis is more concerned with how each paragraph and each essay coheres and conforms with the norms of the English paragraph and the English essay. The results of those analyses were again used to assess how much development students made at the University and how these features varied between the passing and the failing papers.

#### **5.3.1. ‘Functional Sentence Mapping’**

In what follows how the mapping of the essays in the data was carried out and how their functions were analysed will be described separately.

##### **5.3.1.1. Mapping**

This method of analysis was adapted by Dahbi (1984) from Christensen (1967), D’Angelo (1976) and others. It was complemented with a functional analysis similar to the works of sociolinguists like Labov (1972) in his narrative analysis and Shuy in his study of the language functions in dialogue journals (Cf. Staton et al.,1982).

The mapping part of the analysis is carried out by determining whether the relationship between any two sentences is coordinate or subordinate. D'Angelo (1976) describes this analytical procedure in what follows:

“The reader assumes provisionally that the opening sentence of the essay is the lead sentence. Then he proceeds, sentence by sentence, through the whole discourse, searching for similarities and differences. If the second sentence is like the first, then it is set down as coordinate and given the same number as the first sentence. If the second sentence differs from the first, then it is indented as being subordinate to the first, and it is given the number 2. If the third sentence differs from the second, it too is indented and given the next number, but if it is coordinate to the previous sentence, then it is given the same number. A sentence may be either subordinate or coordinate to the sentence immediately above it.(D'Angelo 1976:203)

According to D'Angelo (1976), determining coordination and subordination between sentences is based on an intuitive sense of semantic relationships. Christensen (1967) shows how such relationships can be determined. Grammatical and semantic relationships are often clues that enable the researcher to determine whether the relation is that of coordination or subordination. Pronoun reference, parallel syntactic structures and the inductive or deductive progression of an argument are some of these types of clues.

Kirszner and Mandell (1985) believe that the use of this method enables the writer to look closely at the underlying structure of the paragraph and see how each sentence contributes to the central idea and consequently examine how unified a paragraph is.

The T-unit has been chosen for this analysis instead of the sentence for the simple reason that learners were writing in a foreign language and therefore did not always use punctuation appropriately; besides, the researcher did not want to impose her own punctuation on the original texts.

In the few cases where the relationship of a T-unit to the one before it could not be determined, the T-unit in question was marked with a question mark and was left with no level of indentation.

Problems of grammaticality or appropriateness were not important as the main concern of this analysis was to determine whether a T-unit in its gist brought something new to the text or developed the meaning of a previous T-unit. On pages 160-161 is a worked example illustrating how the analysis has been carried out.

### **5.3.1.2. The Functional Categories Found in the Data**

A bare structural map that does not indicate the semantic relationship of each T-unit will not show the communicative behaviour that a student writer is displaying in response to

the topic assigned. That is why a description of the argumentative functions of T-units in each composition was carried out.

The samples of texts on which the analysis was carried out were written on the following argumentative topics:

Year two: “The place of women is at home. Discuss.”

Year four: “Life now is better than it was a hundred years ago”.

In this analysis, the categories of argumentative functions used have been adapted from Dahbi’s (1984) categorisation of argumentative functions. However, the question of how successful students have been in their introductions and conclusions of the topics has been left to be dealt with in section 5.3.2. The main concern of this section is to examine whether a student writer presented enough arguments, support, elaborations, and proposals to satisfy the requirements of the task.

#### **a) The Argumentative Functional Categories Occurring in the Data**

The following argumentative categories were marked in each of the essays:

Argument (Y): is used for an argument that defends a topic.

Argument (N): is used for an argument that criticizes the topic.

Support (Y/N): is used to mark a T-unit which brings support to a particular argumentative position and the Y/N indicates whether the support is pro or con.

Both an argument and its support might occur in the same T-unit.

Refutation: describes an argument, pro or con, whose purpose is to refute an opposing argument.

Proposal: it usually participates in the argumentation while suggesting an alternative.

Position: when a student states his position towards the argument in question.

#### **b) Secondary Categories Occurring in the Data**

Elaboration: this category marks those T-units which serve to expand and elaborate on something that has been introduced.

Restatement: this category marks a T-unit that is more or less a repetition of an earlier one.

### 5.3.1.3. Paragraphing

In his 'functional sentence mapping', Dahbi (1984) indicated the writer's movement from one paragraph to the next by leaving two spaces between paragraphs. In this work we carried out the same procedure for the same purpose. Dahbi (1984) also counted the number of paragraphs occurring in each composition. He felt that the number of paragraphs and their function is sometimes indicative of whether the writer is concerned with the production of meaning or not. In this work, we shall also investigate the number of paragraphs used by students. This shall be carried out in section 5.4.1.3.

In what follows is a worked out example illustrating how the 'functional sentence mapping' of each composition was carried out:

#### The Place of Women

- 1 I don't agree that woman's place is in the home.//(1)[position]  
 2 I think that most of people agree with me especeally women, because they become more educated than the past.//(2)[elaboration]  
 3 They feel that the woman was injured for a long time, but now, she rebels in order to go out and work as the man for these reasons.//(3)[elaboration]
- 1 I believe that woman is equal to the man in everything.//(4)[argument N]  
 2 She has a feeling and mind to think, and so has he.//(5)[support]
- 1 I like to remind that all laws in the world consider that woman is equal to a man.//(6)[elaboration]  
 2 In addition to that, woman forms the half of society.//(7)[argument N]  
 3 This means that if we capture her in the house, we shall deprive the society to be advanced.//(8)[support]
- 1 Some people say that woman is weak according to man, so she can not work.//(9)[counter-argument]  
 2 but I say to them that nowadays, there are no jobs which require a great strength.//(10)[refutation]  
 2 In twentyth century, we have many jobs which do not need strength.//(11)[restatement]  
 3 They depends on the mind as teacher, doctor, actor etc...//(12)[support]
- 1 Those people say that if woman gose out and works, then her children will be bad, because, they will not find a mother who takes care of them.//(13)[counter-argument]  
 2 This idea is true, but the government begins to build schools for children for helping mothers.//(14)[refutation]  
 2 Everyday, we heard about special schools which take care of babies, and food them like their mothers.//[restatement](15)
- 1 We have to know that the history can prove to us that woman has an existance in the life.//(16)[support]  
 2 This proof comes when we remember M.Couri, Khawla Bint Al-athwar, and Alkhnsaa.//(17)[elaboration]

- 1 I think that woman will be able to take every things she wants and to realize their aims especially going out of the house and work.//(18)[position]
- 2 In the third world women have some freedom, //(19)[elaboration]
- 2 and they rebel to own all of it. //(20)[elaboration]
- 3 I wish to them victory and succed in their strugl to own her freedom. //(21)[elaboration]

(Nadia, 2nd year failing)

The first T-unit of the first paragraph is the topic sentence. It introduces the writer's position so it is given indentation level number '1'. The following T-unit, number two, adds a little bit more information by saying that education helped women realize this fact, so it is indented further and given the following number which is '2'. The third T-unit adds some new information by explaining the position of women past and present and thus it is further indented into level '3'.

T-unit number four introduces an opinion which is not directly related to the one preceding it, so it is given indentation number '1'. The following T-unit number five elaborates further on the one preceding it by saying that a woman is equal to a man because she has a mind and feelings just like he does, so it is indented further and given indentation level '2'. T-unit number six repeats the view in T-unit four which says that women are equal to men so it is given the same level of indentation which is level '1'. T-unit number seven adds to the previous one in meaning by saying that women constitute half of the society. This is marked by the use of the transition "in addition" and thus it is indented further than the one preceding it and given level '2'. The following T-unit number eight explains what happens to society if women are not allowed to work and thus it is given indentation level '3'.

T-unit number nine introduces the first of the counter arguments which again is not directly related to the T-unit directly preceding it and so it is considered a new sub-topic sentence and given indentation level '1'. T-units number ten and eleven present the same argument to defend the view presented in T-unit number nine and with this more information is added to the preceding T-Unit and hence both are indented further and given level '2'. T-unit twelve further explains by saying that women do not need to do jobs that require physical strength, on the contrary jobs nowadays need the strength of the mind and examples are given to support the view adopted and thus this T-unit is indented further into level '3'.

T-unit number thirteen introduces another counter-argument that is not directly relevant to the T-unit directly preceding it, so it is given indentation level '1'. T-unit number fourteen adds further information by giving evidence that nurseries can take care of children as much as their parents and by this it adds more information and is given

indentation level '2'. T-unit number fifteen repeats the same information in fourteen, so it is given the same level of indentation, i.e '2'.

T-unit number sixteen introduces another topic to support the thesis. This is achieved by giving evidence of the role that women played in history but it is not directly related to the preceding T-unit so it is again given indentation level '1'. The following T-unit number seventeen gives examples to support the argument, so it is indented further and given number '2' indentation level.

T-unit number eighteen presents the conclusion of the essay and thus it is given indentation level '1'. T-unit number nineteen adds more information by showing that women in the third world have got some freedom nowadays, so it is assigned a further level of indentation which is '2'. The following T-unit, number twenty, shows how women are achieving their aims through rebellion, and thus it is further indented into level '3'. The last T-unit presents the writer's hopes for the future, and so it is indented further into level '4'.

After the mapping of each of the compositions in the data was carried out, each composition was read again and each T-unit was assigned a function from the list on page 159 (see worked example pp. 160-161). In this work too, the researcher used double spacing to indicate the writer's movement from one paragraph to the next.

### **5.3.2. Kirszner and Mandell's Check-list**

In their book *Writing: A college rhetoric*, Kirszner and Mandell (1985) devised a revision check-list to help learners revise their writing and ensure that they have included all that is required. Their check-list covers all areas of revision i.e revising the whole essay for content and form, revising paragraphs, revising sentences and revising diction, tone, and style.

In this part of the work an adapted version of Kirszner and Mandell's (1985) revision check-list will be used for a different purpose. The purpose here is to check the extent to which learning writers conformed to what Kirszner and Mandell thought appropriate for producing a coherent task. Areas of special interest here are the content and organization of the paragraph and the content and organization of the whole essay.

In what follows is a Table of the questions used for analyzing each of the students' papers. These questions are adapted from Kirszner and Mandell's (1985:232-234) check-list and their aim here is to help analyze each paper taking into consideration important factors that each student writer should have taken into account whilst writing in English.

## **i) Content and Form of the Paragraph**

### Unity

1. Does each body paragraph contain only one main idea? (does each topic sentence identify a main idea)
2. Are topic sentences clearly recognizable and linked to the thesis?

### Completeness

1. Do body paragraphs contain enough detail-reasons, facts, examples-to support ideas?

### Order

1. Did the student writer construct paragraphs according to useful patterns? i.e. patterns that readers will recognize and readily understand.

### Coherence

1. Did the student writer use transitions (pronoun reference, synonyms or repetition) to link sentences within paragraphs so that their relationship is clear?

### Special purpose paragraphs

1. Does the introductory paragraph arouse the reader's interest and prepare him for what is to come?
2. Does the concluding paragraph sum up the main points or provide a sense of closure?

## **ii) Content and form of the whole essay**

### Structure

1. Is the overall pattern of development appropriate for the topic, purpose, and audience?
2. Do all body paragraphs support the thesis?
3. a. Can the thesis be easily identified and understood?  
b. Can all the supporting points be easily identified and understood?

### Coherence

1. Are there explicit connections between the thesis and the supporting information.
2. Are ideas presented in a logical sequence and paragraphs in a logical order?
3. Have all the points promised in the thesis been discussed in the body or not?
4. Do clear transitions between paragraphs allow the reader to follow the paper's structure?

### Completeness

1. Did the writer present enough information-reasons, examples, arguments-to make his point?
2. Did the writer fail to answer any of the questions that he raised either explicitly or implicitly?

Each exam paper in the data was examined in detail to see whether it answered the questions presented in the list above with a *Yes* or a *No*. All the results were tabulated to enable the researcher to get a clear idea of the whole group's writing results at a glance (these results are presented in appendixes R1, R2, S1, S2, T1, T2, U1, U2). If a certain question was answered with a *Yes* then it was marked as "I" in the Table of results. If on the other hand it was answered with a *No* then it was marked with "O".

In what follows, the results and discussion of the 'functional sentence mapping' and 'Kirtzner and Mandell's content and organization' analysis at the level of the paragraph and the essay will be presented . For the sake of clarity, the results for the 'functional sentence mapping' will be given in three sections entitled: 'sentence mapping', 'functional analysis', and 'paragraphing'.

## **5.4. Results and Discussion**

### **5.4.1. Results and Discussion of 'Functional Sentence Mapping'**

#### **5.4.1.1. Results and Discussion of 'Sentence Mapping'**

This type of analysis provided a map of the structure of each composition which in turn provided at a glance the degree of "depth" or "shallowness" of development characteristic of each paper. This enabled the researcher too to detect similarities and differences between any two compositions as far as how unified a writer's paragraphs are, i.e. how often a writer digresses from his main topic.

The deeper the level of indentation meant that the writer is concerned with giving more information. In what follows the results of the T-unit counts at each level of indentation in the passing and failing second and fourth year's papers are presented. The purpose of this is first to compare the levels of indentation in all the data from year two to year four to detect any signs of development, and second to compare the differences in indentation levels between the passing and the failing papers to detect whether the depth in meaning influences the mark assigned to a certain paper.

a) Variation in the Levels of Indentation between the Passing and Failing Second year Students

Table 5.1 shows that the mostly used level of indentation is level two (33%), which means that second year passing learners are not trying to develop their ideas much.

Indentation Level	1	2	3	4	5
Total	40	45	33	14	4
%	29.4	33.1	24.3	10.3	2.9

Table 5.1. Levels of indentation for the passing second year students

Similarly, the peak level of indentation for second year failing students is level two with 31% (see Table 5.2).

Indentation Level	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Total	45	50	34	18	8	5	1
%	27.9	31.1	21.1	11.2	5	3.1	0.6

Table 5.2. Levels of indentation of the second year failing students

Results of both second year failing and passing students are similar in most levels of indentation. The peak level for both groups is level two. Little difference is apparent in the distribution of T-units across the different levels. However, failing students attempted slightly more idea development on the fourth level of indentation. This is evidence that both groups are treating the task with more or less the same degree of depth in idea development.

b) Variation in the Levels of Indentation between the Passing and Failing Fourth year Students

For the passing fourth year students the peak level of indentation is, surprisingly, level one (see Table 5.3) which means that in the second year passing students performed better. This could mean that a lot of new topics were introduced by the passing students but not elaborated.

Indentation Level	1	2	3	4	5	6
Total	37	33	24	14	15	5
%	28.9	25.8	18.8	10.9	11.7	3.9

Table 5.3. Levels of indentation of the passing fourth year students

Table 5.4 reveals that the peak level of indentation for the failing students was level three.

Indentation Level	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Total	24	32	57	31	9	2	2
%	15.3	20.4	36.3	19.7	5.7	1.3	1.3

Table 5.4. Levels of indentation of the fourth year failing students

A closer look at Tables 5.3 and 5.4 shows that the levels of indentation reached by both groups in the fourth year are not as similar as they were in the second year. The peak level of indentation for the passing students fell down to level one whereas that of the failing ones went up to level three with more ideas being given at deeper levels. The reason for this drop in indentation level for the passing papers was caused by the writing of one of the students (in fact the highest marked one). This student had memorised chunks of texts and fitted them in wherever possible; that unfortunately produced a piece of text with a string of ideas that were not developed well enough. When the same counts for the passing students were repeated excluding that paper, different results were obtained. The peak level of indentation shifted to level two. In short those results meant that in the fourth year the passing students were trying to develop their ideas but not quite as well as those who have failed.

#### c) Development in the Ability to Achieve Deeper Levels of Indentation from Year two to Year Four

In order to look for signs of growth in the learner's abilities to develop ideas more from year two to year four at the University, all the levels of indentation for both the passing and the failing students in year two were added together and their percentages were worked out. The same procedure was repeated for the results of the fourth year. In Tables 5.5 and 5.6, the results of both years are compared:

Indentation Level	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Total	85	95	67	32	12	5	1
%	28.6	32	22.6	10.8	4	1.7	0.3

Table 5.5. Second year indentation levels for the whole group of students

Indentation level	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
total	61	65	81	45	24	7	2
%	21.4	22.8	28.4	15.8	8.4	2.5	0.7

Table 5.6. Fourth year indentation levels for the whole group of students

Tables 5.5 and 5.6 reveal that the peak in indentation levels shifted from level two in the second year to level three in the fourth which could be taken as a sign that there is a slight growth from year two to year four as far as idea development is concerned. However, one has to interpret these results taking into consideration the fact that the two tasks, although both were argumentative tasks, they were not on the same topic. That might have contributed to the variation in the results.

#### 5.4.1.2. Results and Discussion of the 'Functional Analysis'

The process of analyzing the functional categories was mainly a process of identifying all the arguments (pro/con), unique arguments, supports, restatements, and proposals made in each composition in the data. The aim of this analysis was first to compare variation in students' use of functions from year two to year four to examine whether any development in the density and type of functions used is taking place. The second purpose of this analysis was to investigate differences between the functions utilized by the failing and the passing students to investigate whether the quality of content that a learner puts forward influences the teacher's evaluation.

##### i) The Use of Arguments

##### a) Variation in the Use of Arguments between the Passing and Failing Second Year Students

In Table 5.7, the con arguments used and the number of their occurrences in each second year composition paper on the topic "The place of women is at home. Discuss" are presented:

Con Arguments Used	Frequency in Papers	
	Pass	Fail
The working woman can play an important role in the development of the society and civilization.	4	2
The working woman is capable of bringing up educated and understanding generations because she is in continuous contact with the outside world.	4	2
Women constitute half of the society. Depriving them from work means paralysing half of the community and depriving them from playing their roles in life.	4	6
In this age of technology there is no need for women to stay at home because housework can be finished much quicker and children can go to nurseries.	3	1
In these difficult times a woman is capable of earning money and helping her family financially.	3	2
If a woman organises her time, she will be capable of finishing her duties at home and at the same time succeed in her career.	-	1
Staying at home limits women.	-	2
A woman is capable of thinking and doing any job that a man can do.	4	7
Historically women have played great roles in society.	1	2
Women can do some jobs like teaching better than men because they are more patient.	-	1
When a woman goes out to work, she gains a lot from her contact with the people outside her home. She becomes much more understanding for different kinds of problems and feels more responsible towards her country.	2	-
A woman who works like a man is more capable of understanding him.	1	-
The working woman is more independent socially and economically.	3	-
A woman's place is outside working because working is living	1	-
A woman who does not work loses her position and dignity in the society.	1	-
The successful career woman is capable of doing twice the amount of work that any man does because she will have to manage her work inside and outside her house.	-	2
In all civilized countries women have got the same rights as man, i.e. she has got the right to work just as he has.	-	1
Education and the eradication of ignorance enabled women to rebel against the empty lives they lead indoors and seek their places outside the house.	-	1
Jobs nowadays do not require physical strength. They rely more on mental abilities and strength in character.	-	1

Table 5.7. Con arguments used and the number of their occurrences in the second year papers

A summary of the number of arguments appearing in each composition and a comparison of the total number of arguments appearing in second year passing and failing papers is presented in Table 5.8 below:

Failing Students	No.of Arguments	Passing Students	No. of Arguments
Sana	3	Safa	6
Nadia	6	Asma	6
May	5	Mihidin	7
Nada	4	Mohamed	3
Salwa	4	Hiba	3
Huda	3	Samar	2
Najat	6	Nuha	4
Total	31	Total	31

Table 5.8. The number of arguments put forward by each of the passing and the failing second year students

The results show that the number of arguments presented by second year passing and failing students are the same. This suggests that the passing students are not putting more meaning into their writing than the failing ones and that learners are being judged on some other aspect of their writing. Findings in chapter four suggested that it was mainly linguistic sophistication and error-freeness that determined a paper's mark. One can argue here that although the failing student is putting as much meaning into his writing as the passing one, he might not be giving as much support to his arguments as his fellow passing student. So the next step was to investigate the amount of details, facts and examples that each student gave to support his arguments. This was carried out later on in this chapter (section 5.4.2) however, results showed that 1/7 of the failing students and 1/7 of the passing ones in the second year did not present enough detail to support their arguments at the level of the paragraph. This gives further evidence to the hypothesis that learners are not being judged on the amount of meaning that they are putting forward. How sufficient was the overall amount of information that learners gave in their essays to make a certain point was also investigated. It was found out that none of the failing students and 1/7 of the passing students failed to present enough arguments to make her point. Findings suggest that all the failing students succeeded in presenting enough arguments. This again suggests that failing students are no less concerned in meaning making.

The analysis revealed that none of the second year students passing or failing presented any pro arguments, i.e arguments to support the view that the place of women is at home, but many used counter-arguments to be refuted later on by opposing arguments. More of the failing students used this technique which shows an awareness on the part of the writer of the sort of arguments that they may be faced with if they were to argue for a

certain case. They are quite aware of what their audiences' views might be and thus they develop their own opposing arguments to refute such views and to show the reader that they are aware of the arguments that can be used against them. This technique often adds force to the arguments used and is a sign of concern with meaning making and awareness of audience.

In Table 5.9, the counter-arguments used and the number of their occurrences in both the passing and the failing papers are presented:

Counter-arguments Used	Pass	Fail
Men do not want women to work outside because they think that women have been created only to serve them, to have children, clean the houses, cook and wash dishes	2	2
Men would not like women to work because they are afraid of their success.	1	-
The working mother is likely to ignore her duties towards her family and her home.	-	1
Women are weak creatures that have no effect on society.	-	2
Historically women have been considered as devils or as bad creatures in the society.	-	1

Table 5.9. The counter-arguments used and their occurrences in the second year failing and passing papers

Table 5.10 reveals that the number of counter arguments put forward by the failing students is twice as high as that used by the passing ones:

Failing Students	No. of Counter-arguments	Passing Students	No. of Counter-arguments
Huda	1	Samar	1
Salwa	2	Safa	1
May	1	Asma	1
Nadia	2		
Total	6	Total	3

Table 5.10. Comparison between the number of counter-arguments used by the second year passing and failing students

b) Variation in the Use of Arguments between the Passing and Failing Fourth Year Students

The pro arguments used by the passing and the failing students in the fourth year composition paper on the topic “Life now is better than it was a hundred years ago” are illustrated in Table 5.11:

Pro Arguments Used	Frequency in Papers	
	Pass	Fail
Electricity enters every house.	3	2
Water pipes enter every house.	1	2
Different means of comfortable and fast transportation are available for every one	2	4
Jobs are not as strenuous and working conditions are not as bad as they used to be in the past.	-	2
Means of luxury can be found in every house.	-	2
Education has developed a lot and it is available for everyone.	5	5
Scientific and technological developments helped man to live a more comfortable life.	4	3
People’s mentalities have become more flexible and moderate.	1	-
Men now live in houses instead of camps.	-	2
There has been a lot of improvements in the field of agriculture.	1	1
Women got most of their rights.	2	2
People got rid of a lot of bad habits.	1	1
The discovery of anaesthetic, new medicines and medical equipment made life much better.	2	4
People nowadays have more rights.	-	1
There has been a lot of development in thought.	1	-
Different means of communication are available	1	1
Life now has the values of previous civilizations	-	1
People have more developed characters.	1	-
People work more than they used to in the past.	1	-
Space technology developed rapidly.	1	1
Less over-population due to less ignorance among people.	-	1

Table 5.11. The pro arguments used by fourth year passing and failing students

The fourth year's task was not on the same topic as the second year one, yet both were seeking the students' opinion on a certain issue. Whilst all students disagreed with the second year's topic which was "the place of women is at home", the fourth year's topic was more controversial and not all students found that they could agree with the topic "life now is better than it was a hundred years ago". In consequence many student writers presented a number of con-arguments to disagree with the topic. Table 5.12 below summarizes the con arguments and the number of their occurrences in both the passing and the failing papers:

Con Arguments Used	Frequency in Papers Marked	
	Pass	Fail
Nowadays, It is hard to find people who are honest.	2	-
People have become very selfish.	-	1
There are no true friendships any more.	1	-
Man has become materialistic and greedy.	1	1
There is no simplicity and innocence any more.	1	1
There is no love among people as there used to be in the past.	1	3
Man is not free.	-	2
Man is not safe, there are a lot of wars and crimes taking place nowadays.	-	1
Members of a family are not as close as they used to be in the past.	-	2
People lost faith in God	-	1
Inflation	-	1
Marital bonds have become old-fashioned.	-	1

Table 5.12. The con arguments used by the passing and failing fourth year students

Table 5.13 shows the number of arguments (both pro and con) used by each fourth year student (passing and failing) together with the total number of arguments used by each group:

Failing Students	No.of Arguments	Passing Students	No. of Arguments
Sana	4	Safa	7
Nadia	6	Asma	3
Najat	7	May	5
Nada	7	Huda	4
Salwa	5	Hiba	3
Mohamed	5	Samar	8
Mihidin	15	Nuha	3
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>49</b>	<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>33</b>

Table 5.13. The number of arguments (pro or con) used by each of the passing and the failing fourth year students

Table 5.14 shows the number of con-arguments used by individual students and the total number of con-arguments put forward by the passing and failing students:

Failing Students	No.of Con-arguments	Passing Students	No. of Con-arguments
Najat	7	Hiba	1
Nada	2	Samar	5
Mihidin	5		
<b>Total</b>	<b>14</b>	<b>Total</b>	<b>6</b>

Table 5.14. The number of con arguments used by the passing and the failing students

Looking closely at Tables 5.13 and 5.14 above shows that the number of arguments (pro or con) that have been utilized by learners were much higher in the failing students' papers than they were in the passing ones. Findings suggest that the failing student is no less involved in meaning making than the passing one. The question of how sufficient was the amount of support given to such arguments was investigated (in section 5.4.2) to make sure that the failing students were not just presenting arguments without giving enough support to back them up. It was found that 3/7 of the failing students and 4/7 of the passing ones failed to present enough details, facts or examples to back up the arguments they gave at the level of the paragraph. When the overall amount of support to the view adopted in all of the essay was examined too, it was found that 1/7 of the failing and 2/7 of the passing ones failed to produce enough overall evidence to make their

points. Moreover, the number of con arguments in the failing papers was much higher than that in the passing ones, which again suggests that the failing student is tackling the topic at hand from its different angles. All of this evidence enforces our earlier belief that the failing student is no less concerned with content; on the contrary he is trying to put forward as much ideas as he can with his limited repertoire of lexis and structures and that perhaps is what is contributing to his failure.

c) Variation in Students' Use of Arguments from Year Two to Year Four

The number of arguments and counter arguments used in the second year by both the passing and the failing students was 71. The total number of pro and con arguments used in the fourth year was 86. Thus students wrote more arguments in the fourth year than they did in the second, however the number of supporting points used in the fourth year was fewer than that used in the second.

ii) **The Use of Unique Arguments**

Unique arguments are those arguments that have been used by only one writer. Their use can be a sign of the learner's originality and concentration on the invention of content. The last three con-arguments in Table 5.12 are examples of unique arguments.

a) Variation in the Use of Unique Arguments between the Passing and Failing Students

The number of unique arguments occurring in the failing and passing papers of second and fourth year subjects are summarized in Table 5.15 below:

	No. of Unique Arguments (pro or con)	
	Second Year	Fourth Year
Failing	5	10
Passing	3	5
Total	8	15

Table 5.15. Comparing the number of unique arguments written by the passing and the failing students in the second and the fourth year

Although one could argue here that some arguments are more weighty than others, that of course is a very subjective matter. The results of the analysis show that in both second and fourth years the failing students presented almost twice as many unique arguments as the passing ones. In the second year compositions, the number of unique arguments used by the passing students were 3 in comparison with 5 produced by the failing ones.

Similarly in the fourth year, the failing students produced 10 unique arguments in contrast with 5 produced by the passing ones. This can be taken as further evidence that the mark given to a certain paper is not taking into consideration factors other than grammar and error.

b) Variation in the Use of Unique Arguments from Year Two to Year Four

The total number of unique arguments used by both failing and passing students in the second year was about half that used in the fourth year. This could be taken as a sign that as students are developing in language proficiency they are becoming more capable of being original. Another reason for this variation may be the task itself. The fourth year composition task may have been easier to speak about than that of the second year.

iii) **The Use of Proposals**

The number of proposals in each composition was counted because it was felt that their use at times can be indicative of the learner's involvement in meaning making.

a) Variation in the Use of the Function of Proposal between the Passing and the Failing Papers

This analysis revealed that in the fourth year paper, the one on "life now is better than it was a hundred years ago", only 1/7 of the passing students and none of the seven failing ones made any proposals. However, in the second year paper, 7/7 of the passing students and 5/7 of the failing ones made proposals in their writing. These results can be used to show that making proposals is related to the task at hand. In our sample data, the same students wrote in different years, so if making proposals was only a characteristic of the better writers, then why did the better students not write proposals in both argumentative topics for years two and four. The fact that second year failing students used proposals in their writing, although to a lesser degree than the passing ones, again suggests that the failing student is no less concerned with content than the passing one.

b) Variation in the Use of the Function of Proposal from Year Two to Four

According to Dahbi (1984), a higher incidence of the function of proposal in students' writing will indicate more concern with content because it shows that the learner is concerned with finding solutions for the problem at hand. In what follows are some examples of 'proposals' used by two second year students:

*We must improve ourselves by getting rid of our ignorance which makes us unable to approach any step to the front, we must give our women their freedom to share in the process of the progress in their society, to prove their presence in their work, schools, colleges, and anywhere they are found.*

(Samar, 2nd year)

*In my opinion the best course to woman is to complete her education. If she hasn't a desire to educate, she must learn anything which can help her in life. She may learn how to made clothes, or to be a woman barber's. Any way she musn't stay at home, being unactive person.*

A few paragraphs later ...

*... The man must help woman to have her rights, he must respect woman ... Woman must avoid staying at home. She must walk side by side with man.*

(Sana, 2nd year)

Results of the counts revealed that, in the second year, 14 students from both groups made a total of 12 proposals in their writing on the topic: "the place of women is at home". In the fourth year, however, only one student made a proposal on the topic of "life now is better than it was a hundred years ago". This variation may have been due to the difference between the second year task and the fourth year one. On the topic of 'women', students felt that a lot of things could be done to improve on the status of women in society, whereas on the topic of 'life now is better than it was a hundred years ago', students did not have much suggestions to make since the majority felt that life now is better than it was in the past.

#### **iv) The Use of Restatements**

Restatements made by both groups were compared because it was felt that the writer who is concentrating more on form tends to restate ideas rather than give further support and elaboration to his arguments.

The analysis revealed that restatements were rarely made and even when they were made by either group they served the purpose of recapitulating arguments mentioned earlier, emphasising or clarifying a certain point, the following examples illustrate the point just made:

*Some people say that woman is weak according to man. so she can not work, but I say to them that nowadays, there are no jobs which require a great strength. In twentyth century, we have many jobs which do not need strength. They depends on the mind as teacher, doctor, actor, etc...*

(Nadia, 2nd year failing)

*There are many bad changes occurring these days. For example one hardly can find an employer, doctor, lawyer, or even an actor who works honestly. I want to say that one cannot find an honest man to respect his honesty.*

(Hiba, 4th year passing)

*And we must not forget that the working woman is more independante socially and economicaly. So, she won't need the help of any one in earning her living.*

(Safa, 2nd year passing)

*Man, in our days becomes very greedy because his main concern is to make more and more money, to reach great positions even if he loses people's love for him. the most important thing to him is to reach and achieve his aims without concerning with anything else in life.*

(Samar, 4th year passing)

#### **5.4.1.3. Paragraphing**

In another count where Dahbi (1984) compared the number of paragraphs produced by the high and the low rated papers, he found that the number of paragraphs in the high-rated papers was higher than that in the low-rated ones. The low-rated ones often consisted of four paragraphs: an introductory, a pro-arguments, a con-arguments, and a concluding paragraph. This he took as a sign that the less skilful writer is concentrating on the production of learnt forms rather than on the production of meaning.

##### **a) Variation in the Use of Paragraphing between the Passing and the Failing Students**

The results of this study's paragraph counts are presented in Table 5.16 (see appendix Q for a detailed presentation of the results of the analysis of the number of paragraphs written by each student):

	No. of Paragraphs	
	Second Year	Fourth Year
Failing	35	29
Passing	47	33
Total	82	62

Table 5.16. Comparing the number of paragraphs written by the passing and the failing students in the second and the fourth year

The number of paragraphs used by the passing students in both years was more than that used by the failing ones (see Table 5.16). In an analysis, it is of vital importance to look not only at the number of paragraphs used but at how effectively they have been used. The findings of the content and organization analysis carried out in sections 5.4.2.1 and 5.4.2.2 confirms our view that although passing students were writing more paragraphs, they were not always using them effectively. The example given in what follows is taken from one of the highly rated papers in the data to show how the learner has over-used paragraphing.

*Do you agree that women's place is at home?*

*I think every educated and liberated individual must ask him self this important question.*

*As far as I'm concerned, I feel extremely humiliated when I hear some people defend this kind of opinion. Because, as far as I know, we are living in the twentieth century where men and women are on equal terms in society.*

*So, why do some bias people want to reveal their theory about putting women in home?*

*I think, the reasons for their odd behaviour are because they are not convinced that woman is capable in doing things as they do.//or, on second hand they are afraid of woman's success. And I think every one feels this way must undergoes some kind of psycologic treatment.*

(safa, 2nd year passing)

Furthermore, it seems that Dahbi's (1984) view that students who present their essays in the four paragraph pattern are less skilful writers is not true because complying with a form of organization that is suitable to a certain genre is a strength rather than a weakness since it shows that the writers have learnt something about the organizational pattern of the language in question.

b) Variation in the Use of Paragraphing from Year two to Year Four

Table 5.16 reveals that the number of paragraphs that students produced declined from the second to the fourth year. The time allotted to composition writing in the fourth year was much shorter and in effect students wrote less number of words and consequently less number of paragraphs. More findings on the content and form at the level of the paragraph will be given in the following section.

**5.4.2. Results and Discussion of (Kirtzner and Mandell's) Content and Organization Analysis**

The analysis carried out so far enabled the researcher to form an idea about the depth in meaning making that learners were attempting and the functional categories that they were using to express their meanings. However, it was felt that such measures on their own did not give the researcher enough information about the content and organization within paragraphs and in the whole essays. Following the detailed functional mapping and in order to gain an overall picture of more aspects of the organization of the essays with more meaning focus, the need was felt for more tests. To fulfil this objective, a revision list designed by Kirszner and Mandell (1985) specifically to enable learning writers check on whether they fulfilled the requirements of a certain task or not has been used in this work (see section 5.3.2). A discussion of the findings is presented below:

**5.4.2.1. Second Year Students' Adherence to the Requirements of the Content and Organization of the Paragraph**

A summary of the results of the analysis on the relationship between content and organization within paragraphs in the second year failing and passing papers is given in appendices R1 and R2. In what follows is a detailed discussion of findings:

**i) Unity**

a) Does each body paragraph contain only one main idea?

It was found that 3/7 of the passing students and 2/7 of the failing ones did not confine themselves to writing just one main idea per paragraph. In some cases the student writer introduced more than one main idea per paragraph and in others the same idea ran over a number of paragraphs, as below:

*There is no doubt that the woman who does not work, loses her dignity as a human being and her position in her society. Thus, amidst the complexities of life and the swift advance of change, women find themselves forced to work. Nevertheless, from my point*

*of view, I think that women should work in order to live as useful members in their society.*

*As far as woman's work is concerned the best thing women can do is to assert their creative existence, and as a matter of fact they can satisfy their desires to render services to the community. However, the woman who does not work, hinders the progress of her family, society, and nation; she is a heavy burden on her society, because she steals part of what other people gain, whereas, their can be ^no gains without pains^.*

(Nuha, 2nd year passing)

The main idea in this paragraph is that women should have a career, but the idea runs over two paragraphs without making the idea any clearer.

*You cann't say that woman and man are equal although we witness the age of equality, but at the same time you cann't imagine any place without her. In the past, they believed that woman had no activity at all. She had to stay at home cooking, cleaning and taking care of her children. Moreover, she had no right to choose her life partner. They were selling her as if she was a peace of jewle or any successful deal between her father and her future husband.*

*Nowadays, it is the time to change that ancient idea. In may opinion, woman should take her freedom and practice it outside her home despite all the obstacles that she may face.*

(Huda, 2nd year failing)

In this example, the writer could have either merged the two paragraphs together or she could have put the first sentence in a separate paragraph and the comparison between the position of women past and present in another paragraph.

b) Are topic sentences clearly recognizable and linked to the thesis?

As to the question of whether all topic sentences have been recognizable, it was found that all subjects passing and failing presented clearly recognizable topic sentences. However, 2/7 of the passing students and 1/7 of the failing ones used topic sentences that were not relevant to the thesis.

*As far as woman's work is concerned the best thing women can do is to assert their creative existence, and as a matter of fact they can satisfy their desires to render services to the community. However, the woman who does not work, hinders the progress of her family, society, and nation; she is a heavy burden on her society, because she steals part of what other people gain, whereas, there can be ^no gains without pains^.*

(Nuha, 2nd year passing)

In the above example, the link between the topic sentence and the thesis which is the place of women does not seem to be clear enough.

*When we speak about a woman we don't separate her from man, because she may be his mother, sister, wife, and daughter. She is the nice kind who make life full of pleasures, so the man must help woman to have her rights, he must respect woman.*

(Sana, 2nd year failing)

The above mentioned example does not seem very relevant in a topic where the writer is trying to argue for women's place outside the house.

## ii) Completeness

Do all body paragraphs contain enough detail, reasons, and facts to support the position adopted?

It was found that 1/7 failing and 1/7 passing students did not use enough support. This suggests that the failing learner is not putting in less support than his fellow passing friend. In what follows, two examples, one from a passing paper and another from a failing one, are given:

*It is very good to know that women play a very important role in the improvement of the condition of society. Who are women? They are our mothers, sisters, aunts and daughters. We feel sorry when we hear that any mother or sister of us is ignorant.*

(Samar, 2nd year passing)

The writer of this composition did not clarify how a woman shares in improving the conditions of society.

*Mother has an important role with her children If she is educated, she can deal with her children successfully, while the ignorant mother fails in her role, destroys her life, her children, and live miserably.*

(Nada, 2nd year failing)

The writer here did not elaborate on why the educated mother succeeds and the ignorant one fails.

## iii) Order

Have students constructed paragraphs that could be easily recognized and understood?

It was found that 1/7 failing and 2/7 passing students did not construct paragraphs that could be easily recognized and understood as below:

*As far as I'm concerned, I think that woman in our technology period don't need to stay at home if she could finish her duties inside her house. She is able to bring money and help her husband and her children through in their difficult life.*

*She is now can ocur the position of unimportant member of any company, or a doctor or a teacher. Any job, I think, could be propable for her if she arranged her time in a good timetable which would allow her to enjoy her life as human being. However, now when she got her actual freedom, she prove that she can do the most things which men were doing before. She proved her responsibility when she could reach the highest position and be queen, prime minister, nurse and...*

*Woman is a responsible human being inside and outside her house trying to show her intellegence and ability to do everything and to change that bad belief about her.*

(Huda, 2nd year failing)

The meaning in this text is not clear mainly because of the wrong use of paragraphing and the wrong use of tenses.

*Do you agree that women's place is at home?*

*I think every educated and liberated individual must ask him self this important question.*

*As far as I'm concerned, I feel extremely humiliated when I hear some people defend this kind of opinion. Because, as far as I know, we are living in the twentieth century where men and women are on equal terms in society.*

*So, why do some bias people want to reveal their theory about putting women in home?*

*I think, the reasons for their odd behaviour are because they are not convinced that woman is capable in doing things as they do.//or, on second hand they are afraid of woman's success. And I think every one feels this way must undergoes some kind of psycologic treatment.*

(safa, 2nd year passing)

The paragraphs in the above example can be easily understood but one cannot help but question why the learner used so many paragraphs when there was not an obvious need for that.

## iv) Coherence

Did student writers use transitions to link sentences within paragraphs

2/7 passing and 2/7 failing students did not use enough or appropriate transitions between sentences within paragraphs, as below:

*Now, the woman compaines have a great perform to save the woman from the ancient thought and ? work hard to put her in the right place, and to gather all woman efforts to protect them from the cruel hand of the society.*

(Najat, 2nd year failing)

The cohesive tie missing in this example is the personal pronoun 'they' referring to women's campaigns in the first part of the sentence.

*Some women leave the home to be a useful element in the society. we have women ? by their efforts became doctors, teachers, nurses or the angles of merci who move the pain from others, the space women who risk their selves to make our life better.*

(Mihidin, 2nd year passing)

In the above example, the relative pronoun 'who' is missing from the second sentence. In the last sentence there is also no signalling that an example is being given.

*There is no doubt that the woman who does not work, loses her dignity as a human being and her position in her society. Thus, amidst the complexities of life and the swift advance of change, women find themselves forced to work. Nevertheless, from my point of view, I think that women should work in order to live as useful members in their society.*

*As far as woman's work is concerned the best thing women can do is to assert their creative existence, and as a matter of fact they can satisfy their desires to render services to the community. However, the woman who does not work, hinders the progress of her family, society, and nation; she is a heavy burden on her society, because she steals part of what other people gain, whereas, their can be ^no gains without pains^.*

(Nuha, 2nd year passing)

In the above example, one gets the feeling that the student misused some of the cohesive ties in her text.

v) **Special Purpose Paragraphs**

a) Does the introductory paragraph arouse the reader's interest?

It was found that 1/7 of the passing students' introductions and 2/7 of the failing ones' did not succeed in arousing the reader's interest. In two of the cases the reason was some ambiguity caused by the wrong choice of lexis such as the use of the word 'difficult' instead of 'wrong' in the following :

*It is difficult to say that the place of women is in the house, because women are forming the half of the community, and their role in society is vetal.*

(Mohamad, 2nd year passing)

and the use of this Arabic cliché in introducing topics

*How much pretty and interesting to speak about woman's place in this society, because she is an important member in it.*

(Salwa, 2nd year failing)

b) Does the concluding paragraph sum up the main points or provide a sense of closure?

To the question whether the student writer provides a sense of closure or sums up his arguments, it was found that 1/7 of the failing students and 3/7 of the passing ones failed to achieve this as in the following examples:

*Finally, we find that women has two roles to play in every society, first her responsibility in her house, next her responsibility towards her society in which she shares in building the civilization.*

(May 2nd year failing)

The discourse marker "finally" here signals closure; however, all through her essay, this student never mentioned the role of women inside the house. The compromise between both roles inside and outside the house comes as a shock to the reader who has not been informed about the importance of the role of women inside the house earlier on in the essay.

*and finally, I think I unswered the question about my opinion in woman's place in life, and I'de like to thank you, teacher, because you gave me this opportunity to talk about such important subject.*

(Safa, 2nd year passing)

Here again the use of the discourse marker "finally" signals closure, but the student chose to close her essay in a different way. She decided to inform the teacher that she has

answered the required task and at the same time thank him for the opportunity he gave her in talking about such an important issue.

#### 5.4.2.2. Fourth Year Students' Adherence to the Requirements of the Content and Organization of the Paragraph

A summary of the results of the analysis on the relationship between content and organization within paragraphs in the fourth year failing and passing papers is given in appendices S1 and S2. In what follows is a detailed discussion of findings:

##### i) Unity

###### a) Does each body paragraph contain only one main idea?

1/7 failing students and 2/7 passing ones used more than one main idea per paragraph in their fourth year paper. The following is an example taken from one of the passing papers:

*Character is the soil, abilities are the seeds. If the character is good, the seeds will grow, and the harvest will be plentiful. If the character is bad, there will be no harvest at all. Thus, people are becoming more aware of the importance of their characters in life. They are beginning to know that success in life depends on character rather than abilities. Hence in order to achieve success, they must depend on themselves, and that is what they are trying to do. There is no doubt that people in our modern society have strong wills. They are ready to face any obstacle, because they know that if they want to gather honey, they must suffer the stings of the bees. Thus, people are becoming more optimistic, because they know more than before that man is the architect of his own fortunes.*

(Nuha, 4th year passing)

In this example a number of new ideas are introduced in the same concluding paragraph of the composition.

###### b) Are all topic sentences clearly recognizable and linked to the thesis?

All topic sentences in both passing and failing papers were recognizable. However, only one of the passing students used a topic sentence that was not relevant to the thesis, as below:

*Character is the soil, abilities are the seeds. If the character is good, the seeds will grow, and the harvest will be plentiful. If the character is bad, there will be no harvest at all. Thus, people are becoming more aware of the importance of their characters in life. They are beginning to know that success in life depends on character rather than abilities.*

(Nuha 4th year passing)

The point that the writer is trying to make here does not seem very relevant to the thesis which is about how society have changed.

## ii) Completeness

Do all body paragraphs contain enough detail, support, examples etc... to support position adopted?

As to the question of how much ideas, examples and facts did a writer use to support his stand, it was found that 3/7 of the failing students and 4/7 of the passing ones failed to supply enough information to support some of their arguments. In what follows are some examples to illustrate the point just made:

*Travelling between countries was very difficult work. One should travell on animals for means of transportation were absent. Many hundred years ago, one should work very hard to earn his own living.*

*In our days, life is better than it was hundred years ago. Electricity is every where. All streets, houses, and markets are lightened.*

(Sana, 4th year failing)

In the example above, the idea that people in the past had to work much harder is not clear because it is neither explained nor exemplified.

*And if we want to discuss the man's life itself. we find that man in the past practece very difficult crafts in a difficult situations. He had no rights to demand for. His atmospher is full of diseases and troubles while man in our life has the reception of his defects. He know how to deal with his situation because every thing is existed in his age.*

(Salwa, 4th year failing)

The student in this example did not clarify the sort of crafts the man of the past practiced and the sort of rights that he did not have.

*Of course, these are not the only changes which make life better. There are scientific, mechanical, technological, agricultural and economic changes which help to make our life better than it was a hundred years ago.*

(May, 4th year passing)

The above example is the concluding paragraph of the text. Not all the ideas mentioned in it have been discussed earlier on in the composition. The student writer may have ran short of time so she could not elaborate on the ideas she expressed in her final paragraph.

*So, we notice great changes in mentality, education, technology, and in science. As for the change in mentality many ideas are changed and replaced by modern and practical concepts so we acquired flexibility and moderaty.*

(Safa, 4th year passing)

The student here did not give any examples to show the reader how people's mentalities have changed.

*The Syrian society - which is my society - is changing from its defferent sides. If we take a look on the position of women in the society today, easily we can say that the outlook on them is very different from the one they had thirty years ago. The development of education in Syria, pushed its society forward and helped it to omit many bad habits and traditions for example on that the....*

(Hiba, 4th year passing)

In this example the learner did not elaborate on how the position of women became better than it was a hundred years ago.

### iii) Order

Have students constructed paragraphs that could be easily recognized and understood?

None of the failing students and 2/7 of the passing ones constructed paragraphs that were not easily recognizable. The following composition from a passing paper illustrates the point just made:

#### *Our changing society*

*Where there is a will there is a way*

*Amidst the complexities of the twentieth century life and the swift advance of change and progress, the individual finds himself in perplexity. Hence, change in life is expected on many levels. On one hand, there are many changes in the education of our society. It is certainly true that education is the most valuable asset in our lives. It gives us the right to think as we like, to read anything we wish, and to express our opinions. thus, education is the means by which we make our lives useful. Hence more and more people are going to school and university nowadays.*

*Education enables people to supply themselves with the intellectual needs, and to enjoy the luxuries of the present age. Thus, the persons who learn in our society safeguard their dignities as human beings. In addition to that, they can satisfy their desires to render services to the community. There is no doubt that education plays an important role in our developing society.*

*“Actions speak louder than words” . Hence people tend to achieve their hopes. They no longer believe in words. Thus they use every powerful means, in order to make our society a civilized one. In fact, civilization is the means by which people try to follow the European countries. Therefore, people tend to work more than they did in the past. They realized the importance of work in society. Nowadays, people are able to know that if they want to reach the top of the ladder, they must not be afraid to put their feet on the first rung.*

*“Character is the soil, abilities are the seeds.” If the character is good, the seeds will grow, and the harvest will be plentiful. If the character is bad, there will be no harvest at all. Thus, people are becoming more aware of the importance of their characters in life. They are beginning to know that success in life depends on character rather than abilities. Hence in order to achieve success, they must depend on themselves, and that is what they are trying to do. There is no doubt that people in our modern society have strong wills. They are ready to face any obstacle, because they know that if they want to gather honey, they must suffer the stings of the bees. Thus, people are becoming more optimistic, because they know more than before that man is the architect of his own fortunes.*

(Nuha, 4th year)

In the above example, the first topic (the one on education) runs over two paragraphs and three new ideas are introduced in the concluding paragraph.

#### iv) Coherence

Have the student writer used transitions to link sentences within paragraphs?

As to the use of transitions within paragraphs, it was found that 2/7 of the failing students and 2/7 of the passing ones did not utilize enough cohesive ties within paragraphs as is evident in what follows:

*life became more simple and better, because the technology led to a revolution in means which help the human beings to live a better life. There is a big number of hospitals, universities, schools and communication means which were not found in the past.*

(Mohamad, 4th year failing)

In the above example a cohesive tie linking the first and the second sentence would have made the meaning clearer to the reader.

*Character is the soil, abilities are the seeds. If the character is good, the seeds will grow, and the harvest will be plentiful. If the character is bad, there will be no harvest at all. Thus, people are becoming more aware of the importance of their characters in life. They are beginning to know that success in life depends on character rather than abilities.*

*Hence in order to achieve success, they must depend on themselves, and that is what they are trying to do. There is no doubt that people in our modern society have strong wills. They are ready to face any obstacle, because they know that if they want to gather honey, they must suffer the stings of the bees. Thus, people are becoming more optimistic, because they know more than before that man is the architect of his own fortunes.*

(Nuha, 4th year passing)

In the previous example there are some cohesive ties that have been used unnecessarily.

#### v) Special Purpose Paragraphs

##### a) Does the introductory paragraph arouse the reader's interest?

As to the question of how interesting an introduction is, none of the failing students and 1/7 of the passing ones produced an ambiguous introduction, as below:

*Amidst the complexities of the twentieth century life and the swift advance of change and progress, the individual finds himself in perplexity. Hence, change in life is expected on many levels. On one hand, there are many changes in the education of our society.*

(Nuha, 4th year passing)

The above introduction does not make it clear to the reader what the thesis is really about. Is it about the positive changes occurring in society or is about the negative ones.

##### b) Does the concluding paragraph sum up the main points or provide a sense of closure?

The analysis revealed that the concluding paragraphs of two compositions (one passing and one failing) were missing possibly due to time restrictions. Moreover, 1/6 of the failing students and 2/6 of the passing ones wrote conclusions but failed to provide a sense of closure to their compositions, as is evident in the examples given below:

*Man, in our days becomes very greedy because his main concern is to make more and more money, to reach great positions even if he loses people's love for him. The most important thing to him is to reach and achieve his aims without concerning with any thing else in life and this leads consequently to a struggle among people. This struggle also has it's bad influence because it leads to a great gap among people.*

(Samar, 4th year passing)

This concluding paragraph provides a suitable conclusion to the last argument that the writer has used; however, it does not provide a conclusion to the whole composition where the writer described the good as well as the bad aspects of the changes in our modern life. The reason for this may have been shortage in time.

*Man in the 20th century lose his belief in God, love, goodness, and Kindnes. Every man is running to gain more and more, he wants to have money, and high rank in society. Man loses innocent that he had hundered years ago. In fact, there are many reason for the terrible stat in the 20th century. The wrong may be with man himself or with the society around him. who knows?*

(Najat, 4th year failing)

The writer in this example chose to leave her audience with an open ended conclusion. In it she questions the reasons why 20th century man has become so corrupt. The main topic however is whether life now has become better than it was a hundred years ago or not.

*Character is the soil, abilities are the seeds. If the character is good, the seeds will grow, and the harvest will be plentiful. If the character is bad, there will be no harvest at all. Thus, people are becoming more aware of the importance of their characters in life. They are beginning to know that success in life depends on character rather than abilities. Hence in order to achieve success, they must depend on themselves, and that is what they are trying to do. There is no doubt that people in our modern society have strong wills. They are ready to face any obstacle, because they know that if they want to gather honey, they must suffer the stings of the bees. Thus, people are becoming more optimistic, because they know more than before that man is the architect of his own fortunes.*

(Nuha, 4th year passing)

In this concluding paragraph, the writer introduced three new ideas and failed to signal to the reader that the composition has come to an end.

Having analysed and discussed the degree to which second and fourth year students adhere to the requirements of the content and organization of the paragraph, the next part will deal with the students' handling of the content and organization of the whole essay.

#### **5.4.2.3. Second Year Students' Adherence to the Requirements of the Content and Organization of the Essay**

A summary of the results of the analysis on the relationship between content and organization within essays in the second year failing and passing papers is given in appendices T1 and T2. In what follows is a detailed discussion of findings:

##### **i) Structure**

###### **a) Is the overall pattern of development appropriate for the topic and purpose?**

The analysis have shown that most students passing and failing used patterns of development that were appropriate to the purpose of the argumentative task. Most of

them introduced the topic first, presented arguments to support their views, and finally concluded their compositions.

b) Do all body paragraphs support the thesis?

All body paragraphs in the passing and the failing papers seemed to be supporting the thesis which is that women's place is outside the house.

c) Can the thesis and the supporting points be easily identified and understood?

To the question of whether the student writers' thesis and supporting points could be easily identified and understood, it was found that none of the failing or the passing students failed to clarify what their thesis was.

However, it was found that 1/7 of the failing students and 2/7 of the passing ones failed at times to present supporting points that could be easily understood, as below:

*Nowadays, it is the time to change that ancient idea. In my opinion, woman should take her freedom and practice it outside her home despite all the obstacles that she may face.*

A few paragraphs later:

*However, now when she got her actual freedom, she prove that she can do the most things which men were doing before. She proved her responsibility when she could reach the highest position and be queen, prime minister, nurse and....*

A few paragraphs later:

*Woman is a responsible human being inside and outside her house trying to show her intellegence and ability to do everything and to change that bad belief about her.*

(Huda, 2nd year failing)

Reading the above example, one gets confused, not knowing whether women have their rights or not.

*It is very good to know that women play a very important role in the improvement of the condition of society. Who are women ? They are our mothers, sisters, aunts and daughters. We feel sorry when we hear that any mother or sister of us is ignorant.*

(Samar, 2nd year passing)

*As far as woman's work is concerned the best thing women can do is to assert their creative existence, and as a matter of fact they can satisfy their desires to render services to the community.*

*(Nuha, 2nd year passing)*

In the two examples above, the supporting point does not seem to be very clear.

## ii) Coherence

### a) Are there explicit connections between thesis and supporting information?

All second year students passing and failing used some kind of link to show connection between the thesis and supporting information.

### b) Are ideas presented in a logical order?

Results show that 1/7 of the passing students and 1/7 of the failing ones did not present their ideas in a logical order. In the example above taken from Huda's paper (section c above), the logical organization of her arguments does not seem to be very clear.

### c) Do clear transitions between paragraphs allow the reader to follow the paper's structure?

Some of the students in the second year, 1/7 failing ones and 2/7 passing ones, either did not use a cohesive tie at all or used an inappropriate one to signal transition from one paragraph to the next.

In what follows, the topic sentence used to introduce one of the main arguments in a failing composition is a typical cliché one that is often used in Arabic.

*If we are discussing her responsibilities, we will see that she has much work in this society. She works inside the house and out the house, she takes care of her childrens, her house and her husband. She is so patient and great. So it wil not be possible for us to make her in the house, because she has efforts and society in need them.*

*speaking about woman is a very important subject, because she consists half society. If we will not allow her to worke outside the house, we will loose her efforts.*

*(Salwa, 2nd year failing)*

*It is difficult to say that the place of women is in the house, because women are forming the half of the community, and their role in society is vetal. Women can share men in many jobs, and help them in the life, to the extreme that, we can't do without them. But that does not mean women have not any responsibility, or any role in the home.*

*The role of women at home may be limited, only to take care with their children and their husbands. And to create the good atmosphere, which full of happiness in the house between them in one hand, and their husbands and children in other's*

(Mohamad, 2nd year passing)

In the above example, the link between the first paragraph and the second does not seem very clear. In fact, one is not clear why the student writer decided to start a new paragraph when he was still illustrating the role of women at home.

### iii) Completeness

a) Did the writer present enough information - reasons, examples, arguments,-to make his point?

Only one of the passing students failed to use enough support for her argument as a whole, as below:

*To keep the balance between women and men, it is good to understand the relationship between them. Women and men are two important in our society and without both no society can survive. What I mean is that the importance of women is not less than the importance of men.*

*There are two opposite points of view. One if them says that women must stay at home, must stay behind men to serve him only. They are found only to marry, to clean homes, to wash clothes and dishes. So what about their role in the process of the progress in their society ? It is nothing.*

*The second point of view is that women must go outside homes to work, to teach in schools and colleges, to bring up children who will become successful men in the future. Women have many faculties and they must use their ability in the serving of society's economic.*

*It is very good to know that women play a very important role in the improvement of the condition of society. Who are women ? They are our mothers, sisters, aunts and daughters. We feel sorry when we hear that any mother or sister of us is ignorant. What I want to say is that we are in the year [1986] and we must develop ourselves by ourselves, we must improve ourselves by getting ride of our ignorance which makes us unable to approach any step to the front. We must give our women their freedom to share in the process of the progress in their society, to prove their presence in their work, schools, colleges, and anywhere they are found.*

*Finally, we must remember the proverb which says 'behind every great man is a woman'. In other words not men to lead and women to follow.*

(Samar, 4th year passing)

In the above example the student is arguing for the place of women outside the house. However in all her text there is hardly any reasoning as to why the place of women should be outside the home.

b) Did the student answer all the questions raised in the introduction?

It was found that all students in both groups answered either explicitly or implicitly all the questions that they raised in their introductions.

#### **5.4.2.4. Fourth Year Students' Adherence to the Requirements of the Content and Organization of the Essay**

A summary of the results of the analysis on the relationship between content and organization within essays in the fourth year failing and passing papers is given in appendices U1 and U2. In what follows is a detailed discussion of findings:

##### **i) Structure**

a) Is the overall pattern of development appropriate for the topic, purpose and audience?

In most of the samples of students' writing, passing and failing, the overall pattern of development of the essay was suitable to the purpose and the topic which was about "life nowadays is better than it was a hundred years ago". Students often introduced the topic, spoke about how things were in the past and then spoke about how things are nowadays and finally concluded the topic. Others chose to carry out a comparison of life in the past and life nowadays simultaneously comparing each aspect of the change at a time. In Nuha's paper (see pages 187-188) however, there was not a clear organizational pattern. The composition seemed to centre around some English and Arabic proverbs.

b) Do all body paragraphs support the thesis?

The results showed that none of the failing students and 2/7 of the passing ones used paragraphs or parts of paragraphs that did not support the thesis as is evident in the following example:

*If we ask our grandfathers about their life, we can notice that our life is much better than theirs. In the past; people did not have water and electricity in their houses so they used to bring water from springs in order to drink and cook. As for electricity; they were not*

*so concerned about it because they used to sleep early, and they did not have any aparantus which need electricity.*

(May, 4th year passing)

The writer here is trying to show that life now is better than it was a hundred years ago by enumerating the luxuries of our present life: water and electricity. However, in the process of doing so, she contradicted herself by saying that electricity was not needed because people used to sleep early and they had no electrical appliances.

c) Can the thesis be easily identified and understood?

Only one of the passing student writers failed to make her thesis identifiable. She was busy displaying one of the cliché sentences that she had memorised and consequently ended up obscuring the thesis of her composition which was about 'life now is better than it was a hundred years ago'. The following example may clarify the point just made:

*Amidst the complexities of the twentieth century life and the swift advance of change and progress, the individual finds himself in perplexity. Hence, change in life is expected on many levels. On one hand, there are many changes in the education of our society. It is certainly true that education is the most valuable asset in our lives. It gives us the right to think as we like, to read anything we wish, and to express our opinions. thus, education is the means by which we make our lives useful.*

*Education enables people to supply themselves with the intellectual needs, and to enjoy the luxuries of the present age. Thus, the persons who learn in our society safeguard their dignities as human beings. In addition to that, they can satisfy their desires to render services to the community. there is no doubt that education plays an important role in our developing society.*

(Nuha, 4th year passing)

In this introductory paragraph, it is not clear whether the composition is about education or about changes in society.

In the text above, the reader gets the impression that the thesis is about the importance of education rather than about education as an aspect that have changed in our modern societies.

d) Can all the supporting points be easily identified and understood?

In one of the examples from a passing paper, it was hard at times to understand all the supporting points, as below:

*Character is the soil, abilities are the seeds. If the character is good, the seeds will grow, and the harvest will be plentiful. If the character is bad, there will be no harvest at all.*

*Thus, people are becoming more aware of the importance of their characters in life. They are beginning to know that success in life depends on character rather than abilities. Hence in order to achieve success, they must depend on themselves, and that is what they are trying to do. There is no doubt that people in our modern society have strong wills. They are ready to face any obstacle, because they know that if they want to gather honey, they must suffer the stings of the bees. Thus, people are becoming more optimistic, because they know more than before that man is the architect of his own fortunes.*

(Nuha, 4th year passing)

The writer of the text above did not clarify to her audience why people nowadays have become stronger in character and wills and more optimistic.

All fourth year papers, passing and failing, managed to present supporting points that were easily identifiable.

## ii) Coherence

### a) Are there explicit connections between the thesis and the supporting information?

It was also found that in most of our subjects' data, student writers exhibited some use of explicit links between their thesis and their supporting information

### b) Are ideas presented in a logical order?

Presenting ideas and paragraphs in a logical order was a characteristic of all students' writing, passing and failing.

### c) Do clear transitions between paragraphs allow the reader to follow the paper's structure?

Through the use of cohesive ties, all students succeeded in signalling transitions from one paragraph to the next.

## iii) Completeness

### a) Did the writer present enough information - reasons, examples, arguments,- to make his point?

1/7 of the failing students and 2/7 of the passing ones failed to give enough information to support the positions that they chose to adopt.

### b) Did the writer answer all the questions that he/she raised either explicitly or implicitly?

As to whether students answered all the questions that they raised in the process of their writing, it was found that all students passing and failing succeeded in this.

## **5.5. Conclusions**

Before proceeding to present the conclusions arrived at through the analysis carried out in this chapter, it is worthwhile commenting on the usefulness of the measures used in this work. One important finding made here is that meaning is not easy to quantify. Sentence mapping as a measure of analyzing meaning has some drawbacks too. Besides it being a time consuming process, it does not reveal at times the digressions from the main topics that a writer may attempt if he goes on elaborating on each new point that he makes. This however was not applicable in our study because students rarely digressed from their main topics.

### **5.5.1. Conclusion on 'Functional Sentence Mapping'**

#### **i) Learners' Development between Years One and Four**

Findings suggest that little conclusions could be made in connection with students' development from years two to four. The analysis revealed that students in the fourth year wrote more arguments but with less supporting points. They indented more i.e. they expressed deeper subordination of ideas in the fourth year than in the second but that may have been due to the task and not due to more cognitive development. Students in the fourth year wrote fewer paragraphs, but that again is understandable because they had more questions to answer than in the second year and consequently wrote less number of words. Students also wrote fewer proposals in the fourth year, which again may have been due to the difference in tasks. The increase in the use of unique arguments between years two and four may have been due to either the type of task assigned or to more originality in idea expression on the part of the learners. One important conclusion that one can draw here is that students from second to fourth year did not seem to be making much development as far as meaning making is concerned. However the only conclusion that one can draw with confidence here is that studies of development cannot be carried out without a consideration of the task and context in which the writing has actually taken place.

#### **ii) Differences between the Passing and Failing Composition Exam Papers**

Failing students in the second year wrote the same number of arguments as those passing, with roughly the same levels of indentation. In the fourth year, however, failing students wrote deeper levels of indentation, more arguments, counter-arguments, and unique arguments. Both groups of students in both years used roughly the same number of proposals and restatements. Failing students wrote fewer paragraphs, but that is understandable when they wrote all in all fewer words. The conclusion drawn here is that

failing papers are no less concerned with content and if they are failing it is mainly due to grammatical, syntactic and lexical mistakes.

### 5.5.2. Conclusions on the Content and Organization of Texts

#### i) Content and Organization at the Level of the Paragraph

As far as the content and organization of paragraphs are concerned, students both passing and failing seemed to be writing more *unified* paragraphs in year four than they did in year two; however the fourth year failing students did considerably better than the passing ones. Both passing and failing students wrote less *complete* paragraphs in the fourth year than they did in the second which may have been due to the time factor. In the fourth year paper students had more questions to answer in the same time limitation of two hours. As far as *order* is concerned, students did slightly better in the fourth year than they did in the second; however it was again the failing students and not the passing ones that did better paragraph ordering in the fourth year. As to *Coherence* at the level of the paragraph, students both passing and failing did slightly worse in the fourth year than they did in the second. That may have been caused by the pressure of time or the type of task assigned. Students in general had similar results for the *special purpose paragraph* category in the second and in the fourth year. Failing students were slightly better at introducing their topics in the fourth year than in the second. Two compositions, one passing and one failing, had no conclusions in the fourth year, which again may have been due to shortage of time.

#### ii) Content and Organization at the Level of the Essay

Overall, there was little difference in the results of the *structuring* of the whole essay from years two to four; however, failing fourth year students did much better compared to the passing ones. One passing paper contributed to this because in it the student failed to fulfil most of the requirements of the proper English essay structuring. As to the *coherence* of the whole essay, students did better in the fourth year than they did in the second, especially the failing ones. Results of the *completeness* of the essays were similar to those of the paragraph completeness. Students did worse in the fourth year than they did in their second. That again may have been due to time shortage.

**Research question number one:** Are learners putting forward more meaning and presenting it more coherently from one year to the next?

Findings suggest that students did not put more meaning into their fourth year writing. That may have been due to time restrictions. The word counts carried out in chapter four revealed that most students wrote fewer words in the fourth year than they did in any of the other years. Thus it should come as no surprise that fourth year students wrote less

reasons, facts, and examples to support ideas put forward. All in all, fourth year students seemed to be able to handle linkage and organization of texts better. However, since there is no controlled group to compare our results with, it is hard to assess how significant is the development made by the students in this study. One must bear in mind too that the tasks in the two years were different and that may have contributed to some of the variations between the second and fourth year analyses results. Controlling those factors was beyond the scope of this study.

**Research question number two:** How does the amount and quality of content presented and its organization compare with the marks assigned to the passing and failing papers?

The conclusion that one can come up with through comparing the aspects of content and organization in both the passing and the failing papers is that the difference between the two is limited and one can say with confidence that the passing student does not seem to be contributing more to meaning and organization than the failing one. On the contrary, on many occasions, it was found that the failing students were attempting more idea generation and better linkage and organization. Since the papers that failed were those that displayed less maturity in syntax and more error, one can conclude here that language proficiency on its own does not make skilful writers and that students' strive at times to maintain an error-free paper may be interfering with the content and organization of the texts that they are putting forward.

## CHAPTER SIX

### Implications of the Study

#### 6.1. Summary of Findings

In this work we have established that writing at Damascus University is largely an examination exercise. It is an activity that does not bear much resemblance to real life writing. Its purpose is to complete a certain exercise, the audience is always the teacher and the process of writing is a single attempt at putting ideas down on paper at full speed in a satisfactory error-free manner. The writing course is one that seems to be encouraging rote learning and content reproduction rather than content and form generation and discovery.

More specifically, the study of the context and product of writing at Damascus University yielded a number of conclusions. The first is that the course is language-centred focusing mainly on the teaching of grammatical correctness and error-freeness. Findings in chapter four suggested that students' achievement was mainly in this area. In spite of the fact that some teachers insist that the message conveyed in writing is most important, content serves mainly as a tool to display language proficiency and the language is not used communicatively or purposefully. Writing as a process of exploration of topics and meaning is non-existent. Writing, to most learners, is no more than a tool to display and show proof of learning of the language forms that they have mastered. Hardly any writing takes place that is not to be assessed. The audience is always the threatening teacher and the purpose of writing is always to pass an exam. Cultivation of positive attitudes to writing does not seem a priority at the University of Damascus. Although the interviews we conducted with students are subjective, they do reveal some significant features of classroom practice which are hardly destined to promote positive attitudes to writing or the desire to write from choice. The learning environment is a negative one where learners see writing as fraught with tension and difficulties. They do not feel the motivation to write or the confidence that they can write, simply because teachers do not initiate or simulate tasks that create in the learner a compelling reason for wanting to write. Students all write individually and at the same time not because they have identified a genuine need for writing but because the teacher instructed them to do so. They exercise no freedom of choice in what to write or how to write it. None of the writing is done collaboratively and learners do not support or provide a critical audience for one another. Teachers simply 'mark' the work rather than respond to it and the end product never reaches a wider audience outside the classroom. Such an approach ignores the learner, his individuality, and his ideas. It views him as a passive recipient and not as an active

and creative individual. The educational climate too is not a healthy one because the learner is often humiliated and discouraged. His self-esteem and self-confidence are often undermined by the teacher or by other students in the class. Remarks made by students suggest that there are some powerful constraints in operation in the classroom. Their views reaffirm the central role of the teacher and reveal a considerable fear of failing to meet the teacher's expectations. The discourse level of writing is often ignored and writing is often taught as the stringing of correct words to form sentences and the stringing of correct sentences to form paragraphs. Students are indirectly encouraged to view writing as formulas that can be filled with ideas. Teachers dictate to their learners the requirements of the new syllabus without identifying and building on the knowledge and abilities that students bring with them into the classroom. Teachers also do not select and present curricular activities that meet the broader educational objectives. The learner is kept in the dark and is not given the opportunity to take charge of his own learning, i.e. he is not helped to understand what the potentialities of the course are and he is not allowed to contribute to the ways that he can best cover the required syllabus. Many students end up being confused and unable to understand what is expected from them or how to capitalize on what they already know. Little or no attempt is made to introduce learners to the cultural differences between the English and the Arabic rhetoric and discourse communities. The problem seems to be that students spend most of their time in the classroom learning about how to write but with little practice and little attention or time given to writing itself or to relating writing to all kinds of reading and to other curriculum areas. Hardly any of the student's writing takes place outside the composition classroom where the application of writing skills in a cross-curricular context has obvious benefits. The course in writing is considered as one separate from all other courses at the University in spite of the fact that integrating it with other areas of study could provide the opportunity to extend the range of types of writing learners may attempt, give them an opportunity to use existing skills and knowledge constructively, extend the range of their linguistic skills and cognitive competence, and help them clarify ideas and relate new learning to existing experience and confirm their understanding of those topics.

One last word is that teachers are themselves constrained by administrative and organisational demands and requirements such as massive class sizes, limited time, space, materials, resources and facilities. These constraints may also be powerful influences on the teachers' resort to stylized routines and practices.

We strongly feel that the approach to the teaching of the course at present needs to be reviewed, redefined and developed because it is indirectly leading to thought stagnation.

## **6.2. The New Objectives of the Writing Course**

To be able to design a successful course, the main guide-line for teachers should be the question: why teach a course in writing in the first place? In the past, when the spoken word was given precedence over the written one, the teaching of writing was mainly to help learners consolidate their learning of the skills of speaking, listening, and reading. In the light of the new understandings gained through this research of what writing really involves and its uses, the writer of this work feels that the goals of the writing courses at Damascus University need to be different.

At the moment, administrators and teachers at Damascus University view writing as an inferior topic that serves mainly to consolidate the L2 grammatical structures learnt through the other skills. If integrated with the other content courses, the writing course can help promote education in all other topics taught at the university. One of the objectives of teachers and learners therefore can be to use writing to enhance learning in other University courses. Thus instead of asking students to write purposelessly on meaningless topics such as 'smoking', 'travel', 'women', etc..., writing teachers at the University can use writing classes to help students write and learn about the novels, plays, poems, or any of the course topics that they are required to do.

The course in writing at the university should aim at helping learners develop and grow into maturity through gradually allowing them to become more and more capable of critical thinking and personal judgement of their own writing and that of others. Students have for long depended on teachers and textbooks for ideas. This needs to be gradually shifted and students need to be encouraged to exercise more and more of their own judgements. This freedom to exercise one's own judgements needs to be accompanied by a sense of responsibility, a responsibility first towards the idea that learners put forward and then the form and organization that they choose to present their content in.

In order to put into application the goals of the writing course embodied in this work, a number of developments need to be introduced to the context of teaching writing at the University.

## **6.3. Developments That Need To Be Introduced**

### **6.3.1. Create a Positive Writing Environment**

For students to see themselves as writers, the classroom must be an environment that creates in learners the need to write and gives them the confidence that they can write. In chapters two and three, the picture we portrayed of the Damascus University context revealed that students only write because they have to, not because they feel the need to, and the majority have no confidence in their writing and are reluctant to expose it to

others. The reason for this lies in the teacher-student relationship and the type of tasks that teachers set their learners. The tasks that Damascus University teachers set their learners are often of no interest to the writer at all. Even students' choice of topics at times is not determined by their interests in what they would like to write about but whether their language proficiency enables them to write on that specific task or not. We tried to show that such tasks teach the learner no more than to play safe and avoid areas where they are likely to err. To overcome this the teacher must try and make sure that the student has something interesting to say for some specific audience. To make writing more meaningful and purposeful, we suggest abolishing the composition class as it stands at the University of Damascus nowadays and introducing writing classes that incorporate writing with other disciplines such as writing about the novels, the plays, the poems or any of the courses that students have to do at the University. In this way there will be more meaningful topics to write about and at the same time learners will enjoy it more because they would feel the need and the benefit of writing on projects related to topics that they need to study anyway. In this way the learner will end up not only learning how to write but also learning about the other courses that he is required to do. Teachers with the help of students' suggestions can make sure that they find different purposes and audiences for writing to break away from the routine which constantly engage learners with the same type of writing. In one of the samples of students' writing that we analyzed in chapters four and five, we found out that across the four years at the university the student fitted the same sentences again and again in her compositions. This student was clever enough to predict that writing in each year is just the same task requiring her to write to the teacher about some dull boring topic. The task has therefore become a routine whereby students write just to finish the task required and by this produce the same piece of writing over and over again. Teachers should look for reasons for writing where the message is more important than anything else because writing takes off when teachers create conditions whereby learners consider the writing as their own. One way to motivate learners to write is to get them to watch and later on discuss and write in groups (for some audience like their friends in other groups or for some audience outside the classroom) about some interesting play or film on current show at the theatre or the cinema. This kind of exercise will encourage a lot of personal thought and will help learners generate a great amount of language and make use of a lot of its functions (narrative, descriptive etc...) without the pressure of deadlines and assessment. Teachers therefore should assign topics and encourage learners to choose ones that will suggest real life contexts with a purpose and an intended audience because the impetus to write has to come from the urgency of having something to say, otherwise all writing will be an artificial exercise, that has no real function (So:1986).

In short, the more students feel the need to write, the more they will write, and the more they write the more confidence they will have that they *can* write. It is only through

practicing a lot of writing that learners will develop the spontaneity, fluency and confidence necessary to become skilful writers.

### **6.3.2. Help Students Experience and Understand the Requirements of the Various Stages of the Composing Process**

One of the basic principles of this approach is not to treat a writing task as a class-room activity but as one very similar to the writing carried out in the outside world. The course in writing should gradually enable the learner to be quite familiar with all the phases of the writing process and how they vary with writing to different audiences and for different purposes. To this end teachers need to guide learners all through the process of writing and to make them aware that the way writing is being produced is as important as the final product. Learners need to be shown how to start by looking for ideas in accessible reference books, then they need to be shown how to organize all the materials that they have found and how to present, revise and edit it. At each stage different kinds of advice will be needed.

#### **pre-writing**

The aim of the teacher at this stage should be to encourage learners to focus on composing rather than on surface level features. They should put down on paper ideas that come to their mind without any concern as to how it is presented. Sorting out this will come at a later stage. What is important here is getting ideas down on paper.

At the pre-writing stage where the collecting of vocabulary, structures and ideas necessary for the writing act is being carried out, students can be helped by brainstorming, reading, interviewing, taking trips, working in conjunction with peers or teachers who teach other courses, etc.... "*Ideas develop from interaction and dialogue-with other people, with books, films, and drama, and especially with one's own writing. Ideas grow through exchange*" (Frank Smith:1985). Thus instead of presenting learners with a new task to struggle with on their own, the teacher gives learners the chance to discuss the topic with him and their peers in the classroom or he gives them ample time to do some relevant reading to be able to formulate their own judgements, or he gives them the chance to go interviewing people to collect ideas, or he takes them on a trip to observe and explore the topic in question and so on. Even after students choose their topics and settle down to work on it, they may still feel the need to go back and check or collect more data and they should be encouraged to do so, first because this will enable them to produce better ideas in their writing and second because that will make them accept the fact that writing is a recursive process whereby one has to keep moving backwards and forwards.

## Re-writing

The more a learner learns how to become a competent reviser, the better writer he will become because that will make him a better critic of his own writing and that of others. Recent research have revealed that better writers are not only those that possess better strategies for correcting local problems such as word choice, grammar and punctuation but those who can also deal with overall meaning and content by adding, deleting and reorganizing larger chunks of text (Chenoweth :1987). Fathman and Whalley's (1990) research revealed that students' re-writing in response to teachers' feedback on either grammar or content or both resulted in better compositions. Thus they concluded that re-writing in itself is an important way to improve writing skills.

Students at Damascus University are averse to revising and re-writing simply because they have never been shown the importance of such processes nor have they been given tasks that would make these processes come naturally as part of making their meanings clearer to them and to their readers. Students even boast outside the exam classroom that they did not do any revision or re-writing. The roots for this may lie in the educational culture (see Adams et al:1991). The way writing is taught is indirectly teaching the learner that the skilful writer is the one who gets his writing correct from the first attempt in the limited time available without having to stop to correct or re-write. Students are therefore indirectly taught not to waste anything that they write. However, writing in reality is often the result of much effort and many new starts. Real life quality writing is often achieved through a frustrating process of writing and re-writing. Most writers find it almost impossible to write something that is well composed, grammatically correct, properly punctuated and spelled, appropriate as far as the vocabulary is concerned, neatly presented and interesting to the reader, from the first attempt. This emphasises the importance of re-writing. However, it is important to point out that that does not mean that no writing can be produced in an acceptable form from the first attempt, but most assessed writing is too complex to be done perfectly right from the first attempt. Writers therefore should be made fully aware of how complex and hard writing is so that they can cope with the frustrations, and persist and be determined to make decisions and take responsibilities. Teachers also should aim at helping learners develop a willingness to write as many drafts as necessary and to revise whenever appropriate. Chenoweth (1987) suggests asking students to re-write previous topics concentrating on clarifying meanings and ideas. In this way learners will be helped to improve on what they have written before which will boost their confidence as writers by showing them that re-writing is not failure. At the same time this will benefit teachers too because it will save them the trouble of having to think of new assignments (Chenoweth 1987: 27).

It is important to show students that revising is more than surface level editing. Experienced writers writing with students and demonstrating to them how they have revised for example will be a great guide and reassurance for learners, for it shows them the way things are done and that almost everybody feels the need to revise and change and possibly write a number of drafts. Unlike the L1 teacher, the EFL teacher may find it necessary during the revising stage to attend to a lot of low concern problems.

Being asked to cross-out and scribble and not to mind untidy writing may be a cause for concern for learners who have been taught through long years of schooling to always write neatly. The teacher should therefore make it very clear, especially in the early stages of writing, that what matters is the thinking and not the presentation of the writing. The value of this practice can be shown to learners through a presentation on an over head projector for example, the several drafts of either the teacher's or one of the group's piece of writing. Showing them the improvement from one stage to the other may encourage them to do more revising. It has to be demonstrated to them that it is acceptable to draft, jot, scribble and alter, otherwise they will never appreciate its importance. If learners are asked to keep all their drafts in a folder they will see for themselves how their writing developed and they will come to accept the fact that they do need to discard a lot of what they write before the final product is finally produced. In an exam too, requiring that all drafts be presented with the final product (without teachers having to mark them) may be an incentive to encourage learners to see drafting and revising as inevitable parts of the final product.

It might be of help to learning writers too if teachers could arrange for them to meet some professional writers to talk to them about the processes of revisions and re-writings that they had to go through in the process of producing some of their important publications.

## **Editing**

Editing should be left to the final stages of writing so that it does not interfere with the ideas that the writer is trying to put forward. Another advantage of leaving the editing to a later stage in writing is the fact that the time elapsed between the early and the later stages of writing will enable the writer to look on his own writing like an outside audience and thus see it with his reader's eyes. To help learners through their editing stage, they should be encouraged to make use of dictionaries, thesauruses, previous samples of their own writing and other useful sources that the teacher can find for the task in question.

After the completion of the final draft, students should be encouraged to read their own writing aloud to themselves, or to their peers, a technique that has been strongly recommended by writing experts because it is believed to enable writers to hear their own voice and to check the word against the idea.

One final point here is that teachers should be careful to organize writing sessions in such a way that they do not always take place in the same order of stimulus, talk, write, finish. Encouraging learners to shift between activities as much as is required by the task will make writing less of a routine and more of an enjoyable process.

### **6.3.3. Establish Reading as an Essential Part of the Writing Course**

It should not come as a surprise to Damascus University teachers that their students are not good writers for they are not good readers either. Students at Damascus University due to no fault of theirs never get to read enough. Students in each of the four years have a set of textbooks that they are required to read in each course. However, the linguistic level of those books is often much higher than the level of language proficiency of the learners. In consequence the student is either incapable of reading them and is put off reading altogether or if he is keen enough he will read the Arabic translation of the set text books. This however defeats the purpose of reading which is the internalizing of English language structures and organizational patterns. Out of class reading too is also not a common practice simply because the Syrian community is one that is not keen on reading neither in L1 nor in L2. Krashen (1984) maintains that writing competence is acquired subconsciously through reading. Stotsky (1983) surveyed first language reading and writing correlational studies and found that better writers read more, tend to be better readers and produce more syntactically mature writing than poorer ones (reported in Eisterhold 1990:88). Reading therefore contributes greatly towards improving writing and is an invaluable source of both content and form and thus should be incorporated into the writing classroom. It would be of great use if teachers and students from all parts of the University could work at establishing a respectable reading library from whatever books they can find that match the interests and the linguistic proficiency of the learners. Such a library should have books that capture the interest of the students without requiring them to labour over them word for word and sentence for sentence. Moreover, after the reading session, there should be no exercises to do, no questions to answer, and no blanks to fill. The discussion of their readings should be initiated by what the learners themselves have found interesting. It would be useful if the teacher could allow learners to have access to the reading materials outside the writing classes too to encourage learners to do more and more independent learning.

### **6.3.4. Encourage Writing at a Discourse Level and Familiarize Learners with the Differences between Literary and Non-literary and L1 and L2 Discourse**

Starting with day one of the course, students should write on a discourse level. In chapter two, we have shown that when writing takes place, especially in the first year, it is mainly the writing of exercises that practice certain forms or structures of the language.

Even when free writing takes place, it often aims at getting learners to write correct sentences. Another observation that was made on some of the students' writing was that some learners were importing into their L2 writing what was acceptable to an L1 audience for the simple reason that they were not made aware of the difference between the two. Learners, through specially designed tasks therefore should be guided to find out for themselves the differences between L1 and L2 literary and non-literary discourse. Later on in this chapter examples of tasks that will help build learners' awareness in this area are given (see pp. 218-219).

### **6.3.5. Expose Learners to Models of Good English Writing and Models of Skilful Writers Writing too**

Earlier on in this work, we have shown that students at Damascus University are never given back their marked essays and, due to the high level of competitiveness amongst students, they refuse to lend their essays to one another. The teacher also does not display or distribute any models of good writing. In addition, students are not shown models of how the writing process actually takes place. For all they know, it is that quick single attempt process of pouring down ideas onto paper. Teachers themselves may not have experienced writing for a long time and may have forgotten how complex the process of writing is. Besides, most teachers think that their role is only to lecture, instruct, and assess, but not to write. However, in a successful writing course the writing teacher must not only be an expert teacher but an expert writer too (Graves 1983).

In short, students need to see good models of both the process and the product of writing. In large classes this may not be so easy to carry out but the teacher and all the experienced writers in the classroom can always perform within the group and be a model for the rest of the group (more on group work will be discussed in section 6.3.8). This will demonstrate to learners that expert writers too struggle to produce writing. At the same time that will demonstrate to teachers or to the expert writers in the group what it is like to produce a piece of writing, what it is like to cross out, to re-arrange information, to get frustrated, to get angry, in short to appreciate the difficulties that students are going through. Learners on the other hand will be trying to copy the behaviour of the expert writer or the teacher and will struggle as he is in order to produce a satisfactory piece of writing. The final product that the teacher or the expert writer produces (on his own or as part of a pair or group) will serve as a model of good writing that learners can also be guided by.

Watson (1982) thinks that models, if not copied blindly, are an indispensable resource in an ESL/EFL writing class. If students learn how to explore models with one another and with the teacher, compare them against their own products at various stages of

composing, then the 'alien product' might contribute towards strengthening their 'original process' (Watson:1982).

### **6.3.6. Establish Balance between Content and Form**

The problem at Damascus University is that when teachers mark students' tasks, they focus mainly on correcting grammatical structures, spelling and punctuation. Our questionnaires in chapter three revealed the adverse effects that that is having on students' writing. Students tried to avoid error by writing shorter sentences, using simple tenses, and writing less to minimize the occurrence of error. The danger in such teacher's practices is that to the mind of the learner, the emphasis in writing is shifted from the content to the single sentence or word. In doing this the learner will not be able to develop the fluency and spontaneity that are important to become a skilful writer. Moreover, the teacher may indirectly be encouraging the learner to seek help the minute he sees a problem and to see the teacher as the provider of all answers rather than the provider of support and guidance necessary for learning to take place.

Writing is not only a process of discovering new forms and structures that work in the language but a process of meaning discovery. The writing teacher needs to make clear to his learners the high and the low concerns in writing and he needs to train them to become 'optimal users' (Krashen:1981), that is neither 'monitor overusers' who focus on form at the expense of meaning nor 'monitor underusers' who focus on meaning at the expense of form. The form in which writing is presented is no less important than the ideas and needs to be attended to, but what may be questioned is the stage where editing should take place. If it takes place earlier on in writing such as at the drafting stage, it will interrupt the flow of ideas, whereas if it is carried out during the editing or revising stages, it will not affect the content produced. If the responsibility towards the idea is given precedence, then the responsibility towards the form in which that idea is expressed will follow (Gage:1986). At the same time concentrating on the idea expression will encourage learners to rely on themselves rather than resort to the teacher for help, or panic and give up writing altogether if they cannot find the help they need. Under the necessary guidance learners will be learning how to do things for themselves. They will be encouraged to take risks, build on what they already know, establish what they already know and take on the responsibility for their own learning.

If in the early stages of writing, learners are encouraged to write freely without attending to surface level features, they will soon come to realize that the real place of these features is after the ideas have been put down on paper because then they will be able to write all that they want to say uninhibited by their fears of making mistakes. Learners can be encouraged to underline the word, the structure, or whatever they are unsure about and come back to it after they have all their ideas down on paper.

The teacher should also make it a rule of the class that each student should try and sort out his difficulties on his own first and only if that did not work then the student should consult at least three of his peers before finally consulting the teacher. In this way the teacher will be encouraging learners to experiment, take risks, and take on the responsibility of their own writing. In consequence they will grow to depend less on the teacher and more on themselves and they will be forced to concentrate their attention more on what to say and less on how to say it.

There is another way by which learners can be shown the importance of content. Rather than concentrate on grammatical correctness and error as is almost always the case at Damascus University when a piece of writing is under scrutiny, the teacher should consider the content aspect before any other by making it a point to always discuss what the writing is about and what it is trying to say and whether it actually achieves its purpose or not. In this way students will be indirectly taught to consider content in their peers' writing or in any piece of writing that they are asked to assess and at the same time that will be reflected in how they will evaluate their own writing when they are doing their own revising too.

### **6.3.7. Encourage Sharing Finished Pieces of Writing and Writing Problems**

Our questionnaires in chapter three revealed that the audience in the student's mind is almost always the teacher. The student's utmost purpose of writing is to complete the writing exercise in a way that will satisfy the teacher. The authoritarian role of the teacher, the student's wish to please him and the type of tasks that lecturers give where no audience whatsoever is assigned in the task are the main reasons for this.

In such a context, when a teacher requires a learner to write he expects him to show proof of learning. The learner on the other hand is aware that the teacher already knows most of the information that he is trying to put forward and consequently he does not feel under pressure to convey or to order his message clearly and logically. In real life writing, however, there is an information gap between the writer and the reader and the writer estimates the amount of information that his reader does not know and makes sure that he presents it in a clear and interesting way. Moreover, the fact that teachers often know most of the things that their learners are writing about may be the reason why teachers show little appreciation for their learners' ideas, efforts, and intentions and concentrate mainly on the effectiveness of how writing is being presented. The teacher will not be responding to a piece of his student's writing in the same way as an interested reader will and on top of that the teacher will be trying to judge how much a student has learnt of the things that he has demonstrated in the classroom. To overcome this teachers need to learn how to simulate real life or meaningful and purposeful writing activities. In a more

relaxed atmosphere of teaching where the role of the teacher as an authority is played down and his role more as a facilitator of knowledge is highlighted, the students may be able to relax and think more of their audience than of the teacher. Here group writing can play a great role too. If students are asked to write in groups rather than as individuals and asked to write for a specific audience, such as another group in the class or some audience outside the classroom, then there is no doubt that learners will enjoy the writing act more. They will feel less threatened by the teacher and at the same time they will see a purpose in writing to inform someone about something that they do not know or are not clear about.

One important thing for teachers therefore is to organize readers for student's writing because when a student writer has a certain reader in mind he can see the point of why he has to write and re-write. Making the text clearer, better organized, more interesting, more persuasive and better punctuated and spelled will be a natural outcome of wanting to put through a clear and adequate message. In the classroom, this can be achieved by asking learners to write about the stories, plays or poems that junior groups of students in other classes have to do as part of their courses to help them gain a better understanding of them. They can also be encouraged to write to authors or publishers criticizing or praising a certain work. It would also be of great benefit to learners upon the finishing of a certain project, let say a project on the poems of T.S. Eliot for example, to invite learners from other classes to listen to their findings and contribute and add to the ideas found.

Students must know that the writing they produce is to be shared by others too. It is the teacher's responsibility to make sure that the student's writing is publicised, either displayed in the library or hung on special bulletin boards for students from other classes to read. Students can also be encouraged to read their writing aloud for the rest of the classroom. It would also be wise to work towards establishing a University's own journal, because in this way students will be encouraged to write more especially when they know that what is to be written is going to be read by thousands of students all around the university who share similar experiences and difficulties. The range of audiences to whom students can be encouraged to write is wide. They can be asked to write for themselves, their teachers, their peers, a wider known readership such as other students in the University, other teachers, their parents or their relatives or friends, a wider unknown audience such as writing to authors of books, to newspapers, magazines etc...

Students should not only be encouraged to share the final product of a piece of writing but they also need to be encouraged to discuss the problems that they encounter in the process of writing. In this way they will not feel as isolated and they will gain more confidence as they see that most writers feel the same as they do when experiencing the writing process.

### 6.3.8. Convert the Classroom into a Writing Workshop

Damascus University teachers view writing as the single individual attempt that is to be carried out in silence and in a limited period of time. The setting of the writing classroom described in chapter two revealed that students are under a lot of pressure too because they struggle as they write individually and suffer in silence. The teacher may ask a learner at any minute to expose her/his individual writing to the rest of the classroom-an experience that can be very humiliating. The outcome of such an approach is a decrease in the student's confidence and self-esteem which is resulting in even less participation, risk taking and writing. In his workshops, Curran (1976) generates a positive atmosphere so that his students learn to know each other and learn to work together as a learning community. In a large class situation like the one at Damascus University, the teacher may find that asking students to work in groups will not only make them feel more secure but will also enable the teacher to invest on the only asset that he has got.

The first step towards converting the class into a writing workshop is by rearranging tables in such a way as to allow students to work in groups. The fixed furniture in some of the lecture rooms might constitute a problem but the large space in such classrooms may solve the problem. The teacher should aim at establishing a warm and relaxed atmosphere in which the students will feel the least amount of pressure and at the same time will show readiness to participate, take risks and try out new ideas, words and structures in their own writing. This may not be easy to implement especially when most teachers have been used to teaching practices like those described in chapter two. This is an important issue that needs to be looked into further while planning for the implementation of such developments. Rather than each individual learner working on his own and struggling in silence, group work will produce a more relaxed atmosphere where students feel more secure and their difficulties will be shared by each member of the group in a less stressful way. In such a context learners will be helping one another when they are struggling for a word or a structure or a spelling or even an idea. At the same time, this group work will help give each learner more confidence when he finds out that what he knows is confirmed by the knowledge of others in the group or what he finds difficult is also shared by others. Group work also makes learners feel more relaxed when their piece of writing is exposed because the responsibility for it does not lie any more on the shoulders of just one learner but is shared by the rest of the group. Working in groups makes the continuous search for better ways of expression automatic too. It will enable learning writers to focus automatically on the compositional aspect of the writing process because through working together there will be a lot of open discussion about the ideas, the choice of words, the organizational structure, etc... and more and more suggestions will be put forward and consequently more and more changes will take place. Another advantage of group work is that it will make the learner less

worried about his weaknesses and difficulties because he talks about them in confidence to his peers without having to expose them to the rest of the classroom. By working in groups, students get the opportunity to go through the mental processes of composing a much more extended text than each of them could write on his own. Working in groups will give them more satisfaction because they will see a lot of writing down on paper and at the same time they will get response and feedback from their peers. Students need to train to ask others about things that they do not know or are unsure about and in this way all of the group will benefit and learn. However, group work needs a lot of training so that learners do not greet each others' errors with derision.

Such changes may not be easy to introduce, especially in a traditional classroom where the teacher is the only one who does the talking. Damascus University students who talk in class are asked to leave because talking means that they are wasting their time and that of others and are not learning. Teachers first need to change their attitude towards this and need to encourage learners to talk together because through talking better learning and writing will be produced. However, the teacher should make sure that he is in control of talking times and listening times. There should be times when students have to listen to the lecturer explaining a certain task for example or making an important point and there are other times when learners will be working together discussing in the open their ideas and their difficulties. Alternating group work and whole-class teaching should therefore be carried out depending on the needs of the learners.

In a writing class of a minimum size of 200 students, the conferencing methods suggested by Graves (1983) are almost impossible to put into practice. Students may be working in groups but the teacher may still find it difficult to monitor a class of 200 students. The enormous number of students in each writing class makes the need for other instructors or senior students' help in guiding and monitoring everybody in the classroom extremely important. Consequently the teacher will have to seek help either from senior students i.e. students from higher classes or from the more experienced writers in the group or from other instructors at the University. One of the ways by which a teacher can get help is by pairing a senior class with a junior one in two classrooms. Although the research carried out in this work showed that there is little difference between the first and fourth year writers, a start must still be made somewhere, and gradually by applying the teaching methods suggested in this work we hope that there will come a time when fourth year students will be comparatively more skilful writers than the first year ones. The teacher's role will then be to match the more experienced writers with the less experienced ones. He also needs to make sure that all the necessary materials such as references, dictionaries, thesauruses, etc... are accessible because learners will need a lot of written

material from which to get ideas for their writing. The teacher's responsibility also lies in teaching the more experienced writers how to teach the less experienced ones<sup>1</sup>.

As an incentive for better writing, the teacher could choose the group who produces the best piece of writing in a senior class to join in and help the teacher in guiding junior writers. However, these helpers need to be able to commit themselves and come on several occasions so that they can establish a good relationship with their writing partners. Helping partners need also to meet with the teacher before and after each session to be given guidance and feedback respectively. Most important of all is training them on how to respond and give supportive feedback to the less experienced writers. The teacher can also offer a lot of guidance by showing the more experienced writers or his teaching partners samples of student's writing using a number of drafts and showing how the same student's writing developed from one draft into the other. Partners and instructors (who rarely have a say in the context of Damascus University teaching) should also be encouraged to express their opinions and make suggestions because their experiences both as students and as helping teachers can be of use to the learners too.

In a group, the teacher or the students should distribute roles amongst one another. In some of the tasks, some students will take care of the secretarial skills such as writing down, spelling, punctuation and grammar and others will concentrate on composing, that is getting ideas, ordering them, expressing them in words etc... These roles have to be changed from one task to another and the teacher or the helping partner in the group should make sure that each student is getting a chance at doing each.

Writing in groups is more complicated than just deciding on what each member of the group will do or who pairs with whom. Writing collaboratively in large classes may take a lot of training especially with learners who are so used to individual competitive writing, but once it is learnt it will help to give writers more understanding of the writing process as a whole. Thus, teachers have to try and teach learners how to help one another. The teacher's method of criticising and giving feedback to students' writing for example is crucial because it indirectly teaches learners how to criticise each other's writing. The teacher has to set learners a good example by the way he himself responds to students' writing because other learners will simply imitate the way he reads and criticizes students' writing. Moreover, at the University no student dares criticize a teacher even if he has made an obvious mistake. This is indirectly influencing learners' attitudes towards other people's criticism of their work. They do not like criticism, least of all when it comes from their classmates. The teacher, in his comments on students' writing, should set his learners an example of how this can be done politely without hurting others.

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<sup>1</sup> The interpersonal organization and training need to be looked further into because in the large class situation described here teachers will not always be in a position to know their students well enough.

Students will learn to accept criticism when they feel that it is intended to be constructive and they will learn to encourage each other to write. They will learn to practice teaching what they are learning themselves and they will become aware of their peers' strengths and weaknesses and thus they begin to examine their own writing with a more critical eye (So;1986:143). The stage in writing where peers' suggestions can be of help is at the drafting stage because then talking together can enable learners to clarify, reorganize, elaborate or exclude certain parts of their texts. The exchange of work among peers at the editing stage too can be of help because students can help one another in spotting errors in grammar, spelling, punctuation or even the organization of the whole text. Peer collaboration is also useful since it is often easier and quicker for an outside reader to spot and identify the errors of somebody else's writing because the writer gets so familiar with his work that he stops seeing his errors. This process of criticizing other people's writing will help learners develop more perception of their own writing too. Although peers' remarks can be of great value, each learner must reserve the right to have the last say about the ideas or the form of her/his writing. The writer need not take the advice if s/he does not want to. After all the writing is hers/his.

The teacher/partner should make it a point to respond to content first. There are a number of questions that a teacher can ask to help guide the learner. A useful way of managing group work and facilitating supportive feedback will be to provide the students in each group with cue cards that will help focus their attention on certain aspects of the writing process. The following are examples of such questions:

- Why did you decide to write about this?
- What is the message that you are trying to pass to your reader?
- Does your answer address the task that you have been set?
- Are you pleased with it?
- Which bits do you think are especially good?

**In case there are any ambiguities in the text, the experienced writer can ask the following:**

- I am not so sure I understood what you mean here?
- I wonder if there is a better way of expressing it?
- What sort of changes can you do to it?
- What sort of changes have you already made to it?
- Have you asked a friend as to what can be done to it?

**At the editing stage the following questions can be asked:**

- Have you underlined the words, verbs, structures, etc... that you were not sure about?
- Can you try and correct them if you can?
- Have you shown it to a friend for comments?
- Where do you think you will need help?

(Adapted from Martin et al 1989:64)

**More detailed questions to investigate each paragraph separately can be asked:**

- How many main ideas do you think you have in this paragraph? Can you identify them? Can you think of a better way of putting them?
- Is this topic sentence relevant to your main theme?
- Do you think you have put enough reasons, (or facts or examples etc.) to support the ideas you have in this paragraph?
- Is the link clear enough between this sentence and the following one? Can you think of a better way of connecting them?
- Do you think your introductory paragraph prepares your reader for what is to come? Is the introduction strong enough?
- Do you think your concluding paragraph gives your reader a sense of closure?

**Questions that can guide with the whole essay**

- Does this paragraph support the main theme?
- Do you think you have given your audience enough details about the whole topic? Is it an adequate answer? On the whole do you think you have given enough information (reasons, examples or arguments) to make your point?
- Do you think this paragraph fits in well logically with what precedes it?
- Do you think you have used clear links to connect this paragraph with the preceding one?

The use of such questions will not only help learners understand how conference teaching works, i.e. how to guide peers while writing, but also how to review their own work too.

Although there might be a lot of gains for the teacher too in relying on group work, yet at Damascus University it may take a lot of hard work to develop this because teachers may find an approach whereby they are required to speak less threatening to their roles as the repository of knowledge. Another worry for teachers relying on group work will be

whether learners know enough to help one another and whether writers will be prepared to share their work and will accept advice given from other students. Other teachers may feel that by allowing group work they are abandoning their roles and responsibilities as teachers. Here the roles and responsibilities of teachers need to be clarified. There is no doubt that the teacher is and will still be the most skilled and experienced writer in his class but what is happening is a change in the things that he does in the classroom. If the focus is shifted from the teacher's teaching to the student's learning (Page:1991) then the responsibilities of the teacher will take a different shape. His role will be mainly to respond constructively and not to spoon feed or criticize negatively. In this context, a teacher should be well aware of the attainment targets and be prepared beforehand for the task to be offered and should know very well what is to come next. He should have a rough knowledge of the writing abilities of his learners so that he knows who to group with whom and for which task.

If group writing is working successfully, then the teacher should see signs whereby students feel dissatisfied with their first efforts and try more and more to improve it. Students will cease to see the task just as a classroom requirement that has to be completed as quickly as possible but as something enjoyable that they would like to work at and finalize in the best way they can.

#### **Some group work ideas:**

In what follows are some sample group work activities that may be put into application at Damascus University, but first a few individual tasks that will help learners develop their expressive writing are suggested:

Students can be encouraged to carry out some kinds of routine planning writing such as diaries, reminders, plans for study, timetables, memos, etc... In this way they will learn to use writing to organize their lives and to ease the pressure on their memories and at the same time they will be writing without the pressure of exam and assessment, which enables them to generate more language too.

1) Learners can be encouraged to write on any area in their course where they face difficulties. If for example they have found difficulty in how to use the perfect tense, they can be encouraged to write a project on this specific area with the aim of teaching one another about it. The teacher can initiate the activity by requesting the learners to work in groups. Each group will be assigned a certain area and will be given time to find out all about it in the references available. For example one group will deal with the present perfect, another with the past perfect, another with the future perfect, and so on. Then the members of each group will have to collect the necessary information and then present it to the rest of the class. The teacher will then type all the work done by each of the groups and distribute it as handouts to the rest of the class in the following lesson. This activity

can be carried out on any area that students find difficult. Another area of difficulty is figures of speech used in English poetry. Students again can be divided into groups and each group will work on something different. For example some will work on alliteration, others on metaphors, others on puns, others on similes, etc... Each group will do the reading necessary from various references that they and the teacher can bring into the classroom and then they will work at finding the maximum number of examples to make their points clear and then each group will teach their findings to the rest of the class. This can be done by a representative from each group addressing the whole class or by each group pairing with another group and each will tell the other about its findings. There is no end to the areas that students find difficult to understand and this type of task will encourage them to look for the information themselves with the aim of teaching this to other learners either in their class or in some other junior class.

2) Shared writing; The whole class can be divided into groups where all share in writing just one composition on the board but, before this activity takes place students will be asked to work in groups at planning and drafting their own compositions. The teacher will be controlling the whole process and will be writing the best suggestions on the board. The teacher will ask each group for example to think of an introduction for an x-composition. The students will work in groups of ten for example and the teacher will select a few groups to read aloud the suggestions made by each group. The teacher will then write the suggestions made on the board and explain the differences between them and will recommend the best giving reasons for the choice. This process will be repeated for each part of the composition until it is completed. In this way every single student in the class plus the teacher will have contributed to the writing activity, the students will have seen a model of a good composition that the teacher approves of and at the same time the teacher will be relieved from marking 200 compositions written on the same topic.

3) Writing a class newspaper: Discussing and assigning different roles can take place some days beforehand so that learners have enough time to make their choices of what to write on and collect the information they need. Some may feel they want to report on some of the work they have done in their studies like some character, plot, setting, ending, introduction, style etc... of a certain novel or play that they have found interesting or they may choose to write on a poem that they have studied and liked or disliked. Others may feel they need to report on important activities, incidents, stories and features taking place at the University, others may need to report on some difficulties in the syllabus, others may feel they need to report on something happening in their community, some important national issues, some controversial social issues, etc... The teacher will ask for categories of things that students suggest to write about and students will be divided into groups where each specializes in one area. A number of students in the class will be assigned the job of editing and will organize the layout of the paper and the photos before it is finally printed. This paper will be addressed to all other University students.

A number of copies will be made and put in the University's library. Projects of this kind need plenty of time and students in each group can be asked to act as editors for the writers of the other group and in this way all learners will collaborate and provide the help and the support needed for one another.

4) Writing about some controversial issue in one of the plays, novels, or poems or re-writing part of a novel, or a play that they have to do as part of their course with some alterations to the original, or writing about what they would imagine happens after the story finishes or writing about what they predict the ending may be for a certain novel or play that they are doing. The audience for such tasks will be students in other groups or in other classes.

This can be carried out by asking groups of students to write about one of the novels, plays or poems in their core courses introducing some changes to it like changing the setting of a novel for example from an English to an Arab one or changing the ending, or some character or something in the plot like an important incident, etc... In this way students will be learning about the novel or the play in question and at the same time they will learn a lot about the terminology used in the study of such topics such as the words characterization, plot, setting, etc... They will also feel that they are the ones in control and capable of changing that which has been published, which will give them even more confidence. The preparatory work for this task means that students need to discuss in groups the novels read and enjoyed or they will need to read the book if they have not read it and try to focus on the openings, endings, settings, characterization, plot, etc..., or whichever part they would like to deal with. The final novels, plays or poems written should be made available where every one can get access to them like the University's library for example.

This same task can also be done by asking pairs of students to collaborate together to write their own short stories, plays or poems. The preparation for this task can be similar to the preceding one by asking students to discuss books that they have read and enjoyed or by reading some short stories or plays that they find interesting. The audience could be other students in the same class or in the University.

Students can also be asked to take some characters from a book of their choice such as *Gulliver's Travels* for example and try and make up another episode or they can be encouraged to compose a different story of the same structure of a familiar story of their choice. Students will no doubt get a lot of satisfaction when they see the finished piece of work. This form of writing will also teach them how to incorporate their own ideas and independent writing efforts into somebody else's work, learners will also get a lot of confidence from contributing their own ideas to somebody else's published work which is often thought of as something sacred and that cannot be changed.

5) Asking senior students to write short booklets and synopsis on some of the set textbooks of the junior learners

Students from more advanced classes like the third or fourth years can even be given the choice to write a summary or a criticism of the set novels or plays or poems of the first or second year class. They can also be given the choice of comparing two works of art done by either the same author or by different authors again for junior classes to help them in their studies. In this way their purpose of writing will be to help the strugglers to cope with the course and at the same time they will have a real audience for their writing. The writing that they do will not only be helping them but will also be helping the learning of other students in other classes too.

Similarly first and second year students can be asked for example to draw a cartoon and write in bubbles the character's talk in a certain scene of a play, for example a scene from *Waiting for Godot* or from Ibsen's *Ghosts* or from *The Play Boy of the Western World* or from one of Shakespeare's plays or from Dryden's *All for Love*. The whole class can cooperate to do a whole scene and each group will do a couple of pages of that scene. In the end the whole work will be put together and published for learners in the same year or from other years to make use of in the understanding of that play. This same activity can also be carried out on a chapter from a story of the students' choice.

6) For something different, the teacher can ask the students to do a project for the Ministry of Tourism by which they will have to write on all the historical features in the city, with a full description of them and their locations. This project can be done in groups whereby each group will choose to describe a certain feature, some will specialize on museums others on monuments, others on the old cities gates etc... Part of this project will be visiting those places and taking notes and looking for photos. The final layout of the whole brochure will be a task assigned to another group. The students will then have to send the brochure to the ministry of Tourism and it might end up being published and distributed to tourists.

7) Another project that learners could do is to design a booklet on how to use the library at Damascus University or the Central Library. Part of this project will be visiting the library and taking notes and drawing maps of the location of books and catalogues and so on. This again can be done in groups, each group being assigned a different sub-task, and the audience will be all students at the University.

8) In the fourth year, writing the literary essay is a major requirement of the syllabus. So one of the projects of the fourth year could be first to write a project in groups on how to write the literary essay and second to write literary essays on books, articles, essays, or anything of their choice. The audience will be students from other groups in the same

class. The best group's literary essay will be hung on the bulletin board where all students of the University can read it or it could be published in the University's journal.

9) Students should also be given tasks where they are required to spot the differences between one type of discourse and another, like the difference between a literary and a non-literary text or the difference between an L1 and an L2 literary text and so on. In this way students will be made aware of the differences in genres and their layout from one type of discourse to another and from L1 to L2 discourse types. An example of such exercise will be to give learners three texts written on the same topic in three different types of discourse: a poem, an essay and a set of instructions. Students will then be asked to work in groups and find out through guided questions the differences between the three different types of discourse, the layout, the language used, the organization etc... Another kind of task will be to ask students to work in groups and try to re-write a piece of text from one type of discourse into another, like re-writing a poem in prose form or re-writing a piece of prose into a poem. Students can also be given exercises where they can see the link between the language form used for example in a certain literary piece of text like a poem and the literary meanings or the atmosphere of that text. Then they will be asked to compare and see if there are the same links between the language used and the meanings in a non-literary text. In this way they will become more aware of the role language choice plays in literary texts. Another kind of exercise can be to look at two texts, literary or non-literary, one written in L1 and the other translated into L2 and compare how the rhetorical aspects of each differ. In this way they will be made aware that it is not possible to just import a structure or a certain organizational pattern from L1 to L2.

10) To help learners improve on their abilities to translate from English into Arabic and vice versa and to learn more about the rhetorical differences between the two languages, students can be asked to translate a short story of their choice. The whole class can cooperate by dividing the bulk of the work on pairs/groups whereby each translates a certain section. In this way the learners will become more aware of the rhetorical differences between the Arabic and the English language and at the same time they will be doing some practice on one of the important core subjects at the University which is translation. The translated versions of the book can be put in the library accessible for other University students from other years to have a look at it.

The range of tasks that learners can be offered is unlimited, the above mentioned tasks are just examples that hopefully will trigger more creative thoughts on the part of teachers and hopefully initiate more purposeful writing.

### 6.3.9. Review Evaluation Criteria and Engage Learners in Their Own Assessment

At Damascus University, how the writing gets to be completed is of no concern to the teacher, but once it is finished the teacher takes it for marking. In an approach like this, the teacher's interest lies in no more than the final product and the mark given depends very much on the number and types of errors that a writer makes (see appendix K for a copy of the marking scheme of the first year lecturer).

In their evaluation, teachers tend to emphasize the negative rather than the positive aspects in their students' writing. They do not offer any suggestions for development and improvement. They rarely make any specific comments. They only focus on surface level features ignoring content. In chapter three we showed how most of the teachers at Damascus University evaluated a paper according to the number of errors present in it. In chapters four and five findings suggested that it was mainly surface level features that determined the passing or failing of a certain paper. Many students in turn have come to think that these are the features that constitute good writing and that they are no good and perhaps cannot master the skill of writing. Both teachers and students need to be made aware that it takes much more than correct surface level features to produce good writing. There is a need for Damascus University lecturers to review or to question the criteria on which they evaluate the written performance of their learners. Teachers should consider features relevant to content too, such as how far did a certain writer take into account the needs of his reader, did he sequence the incidents or the arguments taking into consideration the purpose of writing, etc... There is no doubt that the large number of students in each year will make it hard on the lecturer to give so much of his marking time and attention to the content aspect of thousands of papers written on the same topic (some suggestions as to how students can help in their own assessments are given on page 224).

To add to the problem, the marked compositions are never given back to the students. Learners therefore get hardly any feedback and so they do not get the chance to learn about their strengths and weaknesses in writing. A practice like this is seriously deficient in helping learners develop as writers. In the sample data of students' written exam papers obtained from the University of Damascus across four years, we often came across examples whereby the same student had made the same error year after year and never knew that what she was writing was wrong and was probably resulting in her failure. In what follows is an example taken from one of the same student's paper across the first three years. The student in this example used an expression often used in L1 compositions and never knew that it could not be used in L2 simply because she never saw her writing after it had been corrected.

Task: What things in people's behaviour make you angry?

*How much pretty and interesting to tell about some bad people's behaviour which make other very angry, because their things exist at every place { at home, at public places, and at university.} So we must dismiss them and become free.*

(the first year's introductory paragraph)

Task: The place of women is at home. Discuss.

*How much pretty and interesting to speak about woman's place in this society, because she is an important member in it. So we must speak about her in a good way and give her all the rights. She gave society much, so we must not take her from it.*

(the second year's introductory paragraph)

Task: The benefits and pleasures of learning English.

*Thirdly, in learning English I achieve my ambition, because when I was only a child I wish I were in this department, how much pretty and interesting to achieve your ambition and your question in this life because every one has his own needs and when he achieves some of these needs he feels very happy. So being in this department makes me to identify my personality as a successful member and my learning is the best achievement in my life.*

(The third paragraph in the third year's paper)

The learner therefore has not been given the chance to learn from her mistakes. The student's writing therefore is not improving from one attempt to the next simply because she has not been told what her strengths and weaknesses are. Had she been told, she would in future writing address her weaknesses and build on her strengths.

It appears that marking at Damascus University is not even done for the learner but for the head of the department or the administration as a piece of evidence as to why a certain student has been passed or failed. The only time a marked paper will come into use is when a learner appeals to the administration requesting to know the reason why he has been failed. Only then is the exam paper produced to the student in the presence of the dean and the teacher and all the learner's mistakes will be pointed out to him.

On the rare occasions when writing is carried out in the practical classes, the large number of students makes it impossible for the teacher to mark each student's paper and therefore he resorts to marking a few papers in front of the whole class. Thus, the only occasion where some feedback is given to learners is when the teacher exposes somebody's individual writing to be read and corrected in front of everybody else. This can be a humiliating and a demoralizing experience because it exposes the errors of one learner to hundreds of students, who are very competitive and rarely supportive. Mistakes are pointed out, corrected, emphasized and probably laughed at in the presence of a massive

audience. This is having some counter effects on learners. Some learners decide not to try, to ask a friend, to ask the teacher, to cheat, to stop attending, but not to take the risk. In short, hardly any feedback is given and when it is given it focuses mainly on the linguistic features of the final product and there is no considering whatsoever of the process by which the writing have been produced. This no doubt is indirectly focusing all the attention of the learner merely on the final product.

Before making any suggestions as to how evaluation can be carried out, there seems to be a need to change the students' and teachers' attitude towards error. The teacher should train himself to tolerate a reasonable level of mistakes. The concept of 'mistakes' should be changed into that of 'attempts' (Martin et al. 1989:92). Learners can be encouraged to have a go, to take risks, to be responsible for themselves, because mistakes are part of the process of learning. Students need to be told that there is nothing wrong with making mistakes and that we learn by our mistakes, by trial and error, and by watching others make mistakes too. Learners can be made aware that some mistakes result from real effort and should not be penalized because they indicate that the learner is trying and experimenting. Although errors can be frustrating to the teacher at times, they are of value because they indicate to him whether learners are developing and where they are facing difficulties and where the help is needed. Teachers or partners helping the teacher should train to express positive statements, compliments, encouragements and explanation of positive alternatives and areas where the need for improvement is most needed because the responses they make have an impact on the self-esteem of their learners. It is the students with higher self-esteem that are more likely to take risks and try new things out. Teachers should also be good at persuasion. In this way teachers will be helping to build students' confidence and this confidence is what encourages learners to take risks and to try something else.

Another argument against the way writing is evaluated at Damascus University is that the student is never involved in the evaluation of his work. All he does is write and throw his writing at the teacher to do the marking. Learners should be encouraged to take part in the assessment of their own work. Assessing their own work and writing their comments on the difficulties, uncertainties and what they feel as a success will give the teacher a lot of information and will form the basis of what the teacher is to offer in the future.

The large number of students is the best asset that a teacher has in this context and, if the teacher can invest in this to help learners teach one another, there is no reason why the teacher cannot invest in this again and train learners to evaluate one another. Baxter (1989) proposes a number of ways by which students can do the marking for themselves but first they need to be made aware of the important areas that need to be evaluated. This can be done in a workshop where the teacher can give learners two different essays and ask them to spot the differences or he can give them several essays and ask them to rank

them. The teacher can help by distributing to students cue cards that ask leading questions similar to those used in supportive feedback:

Is it an adequate answer?

Does it address the task that was set?

What about the look, layout, paragraphing and general organisation of the essay?

Could you draw a diagram of this essay?

What about cohesion (linkage)? Is the essay a string of sentences? What connects the first sentence to the second? The second to the third? and so on...

Is it sufficiently "signposted" to allow you to get the writer's idea easily?

How often can you find a grammatical mistake? Is the vocabulary too simplistic for the task?

Are there lots of circumlocutions?

What about punctuation and spelling?

What about "readability" and interest?

(Baxter 1989:23)

Reformulation is another way that Baxter (1989) suggests to help learners see the different evaluation category areas. He suggests the taking of a learner's essay (possibly from another class) and to either re-write it, or to find a native speaker and ask him to rewrite it. The reformulation should take place with the least amount of digression from the original writer's ideas and the order in which the ideas appeared. The two versions will then have to be circulated and learners will be asked to comment on the differences.

Another way of evaluation suggested by Baxter (1989) will be to divide students in the class into groups where each group will be specialized and responsible for marking one aspect of writing. Thus one group will be responsible for marking cohesion, another will be responsible for marking organization, another will be responsible for marking spelling, etc... The essays of the whole class will be circulated and each group will add its comments and give that area a mark out of three. The marks given by each of the groups will then be added and will constitute the marking of that piece of work. This method will also motivate learners to re-read their writing again to find out where they lost marks.

To help teachers of large classes cope with the large amount of marking that they have to do, Chimombo (1986) suggests some useful techniques whereby samples of isolated sentences or paragraphs or whole compositions are taken from the work of a whole class and are made accessible to all learners either through writing them on the board or by distributing them as handouts. Students will then be asked to work in groups looking themselves for the mistakes. A group representative will then report the whole group's findings. In this way the teacher's evaluation will be transformed into a more interesting process and the students will be learning more through the process of looking themselves for mistakes rather than having the teacher do it for them. Edge (1980) goes even further

to suggest that teachers indicate for learners the location and type of errors in their peers' written work and leave it for them to correct such errors and provide feedback for one another.

Dixon (1987) too feels that it is possible to teach composition to large classes if teachers are willing "to surrender some of the control of evaluation through peer response, allow the students to do some writing that will not be evaluated, and limit the number and type of comments they make about their students' writing to those that are most useful".

Groups can also be helped to carry out each other's assessment if the teacher asks groups to exchange their final products and mark them according to the criteria written on the board which can be: content and interest, linkage and organization, language and mechanics.

Another way of helping groups evaluate themselves will be to distribute assessment sheets after the writing process is finished. Each group will be asked to comment on their own work first and leave an empty space at the bottom of the sheet for other peers' constructive suggestions. Each sheet will go round to all the groups in the class and each will contribute by writing down the strengths and weaknesses of that piece of work. However, before this activity takes place the teacher needs to organize a short session in which he guides the students to the criteria to look for in their assessment. In this way students will be made aware of the criteria on which the teacher himself bases his assessment of their writing too.

It would be useful too if the teacher can demonstrate to his learners, either with his own writing or with that of an anonymous student (preferably not from the same class unless it is a group work piece of writing), how ideas, organization, clarity, style, vocabulary, and punctuation might be improved upon.

We tried to show that at Damascus University, teachers of writing do not coordinate with one another. Teachers do not have a single guide or marking scheme on which to base their evaluation of students' writing. It would help if, in teachers' workshops (which is to be discussed later on in section 6.3.11), the aspects that teachers think are important and need to be taken into consideration while evaluating are written down for all teachers to be guided by while responding to their students' writing. An experiment can be carried out whereby the same students' papers are distributed and teachers are asked to correct them along the same guide-lines. In this way marking will be based on the same aspects that all teachers think are important and students across the four years will be done more justice.

All writing should be kept in folders. Students should keep a record of their past and present experiences in writing because in this way they can see their progress. This in

turn will help to build their confidence and be an incentive for more and more writing. At the end of each semester, students can review the whole term's writing and this could be a good chance for progress to be noted and reflected upon. Seeing progress will give learners a sense of accomplishment. It also enables them to see where they are, how much they have covered so far and what more have they got to learn. Each folder of each student needs to be checked periodically to keep an eye on how much the learner has accomplished and what more s/he has to learn. This again can be carried out with the help of students in the groups where each exchanges his/her writing with others and each tries to assess how much each has covered and what more s/he has to do.

It would also be of help if teachers or partners helping teachers or other experienced writers in the group kept a record of observations made of students' behaviour and models of their writing products. In this way they can help in making a better assessment and can monitor the progress that learners are making and at the same time they can use such information to know the future needs of the learners in question. They can also use some of the students' sample writing as models to give to other students to help them when facing difficulties in a certain type of writing or as a guide-line to follow to learn how a certain genre in English is best written. As it is almost impossible for one teacher to be able to assess the development in writing of about 200 students, it will be of great help if teachers will cooperate or seek help from other experienced writers in the University to carry out such kind of assessment once a semester basing their judgements along the same guide-lines agreed upon in the teachers' workshops.

### **6.3.10. Review Examination Procedures**

The research carried out in chapter three revealed the amount of pressure and constraints exerted by the exam conditions in which learners have to produce their assessed writing. Exams exert a lot of pressure too on teachers who have to mark thousands of compositions written mostly on the same topics. The suggestions that we made earlier on group work will ease the term time pressure of evaluating on the teacher and the pressure of being individually responsible on the learner. However, at the end of each semester students will have to write on their own to be assessed individually.

The approach to teaching writing upheld in this work encouraged the abolishing of the writing course as it stands at Damascus University nowadays and suggested its integration with the other courses. This, if put into application, implies that there will be no composition exam paper that students have to sit for. However, to be able to assess the individual writing skills of each learner some developments need to be introduced to the exam setting. To ease the pressure of exams on the students, they first of all need to be given more time or fewer questions to answer. Another development that can be introduced to make of exams less of a pressure on the learner will be to carry out exams in

the four-day sequence suggested by Keech (1981). In such exams, students write on a number of stages over a period of four days, the only difference in this context is that students work individually and not in groups as in Keech's because Damascus University teachers may reject the idea of group effort writing for individual marking. On the first day students work in groups choosing their topics, doing the necessary reading and collecting their materials. On the second day they work in groups too writing their first drafts and giving and seeking feedback from their peers. Papers are left at school and students have to come on the third and fourth days to do their re-writings, revisions and their final drafting each on his own before finally handing their individual papers in for marking. In this way the teacher and the instructors helping him will be assessing learners day by day not only on the final product but also on how they coped with each stage of the writing process. In this way too learners will come to appreciate the importance of the process as part of achieving the final product.

So far we have discussed what developments need to be introduced in the writing course to transform it into a more useful one. In what follows are some suggestions as to how such developments can be implemented.

### **6.3.11. Organize Workshops for Teachers**

To be able to teach learners how to become skilful writers, teachers themselves need to be experienced writers too. There is no doubt that teachers who are familiar with the process of writing will have a different perspective on the problems that the learner may face and on the sort of advice and experiences that they need their learners to practice in order to overcome the problems of writing. It is of vital importance therefore that teachers, before actually teaching writing to their own learners, appreciate what learning to be a writer is all about. Teachers have to be aware that to write means to struggle at times. Experiencing the complex stages of the writing process themselves enables them to identify with their learners as they go through the same stages too. One way of making teachers aware of what it means and how one can be a skilful writer will be to run short courses and organize writing workshops with activities especially designed to show teachers how complex the process of writing can be, how the process of writing and different purposes and audiences affect the final product, and how and when generating ideas, revising for qualitative changes and editing surface level features can be best carried out. This can be best done by making teachers work in groups (in the same way they are going to encourage their learners to work) and find out things for themselves. Involving other members of staff in the approach (any teachers of other courses willing to join in) will help demonstrate to them the value of such developments too.

In such writing workshops teachers need to review their criteria for evaluation and giving feedback. They need to be made aware of the effect of responding to meaning, ideas,

focus, voice, organization and development before responding to usage, spelling, punctuation, and other low level concerns of writing. Teachers also need to be trained to commend the positive in the same way they criticize the negative.

Such workshops should also aim at helping teachers develop techniques in giving their learners supportive feedback. They should train how to ask relevant questions that will enable the learner to articulate their writing problems and develop their texts. Teachers must also be exposed to relevant literature on supportive feedback teaching and they must exchange experiences because that might also help develop their teaching techniques.

Teachers need to be made aware too that group work and approaches that encourage more autonomous learning do not threaten their role nor does it mean less work; it may mean less talking and lecturing, but that does not mean students will be learning less. However, the implications of this approach are that the teacher may have to spend more time organizing meaningful and useful group work tasks and training as to how to guide the members of the group to respond and interact with one another. He should learn how to create an atmosphere where all students respect one another and accept criticism and where none is inhibited and puts the other down.

Writing teachers need to learn how to document their teaching activities. This may get teachers involved in sharing their practices and reporting their findings and recommendations.

The success of such a program depends on how prepared, committed and enthusiastic teachers are. Therefore, the researcher should be prepared to accept the fact that some teachers may not be convinced by the new developments and may resist them; but what is important is that some teachers especially the younger ones who would usually value assistance will be more open to change and consequently will be prepared to try out the new developments.

### **6.3.12. Encourage Continual Professional Growth**

At Damascus University, once teachers graduate and start teaching they give little of their time to keep themselves up-to-date with the latest findings of research. This is partly due to the fact that up-to-date reference books and journals are inaccessible to teachers. The pressure of work at the University plus the pressure of other jobs that teachers find themselves forced to do to earn their living contribute to that too. Moreover, most of the recent research in ESL findings focuses on the teaching of smaller classes which may not work in the context of the large classes characteristic of the English department at Damascus University.

Teachers at Damascus University are often so keen to prescribe so and so number of books to their learners but the problem seems to be that the teachers themselves do not get to read enough on what is going on in the areas pertaining to ESL/EFL writing research. Teachers and administration should cooperate to build a reference library of the latest and most useful writing books and journal articles because that will certainly foster professional growth through creating an awareness of the latest findings in the field of EFL/ESL writing research. In what follows is a list of some books, textbooks and journals that can serve as a guide for composition teachers:

### **List of books**

*Writing and the Writer* (Smith F. 1985)

*Learning to Write: First Language/Second Language* (Freedman, Pringle and Yalden Eds. 1983).

*Techniques in Teaching Writing* (Raimes 1983a)

*Composing in a Second Language* (Mckay ed. 1984)

*Writing: Research, Theory, and Applications* (Krashen 1984)

*Second Language Writing* (Kroll B. ed. 1990)

*Genre Analysis* (Swales J.1990)

### **Textbooks**

*Writing Skills : a Problem-Solving Approach* (Coe N., Rycroft R. and Ernest P. 1983)

*The Web of Words: Exploring Literature Through Language* (Carter R. and M. N. Long 1987))

*Writing: Advanced* (White R. 1987)

*Study Writing* (Hamps-Lyons L. and Heasley B. 1987)

*Writing* (Hedge T. 1990)

*Teaching Writing Skills* (Byrne D. 1988)

*Writing for Study Purposes* (Brooks A. and Grundy P. 1990)

### **Journals**

*College Composition and Communication*

*English Journal*

*English Language Teaching Journal*

*International Review of Applied Linguistics*

*Language Learning*

*Research in the Teaching of English*

*System*

*TESOL Quarterly*

*The English Record*

Another important note worth mentioning here is that in recent years some educationalists and researchers have been showing an increased interest in teaching EFL in large classes. A useful guide to Damascus University lecturers may be Hywel Coleman's (1989) bibliography on *Learning and Teaching in Large Classes*.

To foster teachers' growth and development, it may be a useful idea if teachers learn to document in a special file the teaching methods and the teaching materials that worked for them. In this way the teachers themselves will become a cooperative teaching community; in the same way they will be guiding their learners to cooperate and work together as learning communities. Each teachers' classroom experience, methodologies and techniques can be of invaluable help for the rest of the teachers if properly catalogued and indexed to make access easy for other teachers. This may not seem feasible in a context where teachers are as competitive as their learners, but gradually through workshops and through more interaction and cooperation between teachers, the message may be put through and that may become possible.

Teachers should also encourage the organizing and the attending of writing workshops and seminars where experiences can be shared and successful approaches can be promoted. This may enable the spread of such approaches to other Syrian Universities.

#### **6.4. Implementations and Limitations**

The developments to the Damascus University writing pedagogy suggested above need to be implemented gradually; otherwise people will resist and reject them. Teachers have to be shown that the old approach was not educationally purposeful and was achieving minimum development.

Before any attempt on the part of the researcher to introduce any of these new developments, it is of vital importance for the researcher to get the backing of the administration or the Head of the department. This may not be easy to accomplish but one can start by discussing the matter with the Head. The researcher should be very careful not to talk about 'changes' but about 'developments'. It must be emphasized to the Head that the research that has been carried out in this work has revealed that the approach to the teaching of writing in current use at the University is not purposeful enough and new developments need to be introduced. These developments will not only be of benefit to the learner but will also be of benefit to the whole educational system

which is bound to develop when students are learning more, enjoying it and becoming better critics, thinkers, and judges of truth.

We have so far identified the problem and suggested some solutions. However, it will be unrealistic or naive to think that such developments can be easily implemented at the University. Staff and students have for so long practiced teaching and learning in a completely different manner. The educational culture seems to have a lot to account for. Students in primary and secondary schools have been taught writing in a similar manner and the whole educational system seems to encourage cramming and reproducing of information. So it may take a lot of staff and students' training and development before approaches like these can be implemented. One also has to admit that this change is only suggested for one course amongst tens of others given in the department and if teachers of just one course are going to introduce the changes, the chances of it surviving are going to be slim and it is going to be hard work convincing teachers of other courses to do likewise. One of the greatest hope for the researcher lies in the students. Students keen on learning always know which are the classes they learn most in and which are the most useful ones; so if the teacher<sup>2</sup> is able to get her message through to the learners then perhaps that may encourage other teachers to follow likewise or at least to think and question the ways in which they teach their courses. The administration can also help by being more involved in the changes and more supportive of the developments that are proving successful and popular with learners. One has to keep in mind that no such changes are taking place in the L1 writing courses, especially at the school level. Other teachers might argue that these changes should have taken place earlier on in education, at the elementary and secondary school levels, but the issue here is that change has to start somewhere and instead of sitting and waiting for others to start changes each has to start with oneself. Besides, socio-political factors have a lot to account for the way things are at Damascus University too. One important factor is that teachers do not have to account for what they do, their assessment most often takes place on a routine basis and, even if they did not prove successful, they will still stay on because they have got permanent jobs and have cost the Ministry of Higher Education so much to qualify them to do the job. The teachers' assured feelings that they have permanent jobs contributes to the fact that they do not feel the need to compete in order to be the best and survive in their jobs. There is little competitiveness and teachers hardly feel the need to transform and change because change is difficult and costs time and effort and is often resisted. Such jobs are also low paid. Members of staff often find themselves forced to do other jobs to sustain their families and therefore have little time to spare to think about change, let alone organize it. It certainly saves a lot of time to teach year in and year out the same materials

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<sup>2</sup> Teachers at Damascus University reserve the right to teach their learners in the way they think most appropriate for their learners.

in the same habitual way because organizing new tasks and trying out new ideas will certainly cost a lot of time and effort.

Another limitation on the application of developments is the fact that getting the approval of the Higher Education Council for introducing curricular developments can be a lengthy and a tedious process. This fact besides the lack of incentive on the part of teachers have contributed to the teaching of the same books for years on end. Consequently the syllabi are rarely reviewed and thus few changes are being introduced to keep up with the developments in education taking place in the rest of the world.

Integrating the teaching of writing with other content courses may be difficult to put into application too because some teachers may see it as trespassing on their own territories and may feel threatened. It may take a lot of time and effort explaining and convincing both the administration and the other course teachers of the benefits of such changes.

Another limitation on the application of this work may be the fact that teachers sometimes, due to shortage in staff members, have no say in the courses they are required to teach. The researcher, for example may not be given the chance to teach a course on writing in the first place. This again is very frustrating for teachers who spend long years working in certain areas of research and end up teaching something that is hardly of relevance to their areas of expertise.

Having mentioned all the limitations on the introduction of these new developments, one has to admit that in recent years the Ministry of Higher Education has been allocating more grants for EFL research. This indicates an awareness for the need to develop such courses. Moreover, the Ministry of Higher Education has recently taken positive steps towards encouraging and funding research in most academic fields at the University. The most recent concern by the government to improve upon the standards of living of University staff members may have positive implications too. One also has to bear in mind that things did not used to be so bad in the past but with the continuous increase in the number of students year after year and with the lack of University funding, the situation seems to be running out of control. Officials seem to be aware of the problem and recently there has been some talk about changes but no one seems to have found a suitable solution yet. Taking into account all these recent developments, the researcher has more hope that she will be able to introduce some of the changes embodied in this work.

## CONCLUSION

One major finding of this work is that the task and the context in which it is produced, the role the teacher adopts in relation to it, the purpose of writing and the audience for whom it is intended have a significant bearing on writing and have to be taken into account when studying the final written product.

The detailed investigations into the educational context carried out in this work revealed the very limited learning gains from a language-centred writing course in an authoritarian educational system with massive classes and limited numbers of staff and resources. Findings suggest that the central focus to the teaching of writing at the Department of English at Damascus University is the written 'product', with little or no attention to the writing 'process' or the writing 'context'.

The longitudinal analysis of the final products that students produced across the four year writing course at the University revealed that little development was being achieved at the language level and even less development was achieved at the level of content and organization. Findings also revealed that the passing papers were those that wrote less arguments and supporting points in a comparatively higher level of linguistic proficiency and that the failing ones were those that attempted more generation of meaning in a lower level of language accuracy. Passing and failing the composition paper at Damascus University is therefore determined by the level of language proficiency displayed in that paper. The course therefore teaches language proficiency and not writing proficiency, yet it equates one with the other.

Findings also suggested that teachers at Damascus University are unaware of the potentialities of writing as a tool that promotes thinking and critical judgement. The use of writing merely to reproduce language forms and structures and sometimes second hand ideas and experiences is indirectly reducing the learners' responsibility towards the thoughts that they write and that which they read in other people's correct writing. The damaging effects of such an approach are far reaching because without questioning ones own views and that of others there will be little development.

The problems therefore that students face in writing lie not only in the low level of their language proficiency but also in the pedagogical approaches in current practice at the University. Thus improving upon the final product that students produce can be best carried out through a development of the context in which the learning of how to write takes place. Suggestions were therefore made to review, redefine, and develop the existing approach to the teaching of writing at the University of Damascus and to

implement the changes into the existing educational context taking into consideration most of its limitations.

The approach to writing pedagogy upheld in this work focuses on the 'process' and 'context' of writing without ignoring the 'product'. It aims at educating learners not only in the skill of writing but in all the content courses given at the University through integrating the writing course with other disciplines. It also aims at socializing learners with the tasks and genres that are acceptable to the L2 academic community. One of the main objectives of the approach upheld in this work is to familiarize learners with the real life difficulties and frustrations of the processes of composing and help them grow into maturity through their own writing experiences and their own discovery of what they think and why they think it. This evaluation of one's own writing can also teach learners how to criticise and judge other people's writing too. The ultimate aim of the approach upheld in this work is not only the improvement of the writing abilities of learners but also their growth and development through the composing experience.

### **Suggestions for further research**

- 1) A study that investigates how non-native skilful writers compose in comparison with native skilful ones.
- 2) A study that compares the L1 and L2 composing strategies of learning Syrian writers at the secondary and tertiary levels.
- 3) A study of how L1 writing and reading courses are taught at primary and secondary school levels with the aim of introducing developments that will improve upon the whole educational process.
- 4) To design a writing course for Damascus University students in all four years taking into consideration its contextual limitations.
- 5) A study of the reading abilities and problems of learners in the department of English language and literature and to design a four year reading course for all students again taking into consideration contextual limitations.
- 6) A study of all the curriculum content courses given at the department of English language and literature, assessing their usefulness and considering introducing curricular developments that go hand in hand with staff developments.
- 7) A study of the management and administration of the University of Damascus to look for the roots of many of the pedagogical problems faced in most departments.

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## APPENDIX A

The courses offered in each year at the department of English language and Literature at Damascus University and the number of weekly hours of instruction assigned to each.

## First Year

First Semester	Number of Hours		Second Semester	Number of Hours	
	Course	Lectures		Practicals	Course
Language	2	4	Language	2	4
Composition	2	2	Composition	2	2
Prose	3	-	Drama	3	-
Poetry	3	-	Short Story	3	-
Translation	4	-	Arabic Language	4	-
Socialist Cultural Education	4	-	European Language	4	-

## Second Year

First Semester	Number of Hours		Second Semester	Number of Hours	
	Course	Lectures		Practicals	Course
Language	2	4	Language	2	4
Composition	2	2	Composition	2	2
Prose	3	-	Drama	3	-
Poetry	3	-	Shakespeare	3	-
Translation	4	-	Arabic Language	4	-
Socialist Cultural Education	4	-	European Language	4	-

## Third year

First Semester	Number of Hours		Second Semester	Number of Hours	
	Course	Lectures		Practicals	Course
Language	2	2	Language	4	-
Composition	2	-	Composition	2	-
Poetry	3	-	Translation	2	-
American Literature	3	-	Shakespeare	3	2
History of Literature	4	2	Prose	3	2
European Language	4	-	Literary Criticism	4	-

## Fourth year

First Semester	Number of Hours		Second Semester	Number of Hours	
	Course	Lectures		Practicals	Course
Language	2	-	Language	2	-
Literary Essay	2	-	Drama	3	-
Prose	4	-	World Literature	4	2
Poetry	3	2	American Literature	3	2
Literary Criticism	3	2	Translation	2	-
Comparative Literature	2	-	Comparative Literature	2	-

## **APPENDIX B**

A copy of the content pages of the High School English language book

ENGLISH FOR SECONDARY SCHOOLS

BOOK THREE LITERARY

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حقوق التأليف والنشر والطبع محفوظة  
لوزارة التربية في الجمهورية العربية السورية

عدد النسخ / ٢٢ / ١٠٠٠  
نسخة

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## **APPENDIX C**

A copy of a sample lesson from the High School English language book

## Section 1

**TENSES OF THE VERB****Exercise 1**

**The Simple Present Tense  
and the Simple Past Tense**

1. The Simple Present Tense is used for habitual actions and general truths. It is found with such words as :

*always, often, generally, sometimes, usually, everyday, once a month, whenever, etc.*

2. The Simple Past Tense is used either for a habitual action in the Past ( with the word *always, often, generally, etc.* ) e. g. *When I was in London I always spoke English.* or for a past action, e. g.

*Last year I visited my aunt once a week.*

*Put the verbs in brackets into the correct tense, either past or present :*

1. Wood always ( float ).
2. My aunt Fadwa ( hate ) girls who made up.
3. His parents don't know what to do with that child. He ( lie ) habitually.

4. When I was young, my father always (give) me some money on Fridays.
5. The ancient Egyptians (build) pyramids as tombs for their kings.
6. You (play) with dolls when you were a little girl ?
7. How often you ( go ) to the theatre when you were in Cairo ?
8. In the past men frequently ( fight ) duels. Nowadays they seldom (do.).
9. Whenever I ( go ) to see him, he was out.
10. Every time he opens his mouth, he (say) something foolish.
11. Ali often (strike) little boys, and then he (run) away when they (cry).
12. It (rain) hard last winter, so the farmers(stay) indoors till the land (dry).
13. Farmers ( serve ) the nation because they (provide) food that we cannot do without even if we (try).
14. How long you ( lie ) down yesterday ? You (sleep) ?
15. I seldom (see) him at concerts these days. He (go) to them regularly before the war.

16. She ( sing ) very beautifully before she was married, but nowadays she (not sing) anymore.
17. He ( come ) to my office whenever he needed money.
18. I (have) my hair cut whenever it gets too long.
19. Water always (freeze) at 0° degrees centigrade.
20. Students frequently (make) mistakes of tense usage when they do this exercise.

### Exercise 2

#### The Unreal Past

The Past Tense is used for something unreal or wished for now.

The Past Perfect is used for something unreal when the supposition or wish was all in the past.

Some expressions using the past tense in this way are :

*I wish, as if, if only, suppose, I'd rather; it's (high) time.*

#### Examples :

If only I knew the answer. (now).  
If only I had known the answer. (yesterday).

*Supply the correct tense of the verbs in brackets :*  
(Note that the simple unreal past form of « be » is « were » for all pronouns.)

1. I wish I (know) his name.
2. It's time we all (go) home.
3. I'd rather you (go) now.
4. It's about time you (get) the tea ready.
5. He came in, looking as if he (see) a ghost.
6. I wish I ( not break ) it.
7. I felt as if I ( be pulled ) through a hedge backwards.
8. My wife says she wishes I (be) a thousand miles away; indeed, I wish I (be).
9. He said he wished he (never see) me.
10. I feel as if my head (be) on fire.
11. It's high time you (have) a haircut.
12. If only he (tell) you the whole story !
13. I'd rather you (pay) me now. Suppose he (ask) me for the money tomorrow !
14. A person who ( refuse ) to eat would be dead in a month.

## MR. BRUSH GOES TO THE BANK

Thornton Wilder

Thornton Niven Wilder was born in 1897 at Madison Wisconsin, U. S. A., and was brought up in the United States and in China. He is a graduate of Yale University. His full development as a playwright was seen on the publication in 1938 of « Our Town », a play depicting life in New England.

The extract is taken from Thornton Wilder's book, « Heaven's My Destination. » Mr. Brush is trying to lead a good life and has decided that it is wrong to accept interest on one's money. Here he goes to a bank (which is in difficulties) to withdraw his money, but not the interest on it. This unusual attitude sets the bank a problem.

Brush found himself toward noon on the same day in Armina, forty miles away, whither he had come to draw his savings from a bank in that town. The bank consisted of one big room, high and well

lighted, with a pen<sup>1</sup> in the middle, walled in with a show of marble and of bright steel network<sup>2</sup>. Beside the door the president sat in a smaller pen, filled with despair. Short of a miracle<sup>3</sup> his bank had little over a week to live. Banks had been failing all through these states for months and now even this bank, which seemed to him to be eternal<sup>4</sup> would be obliged to close its doors :

Brush glanced at the president, but resisting<sup>5</sup> the temptation<sup>6</sup> to go and talk to him, went to a desk and, drawing out his bankbook, made out<sup>7</sup> a slip.<sup>8</sup> He presented himself at the cashier's window.

« I'm closing up my account. » he said. « I'll draw out everything except the interest. »  
« I beg your pardon ? »

« I'll take out the money, » he repeated, raising his voice as though the cashier were deaf, « but I'll leave the interest here. »

- 
1. Pen : enclosed Place.
  2. Network : number of lines crossing each other.
  3. Miracle : any remarkable or wonderful happening.
  4. Eternal : lasting forever.
  5. Resist : not yield.
  6. Temptation : something that tempts. Tempt : Rouse a desire in
  7. Made out : filled out.
  8. Slip : narrow piece of paper.
  9. Interest : money paid (yearly) to one who lends money; money for the use of money as to pay 6% interest on a loan.

The cashier blinked<sup>1</sup> a moment, then began playing with his coins. At last he said in a low voice:  
 « I don't think we'll be able to keep your account open for so small a sum. »

« You don't understand. I'm not leaving the interest here as an account. I don't want it. Just turn it back into the bank. I don't believe in interest. »

The cashier began casting worried glances to right and left. He paid out both sum and interest across the counter,<sup>2</sup> muttering « ..... the bank ... you must find some other way of disposing<sup>3</sup> of the money. »

Brush took the five hundred dollars and pushed the rest back. He raised his voice sharply and could be heard all over the room saying. « I don't believe in interest. »

The cashier hurried to the president and whispered in his ear. The president stood up in alarm, as though he had been told that a thief was entering the bank. He went to the door of the bank and stopped Brush as he was about to leave.

« Mr. Brush. »

« Yes. »

---

1. Blink : close and open the eyes quickly.

2. Counter : table in a bank or shop where money is counted on.

3. Dispose : get rid of.

« Might I speak to you for a moment, Mr. Brush ? In here. »

« Certainly. » said Brush, and followed him through a low door into the presidential pen. They sat down and gazed at one another in considerable excitement.

« Mm .... mm .... you feel you must draw out your savings, Mr. Brush? » said the president softly, as though he were inquiring into a private and delicate matter.

« Yes, Mr. Southwick » replied Brush, reading the name from a framed sign on the desk.

« . . . and you're leaving your interest in the bank ? »

« Yes. »

« What would you like us to do with it ? »

« I have no right to say . The money isn't mine. I didn't earn it. »

« But your money, Mr. Brush — I beg your pardon, — your money earned it. »

« I don't believe that money has the right to earn money. » Mr. Southwick swallowed. Then in a manner he had once used while explaining to his daughter that the earth was round, he said : « but the money you deposited here .... that money has been earning money for us. The interest represents those profits which we share with you. »

« I don't believe in profits like that. »

Mr. Southwick edged his chair forward and asked another question : « Mm ..... mm ... May I ask why you have thought it best to withdraw your money at this time ? »

« Why, I'm glad to tell you, Mr. Southwick. You see, I've been thinking about money and banks a lot lately. I haven't quite thought the whole matter through yet — I'll be able to do that when my vacation comes in November — but at least I see that for myself I don't believe in saving money any more. Up till now I used to believe that you were allowed to save some money — like five hundred dollars, for instance, for your old age you know, or for the hospital if you're ill or for the chance you might get married suddenly — for what people call a rainy day; but now I see that's all wrong. I've taken a vow,<sup>1</sup> Mr. Southwick; I've taken the vow of Voluntary Poverty. »

« Of what ? » asked. Mr. Southwick his eyes starting out of his head.

« Of Voluntary Poverty. »

- 
1. Vow : solemn promise to God. Take a vow = make a vow,
  2. Voluntary : an act done by one's own free will, not by compulsion.

## EXERCISE

### Comprehension :

1. Why was the president filled with despair ?
2. Why did Brush refuse to take his interest ?
3. How did Mr. Southwick try to persuade Brush to take his interest ?
4. Why did Mr. Brush think it best to withdraw his money ?
5. What is the meaning of the saying - To put money by for a rainy day. ?

### Essay Subjects :

1. Is it wise or unwise to save money ? Why ?
2. « Poverty is no disgrace to a man. » ( Sydney Smith. )

### Language :

1. Put one of the given phrases (in its right form) in each space : make out; short of; beg someone's pardon; dispose of; believe in.
  - a — As soon as the clerks had — the work, they went home.
  - b — The policeman — a slip and handed it to the motorist.
  - c — People who — ghosts hate to hear noises in the night.

- d — Unfortunately I trod on a man's foot, and I had to —
- e — His sister borrowed five pounds from him because she was — money.
- f — I have not yet — my house, but a possible buyer is coming tomorrow to look at it.
- g — « I —, » said the deal man. « I didn't hear what you said. »
- h — Henry is an independent sort of fellow and does not — asking anyone for help.
- i — After — a form and signing my name at the bottom, I gave it to the cashier.
- j — — a miracle, that old house will fall down in the next storm.
2. *Explain the following :*
- a — He edged his chair forward.
- b — Walled in with marble and steel.
- c — He presented himself at the cashier's window.
- d — A vacation.
- e — Voluntary poverty
3. *When might a man do the following ?*
- blink; cast glances to right and left; mutter; withdraw money from a bank; deposit money in a bank.
4. *Withdraw money. With = back, from, against, ( Old English ) Explain :*
- a — In the face of the attack, the army withdrew.
- b — The army could not withstand the attack.
- c — His father withheld his consent.
- d — The old banknotes were withdrawn from circulation.
- e — What cause withholds you then to mourn for him ?
- Shakespeare : ( Julius Caesar )

## **APPENDIX D**

A copy of the content pages of the first year composition book

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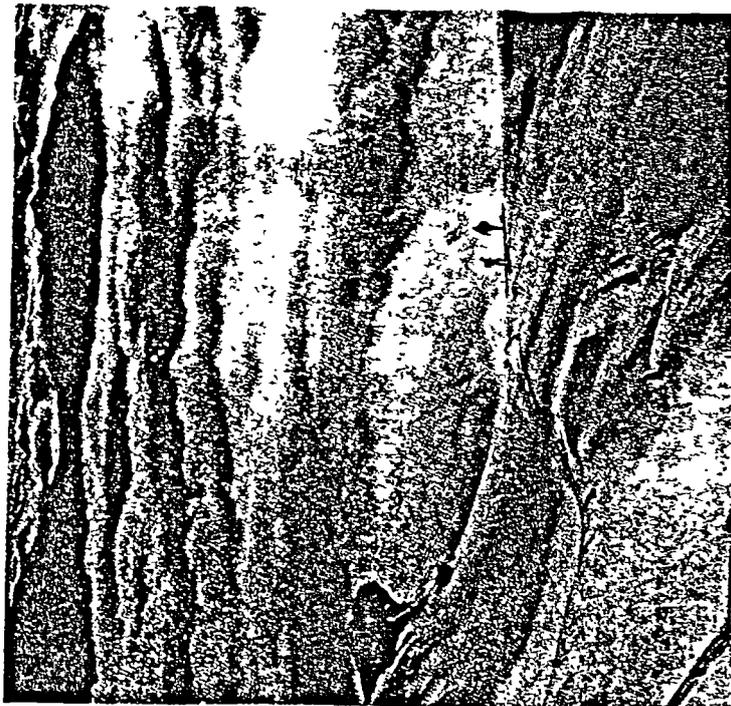
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## **APPENDIX E**

**A copy of a lesson taken from the first year compoition book**

# UNIT 8

## 8.1 Comprehension and composition model: 'The World of Skiing'



Photograph taken at the Col des Vaux below Mont Gelé, Switzerland.

Here is a passage describing in brief the history and present-day development of skiing. Read it twice, noting how the material is developed (every paragraph, in effect, dealing with a fresh aspect of the topic).

According to the *Advanced Learner's Dictionary of Current English* (Oxford University Press, 1974), a ski is 'one of a pair of

5 long, narrow strips of wood, strapped under the feet for moving over snow'. The art of using such strips of wood is very old; indeed, the earliest known 'picture' of a skier is a rock carving in Norway, dating from 2,000 B.C. The oldest skis that have ever been found – in bogs in Sweden and Finland – are thought to be between 4,000 and 5,000 years old. Skis may also have been used by the northern Chinese about 300 B.C., and the Vikings of Scandinavia certainly used them in the 10th and 11th centuries. They did not, however, use them for sport. Northern Europeans used their skis for the practical business of moving – and fighting – in winter lands.

Nowadays, there are basically two kinds of skiing:

- 15 1 *Nordic or cross-country skiing*, which may or may not be a sport, and is essentially a way of getting about on snow, and  
20 2 *Alpine or downhill skiing*, which developed in and around Switzerland in the 19th century and is purely a sporting activity.

Nordic and Alpine have skis in common but little else (and even the skis are not exactly the same). Nordic skiing is a way of enjoying vast snowy panoramas; anyone who enjoys walking in mountain areas will also probably enjoy this means of locomotion. It is excellent for touring: uphill, downhill, over flat land, over frozen lakes and along forest trails. Alpine skiing, on the other hand, is big wintertime vacation business with a technology of its own: ski-resorts, ski-lifts and even snow-flattening machines. It has its own special vocabulary, skills and competitions, and is a significant holiday industry in such countries as Switzerland, Austria, Canada, the United States, Italy and Scotland. It can provide the feeling of flying like a snowbird – or of breaking a leg.

30 Whatever kind one prefers, skiing is a sport for anyone who is normally active. There are no barriers of age or sex: women do as well as men and often a slim girl proves more competent than a muscular man in his prime. A middle-aged mother may make neater turns than a nervous youngster, and children (if they start young) can race down mountainsides at high speeds in no greater danger than on their bicycles in city streets. To be expert, however, means practice and knowledge; good skiers have learned to read the snow, and to change their style as they move from one quality of snow to another.

40 Skiing can cost a lot of money. Costs can, however, be cut by hiring not only the skis and poles but also the boots, anoraks and ski-clothes. The cost of hiring such articles varies from 10 to 50 percent of the purchase price over a fortnight's holiday. It is a particularly good idea to hire children's clothing. This should be done, preferably, at the ski-resort, where one gets the added advantage that hired equipment can be changed if it does not work or fit properly.

45 But why ski? Some people love the lightness and the thrill of

- d. It is ex\_\_\_\_\_t for touring.
- e. Whatever kind one pr\_\_\_\_rs, sk\_\_\_\_\_ is a sport for anyone who is norm\_\_\_\_\_ active.
- f. There are no bar\_\_\_\_\_s of age or sex: women do as well as men and often a slim girl proves more compet\_\_\_\_\_ than a mus\_\_\_\_\_r man in his prime.
- g. ... and children (if they start young) can race down m\_\_\_\_\_nsides at high speeds in no greater danger than on their b\_\_\_\_\_cles in city streets.
- h. To be expert, however, means pract\_\_\_\_\_ and kn\_\_\_\_\_l\_\_\_\_\_e.
- i. The cost of hiring such articles v\_\_\_\_\_s from 10 to 50 p\_\_\_\_\_cent of the p\_\_\_\_\_chase price over a fortnight's holiday.
- j. This should be done, pr\_\_\_\_\_ably, at the ski-resort, where one gets the added a\_\_\_\_\_rage that hired equip\_\_\_\_\_ can be changed if it does not work or fit prop\_\_\_\_\_.

speed, of flying on their slim skis through sunlit mountain passes and down long dizzy slopes. Others enjoy the social life before, during and especially after the skiing itself. Others still, however, just need their skis for getting around in remote areas; for them it is, and always has been, an everyday wintertime necessity.

50

Below are some statements relating to the passage. Some are true (T) in terms of the passage, while others are false (F). Mark them appropriately, and if a statement is false, say why.

- a.  The art of skiing is thought to be about 6,000 years old.
- b.  People in ancient China probably used skis.
- c.  Alpine skiing needs different equipment from Nordic skiing.
- d.  If you take part in Nordic skiing you do not go down hillsides.
- e.  Nordic skiing is excellent for touring.
- f.  Alpine skiing is an important holiday industry in at least four European countries.
- g.  Anyone who is normally active can learn to ski.
- h.  Men tend to be better at skiing than women.
- i.  You can avoid much of the expense of skiing by hiring your equipment at a ski-resort.
- j.  There are essentially two kinds of skiers: those who enjoy the skiing itself, and those who enjoy the company of other skiers.

## 8.2 Spelling: Completing words

Below are ten extracts taken directly from the passage. In each sentence there is one or more word with some letters missing. The missing parts of the words are indicated by a dash (—). No indication is given of the number of possible missing letters. Complete each word properly spelled.

- a. A \_\_\_\_\_ding to the 'Advanced Learner's Dict\_\_\_\_\_y of Current English' (Oxford University Press, 1974), a ski is 'one of a pair of long, narrow strips of wood, str\_\_\_\_\_d under the feet for moving over snow'.
- b. North\_\_\_\_\_Eur\_\_\_\_\_s used th\_\_\_\_\_skis for the practical b\_\_\_\_\_ss of moving, and fighting, in winter lands.
- c. 'Alpine or downhill sk\_\_\_\_\_, which dev\_\_\_\_\_ed in and around Switzerland in the 19th century and is purely a sporting activity.

## **APPENDIX F**

A copy of Lesson One from the first year composition book

# UNIT 1

## 1.1 Comprehension and composition model: 'Cats'



The original cast of the musical 'Cats' at the New London Theatre.

Here is a short passage about cats. It is presented as one complete paragraph. Read it twice.

Cats are independent animals. They are domestic animals, like dogs, but they are not so completely domestic as dogs. They like to keep some secrets. They have their own private lives. The domestic cat is very much a hunter and a wanderer like her bigger sisters, the lion and the tiger. The ancient Egyptians were probably the first people to keep cats, but they did not keep them as pets. The cat was a god in ancient Egypt, or, more correctly, a goddess. It is an interesting fact that in English people usually refer to cats as female. A male cat gets a special name to show that he is not female. He is a 'tomcat'. In the English language, a woman is called a 'cat' if she

says unkind things about other women, but we do not call a man a 'cat' if he says unkind things about other men. If a man is not very nice, we call him a 'dog' or a 'rat'.

Below are some statements relating to the passage. Some of these statements are true (T) in terms of the passage, while others are false (F). Mark them appropriately, and if a statement is false, say why.

- Cats are just as domestic as dogs.
- Dogs like to keep some secrets.
- Cats and lions are like each other in some ways.
- The ancient Egyptians kept cats as pets.
- People generally refer to a cat as 'she'.
- A male cat is called a 'tomcat'.
- A woman is called a 'cat' if she speaks unkindly about other people.
- Men who are not very nice are sometimes called 'dogs' and 'rats', but never 'cats'.

## 1.2 Spelling: Doubling consonants

Look at these two pieces from the passage on cats:

- ... a *wanderer* like her *bigger* sisters, the lion and the tiger. (lines 4-5)
- ... a god in ancient Egypt, or, more correctly, a *goddess*. (line 7)

The *italicised* words in both pieces follow certain English spelling rules. These rules concern when to double (or not to double) certain consonants. Below is a list of words. Suffixes (like *-ed*, *-er*, *-est* and *-ing*) can be added to these words. Mark the words which must double their final consonants, and add at least one example of this happening. (The rules for doubling consonants are given in the answer section for this unit, in case you need to study them.)

- kind
- swim
- come
- d. reckon
- e. plan
- f. fat

- g. name
- h. develop
- i. quiet
- j. occur
- k. level
- l. determine
- m. nod
- n. prefer
- o. gossip
- p. permit

### 1.3 Grammar and structure: Tenses

The table below analyses how verbs are used in the passage. All the finite verbs (that is, all the verbs with subjects) are underlined, and the notes at the side refer to the tenses used.

simple present tense used for general statements	Cats are <u>independent</u> animals. They are <u>domestic</u> animals, like <u>dogs</u> , but they are not so <u>completely domestic</u> as dogs. They <u>like to keep</u> some secrets. They <u>have</u> their own private lives. The <u>domestic cat</u> is very much a <u>hunter</u> and a <u>wanderer</u> like her <u>bigger sisters</u> , the lion and the tiger.
simple past tense used for particular (historical) statements	The <u>ancient Egyptians</u> were probably the first people to <u>keep</u> cats, but they <u>did not keep</u> them as pets. The cat was a god in ancient Egypt, or, more correctly, a goddess.
return to the present tense for further general statements	It is an interesting fact that in English people usually refer to cats as female. A male cat gets a special name to show that he is not female. He is a 'tomcat'. In the English language, a woman is called a 'cat' if she says unkind things about other women, but we <u>do not call</u> a man a 'cat' if he <u>says</u> unkind things about other men. If a man is not very nice, we call him a 'dog' or a 'rat'.

In the passage, the general statements relate to things that still exist or happen, while the particular statements are about things that no longer exist or happen. This is just one pattern among many possible patterns where the present tense contrasts with the past. In the passages which occur later in this course you should make a habit of studying how the tenses are used. Suppose you changed everything in this passage into the past. What effect would this have?

### 1.4 Grammar and composition: Making connections

Below you will find two examples, some instructions and advice, and then two lists in a box. Follow the examples and turn the sentences into a paragraph about cats and dogs.

- Example 1** Cats are domestic animals. **but**  
 They are not as domestic as dogs.  
 Cats are domestic animals, but they are not as domestic as dogs.
- Example 2** Dogs generally like to be part of the family. **while**  
 Cats like to keep some secrets of their own.  
 Dogs generally like to be part of the family while cats like to keep some secrets of their own.

Using *but* and *while* you can contrast and compare various things. *But* makes a contrast very clear. *While* is not so strong, and simply makes a comparison. Now proceed with the following material. Write it out as a complete paragraph, using *but* and *while*.

First statements	Conjunctions	Second statements
Cats are independent animals. Dogs generally like company.	<b>but</b> <b>while</b>	Dogs are not. Cats often prefer to keep to themselves.
Domestic cats still have a lot in common with their bigger sisters, the lion and the tiger.	<b>but</b>	Most domestic dogs do not have much in common with their wild relative, the wolf.
In ancient times, the cat was a goddess.	<b>while</b>	The dog was a worker, protecting the sheep and the home.
It is also interesting that in English the cat is female.	<b>but</b>	The dog is not, being generally regarded as male.
A male cat gets the special name 'tomcat' to show that he is not female.	<b>while</b>	The female dog gets the special name 'bitch' to show she is not male.

**Punctuation work:**  
First stage

If a passage is read aloud, the reader usually pauses at each period. The period in fact marks this spoken pause. A reader may also pause, briefly, at a comma, but may not, while the end of a paragraph often requires a longer pause than the end of a sentence.

Go back to the passage on cats at the beginning of this unit. Consider how you would read it aloud. Think about the pauses, but also think about how to stress the important words in the passage. Punctuation is closely related to speech, and learning how to read aloud properly is a great aid to good writing. In the answer section for this unit you will find the passage written out in a special way that may help you in reading aloud.

**Punctuation work:**  
Second stage

Below is part of the passage on cats. It has no periods or capital letters at all, but it has some commas. Do not change any of the commas, but re-write the passage in full, properly punctuated.

the ancient egyptians were probably the first people to keep cats, but they did not keep them as pets the cat was a god in ancient egypt, or, more correctly, a goddess it is an interesting fact that people usually refer to cats as female a male cat gets a special name to show that he is not female he is a 'tomcat' in the english language, a woman is called a 'cat' if she says unkind things about other women, but we do not call a man a 'cat' if he says unkind things about other men if a man is not very nice, we call him a 'dog' or a 'rat'

Now do the same for this completely new passage:

a friend of mine has a cat called cleopatra this cat sometimes goes away for weeks, and no one sees her or knows where she is occasionally, however, my friend finds her sitting on a wall in the moonlight, miles from home cleopatra comes down from the wall, rubs herself against my friend to say 'hullo', then walks away again she comes back about a week later, quite happy, in her own good time cleopatra is independent she certainly lives with my friend, but she does not in any sense belong to him

**1.5 Punctuation:**  
The sentence and the period

The period or full-stop ends a sentence. ✓

Sometimes, however, people forget to use it. Sometimes, they also put commas (,) between their sentences, instead of periods. This is probably because they do not see their sentences as complete pieces of information with independent grammatical forms. Such pieces of information need to be clearly separated from each other. The English language also uses capital letters at the beginning of sentences to make this separation even clearer, and therefore has a special way of marking both the start and the finish of a sentence.

The material in the boxes below is organized in order to show how important clear punctuation is. In the first box there is no punctuation at all, while underneath the same passage is adequately punctuated.

no periods, capital letters or commas	cats are independent animals they are domestic animals like dogs but they are not so completely domestic as dogs they like to keep some secrets they have their own private lives the domestic cat is very much a hunter and a wanderer like her bigger sisters the lion and the tiger
all the necessary marks	Cats are independent animals. They are domestic animals, like dogs, but they are not so completely domestic as dogs. They like to keep some secrets. They have their own private lives. The domestic cat is very much a hunter and a wanderer like her bigger sisters, the lion and the tiger.

In the second box, it is easier to see and to understand the separate pieces of information. We see clearly what the writer wants us to see, and may even manage to say it better.



- a. Dogs generally like company.
- b. Lions must kill in order to live.
- c. Tigers are powerful animals.
- d. Roses are beautiful flowers.
- e. In ancient Egypt, cats were goddesses.
- f. Squares are geometrical figures.
- g. Trees are important in our lives.
- h. Elephants are very large animals.

Example 2 The cat is an independent animal.

- ▷ Cats are independent animals.
  - i. He has been studying the tiger and its habits.
  - j. It is easier to grow the rose in some climates than in others.
  - k. The kangaroo is found in Australia, but the jaguar is native to Central and South America.
  - l. The cat was certainly considered divine in ancient Egypt.
  - m. The wolf and the hyena are wild animals, while the dog is a domestic animal.
  - n. The tiger and the lion are very large, but the domestic cat is relatively small.
  - o. Although some people prefer the rose, I prefer the tulip and the daffodil because they are spring flowers.
  - p. The circle and the triangle are both common figures in geometry.

In the above sentences, you simply followed the examples. Now study the following sentences carefully and decide how they could be changed from singular to plural, or plural to singular.

- q. Oaks and elms are trees which grow slowly.
- r. The rat is an animal that carries disease.
- s. The dog is often called man's best friend.
- t. Many people regard the oak tree as a symbol of strength.
- u. Dogs are popular animals in English-speaking countries, but men are still called 'dogs' if they are not nice to people.
- v. The ancient Greeks did not have a high opinion of the dog.
- w. Deer are not usually domestic animals.
- x. The sheep and the goat are similar, but they are not members of the same species.

## **APPENDIX G**

**An illustration of exercises in controlled composition and editing texts taken  
from the first year composition book**

**Composition work:**  
Second stage

Below there are two paragraphs, each containing numbered blanks. Consider whether a definite article, an indefinite article or nothing at all is needed in those blanks. Insert the proper word or an 'X', as appropriate.

- y. (1) \_\_\_\_\_ cats are independent animals. They are (2) \_\_\_\_\_ domestic animals, like (3) \_\_\_\_\_ dogs, but they are not so completely domestic as (4) \_\_\_\_\_ dogs. They like to keep some secrets. They have their own private lives. (5) \_\_\_\_\_ domestic cat is very much (6) \_\_\_\_\_ hunter and (7) \_\_\_\_\_ wanderer like her bigger sisters, (8) \_\_\_\_\_ lion and (9) \_\_\_\_\_ tiger.
- z. (1) \_\_\_\_\_ cat is (2) \_\_\_\_\_ independent animal. It is (3) \_\_\_\_\_ domestic animal, like (4) \_\_\_\_\_ dog, but is not so completely domestic as (5) \_\_\_\_\_ dog. It likes to keep some secrets. It has its own private life. (6) \_\_\_\_\_ domestic cats are very much (7) \_\_\_\_\_ hunters and (8) \_\_\_\_\_ wanderers like their bigger sisters, (9) \_\_\_\_\_ lion and (10) \_\_\_\_\_ tiger.

**1.8 Controlled composition:**  
Animal names

In the lists immediately below you will find the first three sentences of the passage on cats reduced to their essential content. They are now a little like a telegram. To return the sentences to their original form it is necessary to add the basic grammatical materials of English:

- 1 cat/be/independent/animal
- 2 they/be/domestic/animal/like/dog/but/be/not/so/complete/domestic/as/dog
- 3 they/like/keep/some/secret

The verbs in the lists are underlined so that you will know that they *are* verbs and are not any other part of speech, and this practice will be followed in all the exercises like this throughout the course.

Below you will find two similar sets of lists. These serve as the basis for two passages about how we use the names of animals in everyday

English. Study the lists, then write the two paragraphs, taking care with spelling, punctuation, tenses, singulars and plurals, margins and general layout.

**Animal names**

- 1 in/English/language/name/of/animal/be/ofren/use/describe/people
  - 2 if/man/be/not/very/nice/some/people/might/call/he/'rat'
  - 3 if/he/be/quiet/dull/and/not/very/brave/they/might/call/he/'mouse'
  - 4 if/he/try/trick/other/people/they/might/call/he/'fox'
  - 5 we/do/this/because/we/think/thatsome/kind/of/animal/and/some/kind/of/people/share/same/quality
- 1 in/English/we/sometimes/use/adjective/take/from/name/animal/describe/other/thing
  - 2 we/say/for/example/thatsomething/be/'fishy'/if/we/feel/thatsit/have/bad/smell/or/be/suspicious/in/some/way
  - 3 we/sometimes/say/thats/woman/be/'catty'/if/she/say/unkind/thing/about/other/woman
  - 4 people/be/'foxy'/if/they/be/always/try/trick/other/people
  - 5 description/thats/use/animal/name/be/usual/not/compliment

**1.9 Controlled composition:**  
Writing paragraphs

A paragraph consists of one or more sentences. It is generally all that a writer wants to say on a particular topic or part of a topic. Usually a paragraph begins with a *key (or topic) sentence*, which serves to open the paragraph and is followed by one or more other sentences that develop the topic. For example, the paragraph on cats has an organization as follows:

Plan	Contents of paragraph
1 key sentence	Cats are independent animals. .
2 the cat's nature	They are . . . the lion and the tiger
3 the cat in ancient Egypt	The ancient Egyptians . . . a goddess.
4 cats being 'female'	It is an interesting fact . . . a 'tomcat'.
5 uses of the word 'cat'	In the English language . . . or a 'rat'.

## Writing practice

Here is a plan for a short composition about people's attitudes towards animals around the world. It may be presented in one or more paragraphs, as you prefer. Each section of the plan contains one or more lists of basic words that must be combined grammatically. No additional information should be added.

1	key sentence/paragraph	People's attitudes to animals can be very different in different parts of the world.
2	an example of different attitudes	in/some/place/for/example/dog/be/ popular/as/domestic/pet/but/in/other/ they/be/never/allow/inside/house they/be/keep/outside/help/with/sheep/ or/guard/property
3	a contrast: the cow in India and in the western world	in/India/cow/be/sacred/animal/and/be/ never/kill/or/eat/while/in/western/ world/cattle/be/keep/provide/milk/meat/ and/people/have/no/special/feeling/ about/they
4	attitudes to animals and our use of language	in/many/language/name/for/animal/be/ use/describe/people this/name/serve/express/our/strong/ opinion/about/both/animal/and/human/ being/and/general/they/be/not/ complimentary nobody/usual/enjoy/be/compare/animal in/modern/English/no/woman/want/be/ compare/cat/or/cow/and/no/man/want/ be/call/'dog'/or/'rat'
5	conclusion	from/point/view/science/like/zoology/of/ course/this/comparison/have/no/ meaning they/relate/instead/to/cultural/and/ emotional/attitude/and/therefore/ interest/people/who/study/human/mind

Sometimes, for short reports or descriptions, one paragraph is enough. Usually, however, a piece of writing looks better (and is perhaps easier to read) if it is organized in more than one paragraph. When planning his or her work, a writer considers these points:

- 1 How many paragraphs are necessary? The writer plans to have a paragraph for each distinct topic or part of his main topic.
- 2 Whether to divide a longer paragraph into some shorter ones, in order to emphasize certain points or make the material easier to read.
- 3 The size of the page, the kind of writing or typeface, the size of the margins, etc, so that the paragraphs look attractive to the reader.
- 4 The age, ability and interests of the readers. Paragraphs in academic books generally look very different from paragraphs in children's books, and a specialist newspaper can look very different indeed from a newspaper for the general public.

The paragraph at the beginning of this unit is in the style of the general textbook, report or specialist magazine. Below, the same material is organized quite differently. This time it has one paragraph for each of the points in the plan. Here, the key sentence becomes the *key paragraph*.

Cats are independent animals.

They are domestic animals, like dogs, but they are not so completely domestic as dogs. They like to keep some secrets. They have their own private lives. The domestic cat is very much a hunter and a wanderer like her bigger sisters, the lion and the tiger.

The ancient Egyptians were probably the first people to keep cats, but they did not keep them as pets. The cat was a god in ancient Egypt, or, more correctly, a goddess.

It is an interesting fact that in English people usually refer to cats as female. A male cat gets a special name to show that he is not female. He is a 'tomcat'.

In the English language, a woman is called a 'cat' if she says unkind things about other women, but we do not call a man a 'cat' if he says unkind things about other men. If a man is not very nice, we call him a 'dog' or a 'rat'.

Notice also the special large margins used here to help demonstrate the way in which the material is presented. This is known technically as 'white space', and is an important factor in the attractive presentation of any written or printed page. A good writer, typist and publisher not only tries to write well, but is also very interested in how his or her work looks to the reader's eye.

Before checking your work in the answer section, look over it again (with the help of a friend, if possible) and complete the following checklist:

Points	Yes	No
1 all the periods properly placed		
2 all the capital letters clearly written		
3 the margins sufficient and <i>straight</i>		
4 all the words properly spelled		
5 the 's' added as needed to all the plural nouns and singular verbs		
6 all the definite and indefinite articles in your opinion properly added		

## 1.10 Editing a text: Doing your own corrections

Every writer has to learn to check written work. Using what you have learned in this unit (and in any other course), study the following passage about horses and cows, correcting it as necessary:

Horses are useful animals, but they are not more usefull than cow. It is easier to ride horse than cow, but it is easier to milk a cow than horse. Cows are generally regarded as female, and the male get the special name 'bull' to show that he is not female. Horses, however, are generally regarded male, the female getting the special name mare to show that she is not male. We can, however, call male horse 'Stallion', but there is no special name, in english language at least. for female cow.

## **APPENDIX H**

**An example illustrating the difficulty of texts presented in the third year  
composition book**

7. Read the following passage in which a nineteenth-century Englishman lays down the principles by which he thought the new Cunard Steamship Company should be guided when sending ships from England to North America. In not more than five sentences give the five principles which he suggests.

In an undertaking of such magnitude, it is of the greatest importance that the whole be reviewed in a broad and liberal manner at the outset and everything that can be brought to bear either for or against the interest of the speculation, fairly weighed and balanced before anything is decided upon. . . . 5

I am aware that in getting up the first of these vessels great care and attention will be necessary to gain the different objects in view and in doing this an extra expense may be incurred, but which may be avoided in all the other vessels.

If the practical difficulties etc. are fairly surmounted in 10 the first vessels—and which I have no doubt but they may—the first cost and sailing expenses of the two first vessels ought not so much to be taken into account. In fact, I consider it as nothing compared with seeing them so efficient as to set all opposition at defiance and to give entire confidence to 15 the public in all their arrangements and appointments, cost what it may at first, for upon this depends entirely the success, nay, the very existence of the Company.

I wish therefore to be impressed upon the minds of your friends, the great necessity of using every precaution that 20 can be thought of to guard against accidents on such a long passage and if accidents shall happen, to be prepared with a remedy to meet any common one that may occur, as far as possible. By attending to this you will give confidence to the public and comfort to yourselves, and in the end I am 25 certain it will more than repay you.

The plan I would propose with regard to the whole of the engineer department is: I would endeavour to get a very respectable man and one thoroughly conversant with his 30 business as an engineer; I would appoint this man to be master engineer, his duty to superintend and direct all the men and operations about the engines and boilers etc. to be accountable to the Captain for his conduct—viz. to be under the Captain.

All the other men for working the engines should be regular 35 bred tradesmen, and all the firemen boiler-makers. A workshop, with a complete set of tools and duplicates of all the parts of the engines that are most likely to go wrong, should be on board.

In a word I would have everything connected with the 40 machinery very strong and of the best materials, it being of the utmost importance to give confidence at first, for should the slightest accident happen so as to prevent the vessel making her passage by steam, it would be magnified by the opposition and thus, for a time at least, mar the progress of 45 the Company.

But if, on the other hand, the steam vessels are successful in making a few quick trips at first and beating the sailing vessels very decidedly, then you may consider the battle won and the field your own. . . . 50

(Robert Napier cited in *Atlantic Conquest* by Warren Tute)

## **APPENDIX I**

A copy of the content pages of the third year composition book

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## APPENDIX K

## The Marking Scheme of the First Year Lecturer

**Mistakes: terrible**1. Using the wrong tense:

Narrative composition: not using the past tenses.

Analytical and descriptive: not using the simple present tense.

2. Using the wrong sentence structure/pattern

e.g Sentence structure should be: S P C A

3. Mistakes in agreement:

a) Lack of agreement between the subject and the predicate

e.g he go/ they goes/ they has ....

e.g There is many books/ people is .....

b) Lack of agreement between an auxiliary verb and the verb which follows it:

e.g He must goes/went/gone

e.g He is go/ went

e.g He didn't went/gone

c) Lack of agreement between the indefinite articles (a) and (an) and the noun they qualify:

e.g a beautiful and attractive sights

e.g an interesting lectures

d) Lack of agreement between a noun and the pronoun which qualifies it:

e.g TV has many qualities. Not all of it good (instead of not all of them are good)

e) Lack of agreement between a demonstrative pronoun and the noun it qualifies:

e.g this films

4. Using a non-finite verb as finite:

e.g He always going to cinema

e.g He wanted to goes/to went

5. Leaving a sentence or a clause without a predicate:

e.g This letter from my friend

e.g I want to know what the matter

6. Leaving a clause without a subject:

e.g There are many accidents happen everyday

**Mistakes: medium**1. Using the wrong relative pronoun

e.g the girl which I saw

2. Keeping the personal pronoun in a subordinate clause:

e.g The book which I bought it ...

e.g The man whom I saw him ...

3. Using “to” with a modal auxiliary:

e.g He must to go

e.g He can to do that

4. Using an irregular verb as regular

e.g We rided the car/ we gaved/ we choosed

5. Words wrongly used:

succeed used instead of success/ teach used instead of learn/ interesting used instead of interested.

## APPENDIX L

**Interviews with students**

The five students chosen from the first year will be referred to as A1, B1, C1, D1, and E1, similarly those chosen from year two will be referred to as A2, B2, C2, D2, and E2. Third year informants will be referred to as A3, B3, C3, D3, and E3 and those of year four will be referred to as A4, B4, C4, D4, and E4.

In what follows we shall present each research question at a time followed by all four year informants' answers to it:

1. Imagine that you were sitting for a composition paper and you were given a set of tasks , which topic would you choose to write about and why?

**(students A1 and B1 were asked to choose between a topic on what they would like to talk about when they meet their friends and another on what things in people's behaviour make them angry)**

**Student A1**

*"I'll choose the topic on "what subjects would you like to talk about when you meet your friends" because there are specific ideas in my mind concerning this topic. Besides I can visualize a clear plan for the composition that I am going to write about. I'll open the composition talking about my relationship with two of my close friends and how relieved I feel when I talk to them. Then I will talk about how I discuss with them my troubles and problems at the University, at home ... etc. Then I conclude with an explanation of our need for friends to whom we could talk in order to relieve ourselves."*

**Student B1**

*I would choose the one on "what subjects do you talk about when you meet your friends" simply because I have not experienced the "anger" mentioned in the topic on "what things in people's behaviour make you angry". As far as the topic I chose is concerned, I think that there is a lot that I can talk about from my own experiences with my friends. I can remember exactly what we usually talk about and write it in the exam.*

**(students C1 and D1 were presented with a different set of past exam tasks, one was on why people do not read any more and another on an incident that affected their lives most)**

**Student C1**

*I'll choose the topic on "what was the event, or series of events which affected your life?" because I felt that the first topic (the one on reading) requires the use of more difficult words such as means of communication and so I avoided it because that might make me lose marks or even fail. Going back to the topic I chose I found it very difficult and I did not have much to say about it. I also found it very difficult to start the topic and I spent about 15 minutes just thinking of what to say and how to start.*

**Student D1**

*I would choose the first question, the one on "Reading" because I could talk about it from my own experiences at the Department of English language and Literature where we are required to read a lot (the student must have misinterpreted the topic because it is not about reading a lot but about why people don't read as they used to). I don't think I could have written on the second topic, the one on "an event that have affected your life" because such an event has not yet happened in my life and thus there is nothing that I could talk about.*

**(student E1 was asked to choose between a topic on the thing that he would look forward to do in the future and another on an occasion where something had been stolen from him)**

**Student E1**

*I would choose to write on the topic of "what is the thing you most look forward to doing in your future life..." because it is the sort of topic that I've often thought about. I have lots of ideas about my future life and having thought of it before I will not waste time during the exam looking for ideas. I also think that I can cope with this topic grammatically too.*

**(students A2, B2, C2, D2 were all asked to choose between a task on the commerciality of private schools and another on passing without being up to the standard)**

**Student A2**

*I find this lecturer's composition topics very challenging and more interesting to write about. The old style of questions is usually predictable but the new type gives us a chance to contribute something to a new issue that has not been exhausted with discussion. In this years exam (which happened to be the same paper as the one I presented the student with) I chose the first topic, the one on the commerciality of the*

*private schools. The reason why I chose it was because I had plenty of ideas so I was able to write quickly within the limited time. During the exam there is no time to draft or to revise so it is of great help if the ideas are ready because then one will write them as they come and finish within the two hours time limitation.*

### **Student B2**

*I chose the one on "private schools" because I felt that I had more ideas that I could write about.*

### **Student C2**

*I chose the one on "private schools" because I had more ideas on this one. The second topic on "passing exams without being up to the standard" was too difficult for me because I have never come across a topic like it or similar to it before. Besides the second topic that is the one that I did not choose was much more difficult to understand with more difficult words in its setting and I was worried lest I misunderstood the requirements of the task and thus fail in answering the question properly. Out of the two hours time assigned for this paper I spent 15 minutes making my choice.*

### **Student D2**

*I chose the second one, the one on passing without being up to the standard because lexically I understood this one better. My intention was to be able to understand exactly what the teacher wants us to write because he emphasized in his lectures the importance of understanding the central idea. It took me 50 minutes to decide on which question to answer and still I could not understand the first. The strange thing was that when I read the questions again after the exam I could understand everything with ease. Knowing beforehand that the questions in this paper are always very long and not easy to understand besides the fact that many students in the same classroom failed to understand the tasks and withdrew from the examination were the reasons why I felt so tense and afraid. The teachers reputation as being a very strict marker was another source of anxiety for me.*

**(student E2 was asked to choose between a topic on the dangers of smoking and another on the place of women)**

### **Student E2**

*I'll choose the question on "smoking" because it is the sort of topic that is being talked about a lot in the media nowadays. There is plenty that could be said about a topic like this.*

(students A3, and B3 were asked to choose between three topics, one on the benefits and pleasures they derive from learning English, the other on a memorable place they have been to and the third on a woman politician they admire)

### Student A3

*I will choose the one on "the benefits and pleasures you derive from your study of English" because it is a topic that is related to my life and to my experiences.*

### Student B3

*I would choose the one on "the benefits and pleasures you derive from your study of English" because we are studying the English language and its Literature in this department and that is the reason for our presence here in the first place, so there is a lot that we can talk about from our experiences.*

(students C3, D3 and E3 were asked to choose from three other tasks, one on the study of English, the other on how your town or village have changed since your parent were young and the last on how something was stolen from you)

### Student C3

*I will choose the one on " the benefits and pleasures of learning English" because it is a topic that concerns our studies and we have a lot of information about it from our own experiences. It is an easy topic because the ideas are ready in our minds. Besides the setting of the question is very clear and I know exactly what the teacher wants me to write. I avoided choosing the narrative one , the one on "Tell a story of something belonging to you that has been lost" because I was afraid I might digress from the main theme. I also avoided the one on "things that have changed in your town" because there are many issues that I can talk about but one might get lost in a topic like this. Although descriptive topics are easy but one must choose what is familiar to him. Another reason why I did not choose the last one was because the vocabulary needed seemed quite difficult and I was afraid I might not be able to find the exact words to express certain ideas.*

### Student D3

*I would choose the one on "what I hope to gain by learning English" because I have plenty of ideas. I feel the importance of the English language besides it is a descriptive topic, I do not need to use different tenses (an area where I usually make many mistakes).*

*I can use one tense through out the composition whereas in the second topic the one on "tell a story of something that has been stolen from you" a change in tense is needed. I also tried to avoid long questions because I often cannot grasp the main topic or theme. I also avoided the question on "things that have changed in your town" because I do not like topics where one has to invent or imagine things in order to be able to write. In this years exams I chose the topic on "what sort of career would you like to take in the future" because it was real to my life, it is something that I often thought about and have plenty to say about.*

**Student E3**

*I will choose the topic on "what I hope to gain by learning English" because it is relevant to my life and to my studies and I can talk about it from my own experiences.*

**(All fourth year informants were asked to choose one of five tasks offered in one of the past exam papers. One of the tasks was on life now is better than it was a hundred years ago, another on our changing society, another was on marriage without love is prostitution, another was on frailty thy name is woman and the last was on nature as a ray of divinity.)**

**Student A4**

*I'll choose the one on "marriage without love is prostitution" because I have lots of ideas about this topic. Besides all the vocabulary that is needed for this topic is quite easy and I know it. I also prefer this topic to the others because I like to write about topics that are specific and those in which there is no danger of digressing from the main theme.*

**Student B4**

*I'll choose the topic on "marriage without love is prostitution" because I strongly believe in this view and I feel that I can discuss it with confidence.*

**Student C4**

*I'll choose the one on "marriage without love is prostitution" because it is the sort of topic that we often discuss and have thoughts about. Unlike the other topics, in this one I can talk from my own experiences whereas the topic on "our changing society", although an interesting one but it is the sort of issue that is not as relevant to our lives as this one and we can do very little to change it. The composition on "nature" is too difficult to attempt because it requires a poetic style which is too difficult for us. We might not be able to find the lexis that will satisfy the ideas we need to express about the greatness of nature.*

**Student D4**

*I'll choose the topic on "life now is better than it was a hundred years ago" because nowadays we live in a world where lots of changes are taking place but my fear is that the question is too general and I am not very sure what sort of changes does the teacher have in mind; is it the social developments or is the technological ones or is it both... To tell you the truth I did not understand the topic on "Frailty thy name is woman" (What does the word "frailty" mean?). I also did not understand the one on "nature", Are we supposed to talk about god? Any way in the exam I avoid topics like this because I want to be sure I understand the topic I am going to write about.*

**Student E4**

*I'll choose the one on "marriage without love is prostitution". It is an issue that relates and is crucial to our lives. The topic on "our changing society" is OK but I would avoid writing about such topics because my vocabulary might fail me. The one I chose does not require specialized vocabulary and the vocabulary needed is quite easy. The topic on "nature" is a very difficult one, I would not attempt it at all, Is it about God or about the universe? ... I don't understand what is it about. I also would not choose the topic "frailty , thy name is woman" because I did not understand the meaning of the word frailty.*

In what follows we shall present question number two and all of the informants answer to it:

2. By setting such tasks, what do you think the lecturer is really after?

**Student A1**

*He just wants to know whether our English is OK or not. The questions that he sets do not require expressing different points of view, he just wants to get us to write. I do not think he is interested in what we have to say to our friends when we meet them.*

**Student B1**

*The teacher would like to know how can we express our ideas and talk about our experiences in the English Language using English expressions and vocabulary.*

**Student C1**

*The teacher is after good language and good organization of ideas. He would not like to see grammatical mistakes. Three deadly mistakes will fail a paper because that means that*

*the student is not competent enough in the language and does not deserve to be in second year.*

**Student D1**

*He wants to see how well can we organize a text grammatically and rhetorically.*

**Student E1**

*The teacher is after our logical organization of the topic, correct grammar and correct spelling.*

**Student A2**

*All that the lecturer wants to know is to find out whether the student can write grammatically and rhetorically sound English.*

**Student B2**

*The lecturer would like to see in our compositions comments on each of the ideas that he presents in the task. He also wants to see whether we know how to develop a certain topic.*

**Student C2**

*He is after our opinions on a certain topic. He wants to know whether we are for or against a certain issue. Moreover, he wants to check on our grammatical structures and expressions. He also wants to check whether we develop a certain topic in the same way that he teaches us in his lectures.*

**Student D2**

*He is after our arguments, deep thinking and deep understanding of the topic. He is also very keen on cohesion and coherence and would like us to express ourselves in correct English structures.*

**Student E2**

*He would like to see us arguing for or against a certain issue. Besides he would like us to write coherent compositions with cohesion.*

**Student A3**

*He would like us to show him the importance of the English language. (the task was about the benefits and pleasures of learning the English language)*

**Student B3**

*I don't think that it would make a difference to our lecturer which ever topic we chose to write about because he is after testing our capability to write and to apply the rules of grammar and rhetoric that he teaches us during the year. He is also trying to test whether we are capable of conveying the meanings that we have in mind.*

**Student C3**

*The teacher is after the correct organization and development of ideas. He also wants to see a coherent theme with minimal spelling and grammatical mistakes because we are in the third year and we are supposed to write grammatically correct and error-free compositions.*

**Student D3**

*The teacher is after our language and structures, he is not as interested in our opinions as much as he is interested in how far we can express ourselves in a non-Arabic way.*

**Student E3**

*The teacher would like to see whether we understood what he really wants from us and whether we could express our ideas in 'good English' .*

**Student A4**

*The teacher wants to make sure that we can write linguistically sound essays. It is our language, organization and coherent writing that the teacher is after.*

**Student B4**

*He is after our language.*

**Student C4**

*To check whether we can write grammatically correct compositions in a good style is what the teacher is really after. But the problem is that when I choose a topic to write about, I choose it because I need to express how I feel about a certain issue and what my beliefs are rather than to show how good my grammar is.*

**Student D4**

*Even if we wrote some information that was not detailed or explicit enough, it does not matter to the teacher because it is our language that really counts. It was only in the second year that I felt that the lecturer was as interested in our opinions as he was in our language proficiency.*

**Student E4**

*In this year's exams the teacher was after testing whether we could put into practice the information he taught us during the year.*

*In what follows we shall present the third question and all of the informants reply on it:*

3. What advice would you give someone who is about to sit for that same paper?

**Student A1**

*My advice will be concentrate on writing the composition and not on the other minor questions because most of the mark is assigned to the composition. Remember also to avoid any deadly mistakes such as*

*forgetting the third person singular "s"*

*using a relative pronoun like who, which ... etc and a subject in the same sentence.*

*Avoid putting two verbs in the same sentence.*

*differentiate between the finite and the non-finite verbs.*

*take care not to make spelling mistakes.*

*and always make sure your composition has an introduction, body and conclusion.*

**Student B1**

*My advice is:*

- *Attend all lectures*
- *Use the dictionary*
- *Try to write a number of compositions during the year and find someone to correct them for you.*
- *Take care you write grammatically correct structures.*
- *Take care not to make spelling and punctuation mistakes.*
- *Try to write less to avoid making lots of mistakes.*

**Student C1**

*My advice will be:*

- *Be careful about the language you use.*
- *Use the right vocabulary.*

**Student D1**

*You better have a good language background before entering the department of English. In the exam, first jot down the main ideas that come to your mind then try to develop a paragraph on each of these ideas. Guided by the meaning try to connect all the paragraphs together making sure you use the right tenses.*

**Student E1**

*Make sure you take good care of your organization, grammar and spelling.*

**Student A2**

*Try to write a composition that is free from grammatical mistakes. Punctuation should also be attended to. You should also use a variety of lexis and should write good ideas.*

**Student B2**

*Make sure that your first sentence is the key sentence that introduces the topic of the composition. In the rest of the composition you should elaborate on each idea in the topic paragraph by using examples, definitions ...etc. Last year I used to write any idea that comes to my mind while writing but in this year's paper, I am more aware that I need to comment on every idea that I make in my topic paragraph.*

**Student C2**

*You should introduce your topic in the first sentence. You should also make use of the ideas that the lecturer gives in his question. You should write grammatically correct structures using cohesive ties while making sure that your writing is coherent.*

**Student D2**

*One should take care to use arguments in his writing that will show deep understanding of the composition topic and one should also make sure that his writing is coherent and free from grammatical and mechanical errors.*

**Student E2**

*A student should make sure that he understood the requirements of the task before starting to write even if that is to take him a long time. If there is a word or two that the student cannot understand, he should rely on the context to try to understand what the lecturer really wants. The lecturer would like to find all the main ideas in the first paragraph, so a student should make sure that all such ideas are present there. Any misuse or lack of use of cohesive ties is considered a mistake by the lecturer, so be careful. A student must not present a new idea in the conclusion and the number of paragraphs that he presents should coincide with the number of main ideas that he uses in his introductory paragraph. Finally, spelling punctuation and grammatical mistakes should be avoided.*

**Student A3**

*A student should write coherently. A student should write around two lines introducing the topic then he should write around three paragraphs in which he should elaborate why and how he said so and so in the topic paragraph. A conclusion that sums up all that has been said before and make suggestions is a must.*

**Student B3**

*Make sure that in your writing you attend to the following:*

- *write down an outline before you start to write.*
- *The key sentence should be a simple one that introduces the theme. General introductions like those used in Arabic compositions should be avoided.*
- *Start with three or four sentences that will reinforce the topic-sentence, i.e that will explain why the topic sentence is right or wrong.*
- *Write three or four sentences about each of those introductory sentences. Here care must be taken to present explanations, examples, details, causes ...etc.*
- *One should keep in mind that a change in paragraph must only take place when there is a change in time, place or topic.*
- *We have to make sure that we write clearly and that the teacher will understand what we mean by our writing.*

**Student C3**

*Write coherently and avoid making grammatical errors.*

**Student D3**

*Stick to short sentences because long sentences will increase the number of grammatical and punctuation mistakes that you make. Moreover stick to the use of either the simple present or any other simple tense whenever possible to avoid making mistakes.*

**Student E3**

*Write in grammatically correct English and do not digress from the main theme. Try to support each statement that you make with convincing arguments.*

**Student A4**

- *Be specific.*
- *Include in your introduction all the main ideas to be discussed. later on in the essay.*
- *Divide the composition into equal paragraphs.*
- *Always end your composition with a conclusion that will reinforce the ideas that you have already presented so that you will be able to influence your reader and leave a lasting mark on his memory.*

**Student B4**

*You should be able to convince the teacher of your own opinions making sure that you present them in grammatically correct structures.*

**Student C4**

*A very safe way to write a topic is to enumerate in paragraph one all the main ideas that you want to talk about. In each of the following paragraphs develop separately each of the ideas mentioned in the first paragraph. Then conclude your topic.*

**Student D4**

*Write grammatically correct structures.*

**Student E4**

*Write grammatically correct language and punctuate properly.*

## APPENDIX M

Samples of past composition exam questions from all four years

The following are samples of first year past exam questions from 1987- 1990:

**I. Write a well-organized PARAGRAPH of about 150 words on ONE of the following topics:**

1. What do you want to be in the future? Why?
2. Tell the story of how you did something wrong when you were young.
3. What is your best season of the year? Why?

(January 1987, first term)

**I. Write a well-organized PARAGRAPH of about 100-130 words on ONE of the following topics:**

- a) What are the things which you most like to do at leisure time (i.e time free. from work)? Why?
- b) What was the happiest moment in your life? Why?

(January 1988, first term)

**I. Write a well-organized PARAGRAPH of about 100-130 words on one of the following topics:**

- a) What was the most embarrassing moment in your life?
- b) What is a friend?

(June 1988, 1st term make-up exam)

**I. Write a well-organized paragraph of about 150 words on ONE of the following topics:**

- a) What was the main problem you faced in your University study? What did you do to overcome (solve) that problem?
- b) Tell the story of how you did something wrong when you were young.

(June 1989, 1st term make-up exam)

**I. Write a well-organized ESSAY of about 250 words on ONE of the following:**

- a) People nowadays no longer read books as they used to do in the past. What are the causes which led to the decline of reading?
- b) What was the event, or a series of events, which affected your life?

(June 1990, 2nd term exam)

The following are samples of second year past exam questions from 1987-1990.

**I. Write a coherent and unified essay on one of the following topics:**

(a) To explore the relationship between man and his social environment is to enter a very dark forest indeed! It is not so much a question of not being able or prepared to deal with people: One cannot even see appropriate persons with whom to deal.

(b) There exists no nation in the world which overcame its greivous ordeals without going through many years of struggle and of suffering. Our nation is no exception and the sole aim must not be less than achieving victory, however long and hard the road may be; for without victory there is no survival.

(June 1987, first term)

**I. Write a coherent and unified essay on one of the following topics:  
(250-300 words)**

(a) Do you believe that the Spanish proverb "TELL ME WITH WHOM YOU LIVE AND I WILL TELL YOU WHO YOU ARE" is right? If so, do you think that there are people above us with regard to some distinguished merit, and that with their company we rise as much as we sink with people below us? If not, why not?

(b) There exist a lot of men and women who naively suppose that people become their friends at first sight or even upon a short acquaintance. In fact, it is dead important to always remember to make a great difference between companions (acquaintances) and friends. Real friendship grows slowly, and never succeeds unless it is based on mutual kind of understanding, on the other hand, and possession of known qualities, on the other.

(January 1988, first term)

**I. Write a coherent and unified essay on the following topic:**

Amusingly simple and rather narrow-minded are those who consider fashion, drinking, and gambling the true pleasures and amusements of life. During one's difficult times in life, however, 'a man of pleasure' more often than not gains, instead of true pleasures, pain and shame. What is more sorrowful, one should not hesitate to admit, is the fact that by the term pleasures people mean the pleasures of the senses rather than those of the mind: The ever-lasting pleasures of virtue, of charity and of learning.

(June 1989, second term)

**I. Write a well-organized essay on one of the following subjects in no more than twenty lines:**

- 1- in spite of all the achievements of the women in the 20th century, it is still a man's world.
- 2- Smoking is the worst habit you could ever acquire.

(1988)

The following are samples of third year past exam questions from 1987- 1990:

**In three paragraphs write a composition of between 200 and 250 words in length on ONE of the following subjects:**

- a) What I hope to gain by learning English.
- b) tell the story of how something belonging to you was stolen.
- c) Describe some of the ways in which life in your town or village has changed since your parents were young.

N.B. Care must be given to spelling, punctuation, and paragraphing, and you must obey the instructions about the length of your answer.

(January 1987, first term)

**I. Write a well-organized essay (not more than 200 words) on one of the following :**

1. The benefits and pleasures you derive from your study of English.
2. A memorable place that left a lasting impression on your mind.
3. A woman politician you admire. Give reasons.

(June 1987, second term)

**I. Write a composition of between 200 and 250 word in length on ONE of the following subjects:**

- (a) Old customs in Syria.
- (b) Describe your first year at the University.
- (c) Do you prefer to live in the country or in the city?
- (d) Give a brief account of some recent achievements in Syria.

Care must be given to spelling, punctuation, and paragraphing, and you must obey the instructions about the length of your answer.

(January 1988, first term)

**I. Write a well-organized essay on ONE of the following:**

- 1. Smoking and lung cancer which evaluates the evidence for connection between the two, indicates the gaps in our knowledge, and comes to some conclusion.
- 2. The increased number of road accidents shows that road safety campaigns have been a waste of time.
- 3. Old customs of your country (town, village) that are disappearing.

Care must be given to spelling, punctuation, and paragraphing, and you must obey the instructions about the length of your answer.(between 200 & 250 words)

(January 1988, second term make-up exam)

**I. Using NOT MORE than 80 words, describe a brief description of ONE of the following, making your account as striking as possible but credible:**

- (a) An old building
- (b) A busy market

(January 1990, first term)

**I. Write a paragraph of NOT more than 80 words on ONE of the following subjects:**

- (a) An interesting occupation
- (b) A character-sketch of an old friend

(June 1990, first term make-up exam)

**I. In no more than 150 words (under 15 lines) discuss only one of the following topics:**

- a) "Tradition is an obstacle to progress".
- b) Describe a mosque, a church, or any place of worship.
- c) Pollution.

(January 1990, 2nd term make-up exam)

The following are four year past exam questions from 1987-1988:

**I. Write an essay on one of the following topics:**

- a) Nobody reads poetry anymore.
- b) Developments in communications have changed people's life-style.
- c) Reform begins with the standard of morality.

(June 1987)

**I. Write an essay on one of the following: (about 250 words)**

- a) Teaching is a noble profession.
- b) Man rejects by nature any form of racism and inequality among people.
- c) A friend in need is a friend indeed.

(June 1987, 2nd term)

**I. In no more than 150 words, discuss only one of the following topics:**

- a) "The road to Hell is paved with good intentions".
- b) The most exciting thing that has happened to you.
- c) Write a story in which you take active part.

(June 1988)

## **APPENDIX N**

A copy of the theoretical background used to calculate the Analysis of  
Variance

## 4

# SINGLE-FACTOR EXPERIMENTS HAVING REPEATED MEASURES ON THE SAME ELEMENTS\*

## Purpose

In experimental work in the behavioral sciences the elements forming a statistical population are frequently people. Because of large differences in experience and background, the responses of people to the same experimental treatment may show relatively large variability. In many cases, much of this variability is due to differences between people existing prior to the experiment. If this latter source of variability can be separated from treatment effects and experimental error, then the sensitivity of the experiment may be increased. If this source of variability cannot be eliminated, it remains part of the uncontrolled sources of variability and is thus automatically part of the experimental error.

One of the primary purposes of experiments in which the same subject is observed under each of the treatments is to provide a control on differences between subjects. In this type of experiment, treatment effects for subject  $i$  are measured relative to the average response made by subject  $i$  on all treatments. In this sense each subject serves as his own control—responses of individual subjects to the treatments are measured in terms of deviations about a point which measures the average responsiveness of that individual subject. Hence variability due to differences in the average responsiveness of the subjects is eliminated from the experimental error (if an additive model is appropriate).

Experiments in which the same elements are used under all the  $k$  treatments require  $k$  observations on each element. Hence the term *repeated measurements* to describe this kind of design. To the extent that unique

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B. J. Winer (1975), *Statistical Principles in Experimental Design*. MCGRAW-HILL BOOK COMPANY.

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characteristics of the individual elements remain constant under the different treatments, pairs of observations on the same elements will tend to be positively correlated. More generally, the observations will be *dependent* rather than independent. If the population distributions involved are multivariate normal, the terms *dependent* and *correlated* are synonymous; analogously, the terms *independent* and *uncorrelated* are synonymous in this context. Since the models that will be used are assumed to have underlying multivariate normal distributions, correlated measurements imply statistically dependent measurements. The designs in this chapter may be said to involve correlated, or dependent, observations.

The notation to be used and general computational procedures to be followed are given in the next section. The rationale underlying the analysis and special uses of these designs are presented in later sections.

## 4.2 Notation and Computational Procedures

Notation for this type of design will be illustrated in terms of people as the elements of the statistical population. However, the notation is not

Table 4.2-1 Notation

Person	Treatment						Total	Mean
	1	2	...	$j$	...	$k$		
1	$X_{11}$	$X_{12}$	...	$X_{1j}$	...	$X_{1k}$	$P_1$	$\bar{P}_1$
2	$X_{21}$	$X_{22}$	...	$X_{2j}$	...	$X_{2k}$	$P_2$	$\bar{P}_2$
.	.	.	...	.	...	.	.	.
.	.	.	...	.	...	.	.	.
$i$	$X_{i1}$	$X_{i2}$	...	$X_{ij}$	...	$X_{ik}$	$P_i$	$\bar{P}_i$
.	.	.	...	.	...	.	.	.
.	.	.	...	.	...	.	.	.
$n$	$X_{n1}$	$X_{n2}$	...	$X_{nj}$	...	$X_{nk}$	$P_n$	$\bar{P}_n$
Total	$T_1$	$T_2$	...	$T_j$	...	$T_k$	$G$	
Mean	$\bar{T}_1$	$\bar{T}_2$	...	$\bar{T}_j$	...	$\bar{T}_k$		$\bar{G}$

restricted to this case. In Table 4.2-1 the symbol  $X_{11}$  represents the measurement on person 1 under treatment 1,  $X_{12}$  the measurement on person 1 under treatment 2,  $X_{1j}$  the measurement of person 1 under treatment  $j$ . In general the first subscript to an  $X$  indicates the person observed and the second subscript the treatment under which the observation is made.

The symbol  $P_1$  represents the sum of the  $k$  observations on person 1,  $P_2$  the sum of the  $k$  observations on person 2,  $P_i$  the sum of the  $k$  observations

## 4.2 NOTATION AND COMPUTATIONAL PROCEDURES

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on person  $i$ . In summation notation,

$$P_i = \sum_j X_{ij};$$

that is,  $P_i$  is the sum of the  $k$  entries in row  $i$ . Summation over the subscript  $j$  is equivalent to summing over all columns within a single row. The mean of the observations on person  $i$  is

$$\bar{P}_i = \frac{P_i}{k}.$$

The symbol  $T_1$  represents the sum of the  $n$  observations under treatment 1,  $T_2$  the sum of the  $n$  observations under treatment 2,  $T_j$  the sum of the  $n$  observations under treatment  $j$ . In summation notation,

$$T_j = \sum_i X_{ij}.$$

Summation over the subscript  $i$  is equivalent to summing all entries in a single column. The mean of the  $n$  observations under treatment  $j$ , designated  $\bar{T}_j$ , is

$$\bar{T}_j = \frac{T_j}{n}.$$

The sum of the  $kn$  observations in the experiment, designated  $G$ , is

$$G = \sum P_i = \sum T_j = \sum \sum X_{ij}.$$

The symbol  $\sum \sum X_{ij}$  represents the sum over all observations in the experiment. The grand mean of all observations, designated  $\bar{G}$ , is

$$\bar{G} = \frac{G}{kn} = \frac{\sum \bar{P}_i}{n} = \frac{\sum \bar{T}_j}{k}.$$

In the analysis of this type of experiment, the total variation is divided into two parts: One part is a function of differences between the means of the people; the other part is a function of the pooled variation within individuals. The total variation is

$$(1) \quad SS_{\text{total}} = \sum \sum (X_{ij} - \bar{G})^2,$$

the sum of the squared deviations of each observation about the grand mean. This source of variation has  $kn - 1$  degrees of freedom. That part of the total variation due to differences between the means of the people is

$$(2) \quad SS_{\text{b. people}} = k \sum (\bar{P}_i - \bar{G})^2.$$

In words, the between-people variation is a function of the squared deviations of the means for the people about the grand mean. Alternatively, this source of variation may be viewed as due to the differences between all

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possible pairs of  $\bar{P}_i$ ; the larger such differences, the larger this source of variation. Since there are  $n$  means, this source of variation has  $n - 1$  degrees of freedom.

The variation within person  $i$  is

$$SS_{w, \text{ person } i} = \sum_j (X_{ij} - \bar{P}_i)^2,$$

the sum of the squared deviations of the observations on person  $i$  about the mean for person  $i$ . This source of variation has  $k - 1$  degrees of freedom. The pooled within-person variation, designated  $SS_{w, \text{ people}}$ , is

$$(3) \quad SS_{w, \text{ people}} = \sum_i SS_{w, \text{ person } i} = \sum_i \sum_j (X_{ij} - \bar{P}_i)^2.$$

Since the variation within each person has  $k - 1$  degrees of freedom, the pooled within-person variation will have  $n(k - 1)$  degrees of freedom. It is readily shown that the between- and within-people sources of variation are statistically independent and that

$$SS_{\text{total}} = SS_{b, \text{ people}} + SS_{w, \text{ people}}.$$

The degrees of freedom corresponding to these sources of variation are also additive,

$$kn - 1 = (n - 1) + n(k - 1).$$

To show this partition of  $SS_{\text{total}}$  algebraically, let

$$b_{ij} = X_{ij} - \bar{P}_i,$$

$$a_i = \bar{P}_i - \bar{G}.$$

$$\text{Then,} \quad \sum_j b_{ij} = 0 \text{ for all } i, \quad \sum_i a_i = 0, \quad \sum_j a_i = ka_i.$$

$$\text{Hence,} \quad \sum_i \sum_j a_i b_{ij} = \sum_i a_i \left( \sum_j b_{ij} \right) = \sum_i (0) = 0.$$

From the definitions of  $b_{ij}$  and  $a_i$ , it follows that

$$X_{ij} - \bar{G} = b_{ij} + a_i.$$

$$\begin{aligned} \text{Hence, } SS_{\text{total}} &= \sum_i \sum_j (X_{ij} - \bar{G})^2 = \sum_i \sum_j (b_{ij} + a_i)^2 \\ &= \sum_i \sum_j b_{ij}^2 + \sum_i \sum_j a_i^2 + 2 \sum_i \sum_j a_i b_{ij} \\ &= \sum_i \sum_j b_{ij}^2 + k \sum_i a_i^2 + 2(0) \\ &= SS_{w, \text{ people}} + SS_{b, \text{ people}}. \end{aligned}$$

The difference between two observations on the same person depends in part upon the difference in treatment effects and in part upon uncontrolled or residual sources of variation. Hence the pooled within-person variation may be divided into two parts: one part which depends upon differences between the treatment means, and a second part which

consists of residual variation. That part which depends upon differences between treatment effects is defined as

$$(4) \quad SS_{\text{treat}} = n \sum (\bar{T}_i - \bar{G})^2.$$

Alternatively, this source of variation may be expressed as

$$SS_{\text{treat}} = \frac{n \sum (\bar{T}_i - \bar{T}_j)^2}{k}.$$

The expression  $\bar{T}_i - \bar{T}_j$  represents the difference between a pair of treatment means; the summation is with respect to all possible pairs of treatment means, order within the pair being disregarded. For example, if  $k = 3$ ,

$$SS_{\text{treat}} = \frac{n[(\bar{T}_1 - \bar{T}_2)^2 + (\bar{T}_1 - \bar{T}_3)^2 + (\bar{T}_2 - \bar{T}_3)^2]}{3}.$$

This source of variation has  $k - 1$  degrees of freedom.

The residual variation is

$$(5) \quad SS_{\text{res}} = \sum \sum [(X_{ij} - \bar{G}) - (\bar{P}_i - \bar{G}) - (\bar{T}_j - \bar{G})]^2.$$

The terms that are subtracted from  $X_{ij} - \bar{G}$  are, respectively, the person and treatment effects so that the residual variation represents those sources of variation in the total that cannot be accounted for by differences between the people and differences between the treatments. The degrees of freedom for the residual variation are

$$\begin{aligned} df_{\text{res}} &= df_{\text{total}} - df_{\text{b. people}} - df_{\text{treat}} \\ &= (kn - 1) - (n - 1) - (k - 1) \\ &= kn - n - k + 1 = n(k - 1) - (k - 1) \\ &= (k - 1)(n - 1). \end{aligned}$$

It is readily shown that  $SS_{\text{treat}}$  and  $SS_{\text{res}}$  are statistically independent and that

$$SS_{\text{w. people}} = SS_{\text{treat}} + SS_{\text{res}}.$$

The degrees of freedom for the corresponding variations are also additive, i.e.,

$$n(k - 1) = (k - 1) + (n - 1)(k - 1).$$

The analysis of the sources of variation and the corresponding degrees of freedom are shown schematically in Fig. 4.2-1.

The definitions of the sources of variation do not provide the most convenient formulas for their computation. Formulas for this purpose are summarized in Table 4.2-2. The symbols (1), (2), and (3) are identical to those used in the case of single-factor experiments which do not have repeated measures. Symbol (4) occurs only in experiments having

repeated measures. In each case the divisor in a term is the number of observations that are summed to obtain an element in the numerator. For example,  $G$  is the sum of  $kn$  observations;  $T_j$  is the sum of  $n$  observations;  $P_i$  is the sum of  $k$  observations. A summary of the analysis of variance

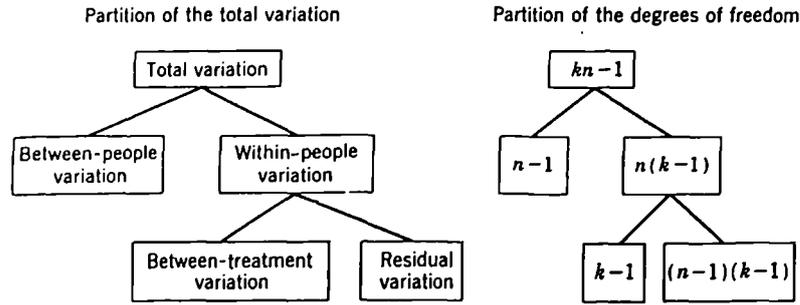


Figure 4.2-1 Schematic representation of the analysis.

appropriate for this design is given in part ii of this table. Mean squares are obtained from corresponding sums of squares by dividing the latter by their respective degrees of freedom.

The  $F$  ratio

$$F = \frac{MS_{treat}}{MS_{res}}$$

provides a test of the hypothesis that  $\tau_1 = \tau_2 = \dots = \tau_k$ , where the  $\tau$ 's represent treatment effects and are defined in the same manner as they were for the case of designs not having repeated measures. The rationale underlying the use of this statistic for this test is discussed in Sec. 4.4.

Under one set of assumptions (made explicit in Sec. 4.4) about the underlying sources of variation, the  $F$  ratio has a sampling distribution which is approximated by the  $F$  distribution having  $k - 1$  and  $(n - 1) \times (k - 1)$  degrees of freedom. This is the usual test. Under less restrictive assumptions about the relations between the underlying sources of vari-

Table 4.2-2 Summary of Computational Procedures

(i)	(1) = $G^2/kn$	(2) = $\Sigma \Sigma X^2$	(3) = $(\Sigma T_j^2)/n$	(4) = $(\Sigma P_i^2)/k$
	Source of variation	SS		df
	Between people	$SS_{b. \text{ people}}$	= (4) - (1)	$n - 1$
(ii)	Within people	$SS_{w. \text{ people}}$	= (2) - (4)	$n(k - 1)$
	Treatments	$SS_{treat}$	= (3) - (1)	$k - 1$
	Residual	$SS_{res}$	= (2) - (3) - (4) + (1)	$(n - 1)(k - 1)$
	Total	$SS_{total}$	= (2) - (1)	$kn - 1$

ation, Box (1954) has shown that the  $F$  ratio in the last paragraph has a sampling distribution (assuming that all  $\tau_j = 0$ ) which is approximated by the  $F$  distribution having  $(k - 1)\theta$  and  $(n - 1)(k - 1)\theta$  degrees of freedom, where  $\theta$  is a quantity which depends upon a set of homogeneity assumptions. The maximum value of  $\theta$  is 1.00, and the minimum value is  $1/(k - 1)$ . The maximum value of  $\theta$  is attained when the homogeneity assumptions underlying the usual test are met. Use of the minimum value of  $\theta$  provides a conservative test. Thus, if the ratio

$$F = \frac{MS_{treat}}{MS_{res}}$$

is assumed to be distributed as an  $F$  distribution with 1 and  $n - 1$  degrees of freedom (assuming that all  $\tau_j = 0$ ), one has a conservative test relative to the usual test. However, the assumptions underlying this test are much weaker than those underlying the usual test. (*Conservative* in this context implies that a larger value of the  $F$  ratio is required for statistical significance at a specified level of  $\alpha$ .)

**One Factor ANOVA-Repeated Measures for X<sub>1</sub> ... X<sub>4</sub>**

Source:	df:	Sum of Squares:	Mean Square:	F-test:	P value:
Between subjects	13	212990.589	16383.891	3.029	.0032
Within subjects	42	227214.25	5409.863		
treatments	3	57642.196	19214.065	4.419	.0091
residual	39	169572.054	4348.001		
Total	55	440204.839			

Reliability Estimates for- All treatments: .67      Single Treatment: .336

1

**One Factor ANOVA-Repeated Measures for X<sub>1</sub> ... X<sub>4</sub>**

Group:	Count:	Mean:	Std. Dev.:	Std. Error:
year one	14	353.429	87.182	23.3
year two	14	350.571	73.444	19.629
year three	14	337.786	112.469	30.059
year four	14	274.429	61.514	16.44

2

**One Factor ANOVA-Repeated Measures for X<sub>1</sub> ... X<sub>4</sub>**

Comparison:	Mean Diff.:	Fisher PLSD:	Scheffe F-test:	Dunnnett t:
year one vs. year two	2.857	50.416	.004	.115
year one vs. year three	15.643	50.416	.131	.628
year one vs. year four	79	50.416*	3.349*	3.17
year two vs. year three	12.786	50.416	.088	.513
year two vs. year four	76.143	50.416*	3.111*	3.055

\* Significant at 95%

3

300  
APPENDIX O1

One Factor ANOVA-Repeated Measures for X<sub>1</sub> ... X<sub>4</sub>

Comparison:	Mean Diff.:	Fisher PLSD:	Scheffe F-test:	Dunnett t:
year three vs. year four	63.357	50.416*	2.154	2.542

\* Significant at 95%

4



301  
APPENDIX 02

**One Factor ANOVA-Repeated Measures for X<sub>1</sub> ... X<sub>4</sub>**

Source:	df:	Sum of Squares:	Mean Square:	F-test:	P value:
Between subjects	13	299.265	23.02	2.562	.0106
Within subjects	42	377.333	8.984		
treatments	3	165.284	55.095	10.133	.0001
residual	39	212.049	5.437		
Total	55	676.597			

Reliability Estimates for- All treatments: .61      Single Treatment: .281

1

**One Factor ANOVA-Repeated Measures for X<sub>1</sub> ... X<sub>4</sub>**

Group:	Count:	Mean:	Std. Dev.:	Std. Error:
year one	14	13.889	2.623	.701
year two	14	15.917	3.565	.953
year three	14	17.954	3.734	.998
year four	14	13.747	2.409	.644

2

**One Factor ANOVA-Repeated Measures for X<sub>1</sub> ... X<sub>4</sub>**

Comparison:	Mean Diff.:	Fisher PLSD:	Scheffe F-test:	Dunnett t:
year one vs. year two	-2.029	1.783*	1.766	2.302
year one vs. year three	-4.066	1.783*	7.094*	4.613
year one vs. year four	.141	1.783	.009	.16
year two vs. year three	-2.037	1.783*	1.781	2.311
year two vs. year four	2.17	1.783*	2.021	2.462

\* Significant at 95%

3

302  
APPENDIX 02

One Factor ANOVA-Repeated Measures for  $X_1 \dots X_4$

Comparison:	Mean Diff.:	Fisher PLSD:	Scheffe F-test:	Dunnett t:
year three vs. year four	4.207	1.783*	7.596*	4.774

\* Significant at 95%

4

303  
APPENDIX O3

One Factor ANOVA-Repeated Measures for X<sub>1</sub> ... X<sub>4</sub>

Source:	df:	Sum of Squares:	Mean Square:	F-test:	P value:
Between subjects	13	201.105	15.47	2.452	.0141
Within subjects	42	264.936	6.308		
treatments	3	117.052	39.017	10.29	.0001
residual	39	147.884	3.792		
Total	55	466.041			

Reliability Estimates for- All treatments: .592      Single Treatment: .266

Note: 1 case deleted with missing values.

1

One Factor ANOVA-Repeated Measures for X<sub>1</sub> ... X<sub>4</sub>

Group:	Count:	Mean:	Std. Dev.:	Std. Error:
year one	14	12.31	2.254	.602
year two	14	14.701	2.833	.757
year three	14	15.954	2.963	.792
year four	14	12.904	2.228	.595

2

One Factor ANOVA-Repeated Measures for X<sub>1</sub> ... X<sub>4</sub>

Comparison:	Mean Diff.:	Fisher PLSD:	Scheffe F-test:	Dunnett t:
year one vs. year two	-2.391	1.489*	3.519*	3.249
year one vs. year three	-3.644	1.489*	8.169*	4.95
year one vs. year four	-.594	1.489	.217	.807
year two vs. year three	-1.252	1.489	.965	1.701
year two vs. year four	1.797	1.489*	1.987	2.442

\* Significant at 95%

3

304  
APPENDIX O3

One Factor ANOVA-Repeated Measures for X<sub>1</sub> ... X<sub>4</sub>

Comparison:	Mean Diff.:	Fisher PLSD:	Scheffe F-test:	Dunnnett t:
year three vs. year four	3.049	1.489*	5.722*	4.143

\* Significant at 95%

4



305  
APPENDIX O4

One Factor ANOVA-Repeated Measures for X<sub>1</sub> ... X<sub>4</sub>

Source:	df:	Sum of Squares:	Mean Square:	F-test:	P value:
Between subjects	13	56.259	4.328	2.012	.0439
Within subjects	42	90.353	2.151		
treatments	3	51.958	17.319	17.592	.0001
residual	39	38.395	.984		
Total	55	146.612			

Reliability Estimates for- All treatments: .503      Single Treatment: .202

Note: 1 case deleted with missing values.

1

One Factor ANOVA-Repeated Measures for X<sub>1</sub> ... X<sub>4</sub>

Group:	Count:	Mean:	Std. Dev.:	Std. Error:
year one	14	7.951	1.158	.31
year two	14	9.246	1.417	.379
year three	14	10.674	1.53	.409
year four	14	9.248	1.261	.337

2

One Factor ANOVA-Repeated Measures for X<sub>1</sub> ... X<sub>4</sub>

Comparison:	Mean Diff.:	Fisher PLSD:	Scheffe F-test:	Dunnett t:
year one vs. year two	-1.295	.759*	3.975*	3.453
year one vs. year three	-2.723	.759*	17.572*	7.261
year one vs. year four	-1.296	.759*	3.983*	3.457
year two vs. year three	-1.428	.759*	4.832*	3.807
year two vs. year four	-.001	.759	4.837E-6	.004

\* Significant at 95%

3

306  
APPENDIX O4

One Factor ANOVA-Repeated Measures for X<sub>1</sub> ... X<sub>4</sub>

Comparison:	Mean Diff.:	Fisher PLSD:	Scheffe F-test:	Dunnett t:
year three vs. year four	1.426	.759*	4.822*	3.804

\* Significant at 95%

4



307  
APPENDIX O5

**One Factor ANOVA-Repeated Measures for X<sub>1</sub> ... X<sub>4</sub>**

Source:	df:	Sum of Squares:	Mean Square:	F-test:	P value:
Between subjects	13	1.749	.135	1.766	.082
Within subjects	42	3.2	.076		
treatments	3	.507	.169	2.45	.078
residual	39	2.692	.069		
Total	55	4.949			

Reliability Estimates for- All treatments: .434      Single Treatment: .161

Note: 1 case deleted with missing values.

1

**One Factor ANOVA-Repeated Measures for X<sub>1</sub> ... X<sub>4</sub>**

Group:	Count:	Mean:	Std. Dev.:	Std. Error:
year one	14	1.751	.286	.077
year two	14	1.726	.288	.077
year three	14	1.678	.249	.067
year four	14	1.507	.339	.091

2

**One Factor ANOVA-Repeated Measures for X<sub>1</sub> ... X<sub>4</sub>**

Comparison:	Mean Diff.:	Fisher PLSD:	Scheffe F-test:	Dunnett t:
year one vs. year two	.026	.201	.022	.259
year one vs. year three	.074	.201	.183	.741
year one vs. year four	.244	.201*	2.017	2.46
year two vs. year three	.048	.201	.077	.482
year two vs. year four	.219	.201*	1.615	2.201

\* Significant at 95%

3

308  
APPENDIX O5

One Factor ANOVA-Repeated Measures for  $X_1 \dots X_4$

Comparison:	Mean Diff.:	Fisher PLSD:	Scheffe F-test:	Dunnett t:
year three vs. year four	.171	.201	.985	1.719

4



309  
APPENDIX O6

One Factor ANOVA-Repeated Measures for X<sub>1</sub> ... X<sub>4</sub>

Source:	df:	Sum of Squares:	Mean Square:	F-test:	P value:
Between subjects	13	388.932	29.918	2.411	.0157
Within subjects	42	521.103	12.407		
treatments	3	174.446	58.149	6.542	.0011
residual	39	346.658	8.889		
Total	55	910.035			

Reliability Estimates for- All treatments: .585      Single Treatment: .261

Note: 1 case deleted with missing values.

1

One Factor ANOVA-Repeated Measures for X<sub>1</sub> ... X<sub>4</sub>

Group:	Count:	Mean:	Std. Dev.:	Std. Error:
year one	14	11.115	3.237	.865
year two	14	11.68	3.399	.908
year three	14	15.644	5.25	1.403
year four	14	12.205	2.644	.707

2

One Factor ANOVA-Repeated Measures for X<sub>1</sub> ... X<sub>4</sub>

Comparison:	Mean Diff.:	Fisher PLSD:	Scheffe F-test:	Dunnett t:
year one vs. year two	-.565	2.28	.084	.501
year one vs. year three	-4.529	2.28*	5.385*	4.019
year one vs. year four	-1.09	2.28	.312	.967
year two vs. year three	-3.964	2.28*	4.125*	3.518
year two vs. year four	-.525	2.28	.072	.466

\* Significant at 95%

3

310  
APPENDIX O6

One Factor ANOVA-Repeated Measures for  $X_1 \dots X_4$

Comparison:	Mean Diff.:	Fisher PLSD:	Scheffe F-test:	Dunnnett t:
year three vs. year four	3.439	2.28*	3.105*	3.052

\* Significant at 95%

4



311  
APPENDIX O7

One Factor ANOVA-Repeated Measures for X<sub>1</sub> ... X<sub>4</sub>

Source:	df:	Sum of Squares:	Mean Square:	F-test:	P value:
Between subjects	13	16735.357	1287.335	8.744	.0001
Within subjects	42	6183.5	147.226		
treatments	3	1405.286	468.429	3.823	.0171
residual	39	4778.214	122.518		
Total	55	22918.857			

Reliability Estimates for- All treatments: .886      Single Treatment: .659

Note: 1 case deleted with missing values.

1

One Factor ANOVA-Repeated Measures for X<sub>1</sub> ... X<sub>4</sub>

Group:	Count:	Mean:	Std. Dev.:	Std. Error:
year one	14	42.714	20.812	5.562
year two	14	37.929	20.048	5.358
year three	14	47.571	19.685	5.261
year four	14	51.214	20.793	5.557

2

One Factor ANOVA-Repeated Measures for X<sub>1</sub> ... X<sub>4</sub>

Comparison:	Mean Diff.:	Fisher PLSD:	Scheffe F-test:	Dunnnett t:
year one vs. year two	4.786	8.463	.436	1.144
year one vs. year three	-4.857	8.463	.449	1.161
year one vs. year four	-8.5	8.463*	1.376	2.032
year two vs. year three	-9.643	8.463*	1.771	2.305
year two vs. year four	-13.286	8.463*	3.362*	3.176

\* Significant at 95%

3

312  
APPENDIX O7

One Factor ANOVA-Repeated Measures for X<sub>1</sub> ... X<sub>4</sub>

Comparison:	Mean Diff.:	Fisher PLSD:	Scheffe F-test:	Dunnett t:
year three vs. year four	-3.643	8.463	.253	.871

4



313  
APPENDIX P1

**Unpaired t-Test X<sub>1</sub>: year one Y<sub>1</sub>: year one**

DF:	Unpaired t Value:	Prob. (2-tail):
12	-1.861	.0874

Group:	Count:	Mean:	Std. Dev.:	Std. Error:
fail	8	319	35.541	12.566
pass	6	399.333	116.483	47.554

1

**Unpaired t-Test X<sub>2</sub>: year two Y<sub>2</sub>: year two**

DF:	Unpaired t Value:	Prob. (2-tail):
12	.552	.5909

Group:	Count:	Mean:	Std. Dev.:	Std. Error:
pass	7	361.714	94.182	35.597
fail	7	339.429	50.269	19

2

**Unpaired t-Test X<sub>3</sub>: year three Y<sub>3</sub>: year three**

DF:	Unpaired t Value:	Prob. (2-tail):
12	1.633	.1284

Group:	Count:	Mean:	Std. Dev.:	Std. Error:
pass	7	384	140.322	53.037
fail	7	291.571	52.278	19.759

3

**Unpaired t-Test X<sub>4</sub>: year four Y<sub>4</sub>: year four**

DF:	Unpaired t Value:	Prob. (2-tail):
12	-.176	.8636

Group:	Count:	Mean:	Std. Dev.:	Std. Error:
pass	7	271.429	70.496	26.645
fail	7	277.429	56.639	21.407

4

314  
APPENDIX P2

Unpaired t-Test X<sub>1</sub>: year one Y<sub>1</sub>: year one

DF: Unpaired t Value: Prob. (2-tail):

12	-2.395	.0338
----	--------	-------

Group: Count: Mean: Std. Dev.: Std. Error:

fail	8	12.644	2.378	.841
pass	6	15.548	2.047	.836

1

Unpaired t-Test X<sub>2</sub>: year two Y<sub>2</sub>: year two

DF: Unpaired t Value: Prob. (2-tail):

12	2.251	.0439
----	-------	-------

Group: Count: Mean: Std. Dev.: Std. Error:

pass	7	17.789	3.626	1.37
fail	7	14.046	2.492	.942

2

Unpaired t-Test X<sub>3</sub>: year three Y<sub>3</sub>: year three

DF: Unpaired t Value: Prob. (2-tail):

12	1.73	.1093
----	------	-------

Group: Count: Mean: Std. Dev.: Std. Error:

pass	7	19.561	4.045	1.529
fail	7	16.347	2.795	1.056

3

Unpaired t-Test X<sub>4</sub>: year four Y<sub>4</sub>: year four

DF: Unpaired t Value: Prob. (2-tail):

12	1.336	.2062
----	-------	-------

Group: Count: Mean: Std. Dev.: Std. Error:

pass	7	14.583	2.343	.885
fail	7	12.911	2.337	.883

4

315  
APPENDIX P3

**Unpaired t-Test X<sub>1</sub>: year one Y<sub>1</sub>: year one**

DF: Unpaired t Value: Prob. (2-tail):

12	-2.841	.0149
----	--------	-------

Group: Count: Mean: Std. Dev.: Std. Error:

fail	8	11.118	1.41	.498
pass	6	13.9	2.261	.923

1

**Unpaired t-Test X<sub>2</sub>: year two Y<sub>2</sub>: year two**

DF: Unpaired t Value: Prob. (2-tail):

12	2.664	.0206
----	-------	-------

Group: Count: Mean: Std. Dev.: Std. Error:

pass	7	16.366	2.687	1.016
fail	7	13.037	1.925	.728

2

**Unpaired t-Test X<sub>3</sub>: year three Y<sub>3</sub>: year three**

DF: Unpaired t Value: Prob. (2-tail):

12	1.024	.326
----	-------	------

Group: Count: Mean: Std. Dev.: Std. Error:

pass	7	16.763	3.076	1.163
fail	7	15.144	2.833	1.071

3

**Unpaired t-Test X<sub>4</sub>: year four Y<sub>4</sub>: year four**

DF: Unpaired t Value: Prob. (2-tail):

12	.807	.4353
----	------	-------

Group: Count: Mean: Std. Dev.: Std. Error:

pass	7	13.391	1.997	.755
fail	7	12.417	2.492	.942

4

316  
APPENDIX P4

**Unpaired t-Test X<sub>1</sub>: year one Y<sub>1</sub>: year one**

DF:	Unpaired t Value:	Prob. (2-tail):
12	-3.587	.0037

Group:	Count:	Mean:	Std. Dev.:	Std. Error:
fail	8	7.256	.626	.221
pass	6	8.878	1.065	.435

1

**Unpaired t-Test X<sub>2</sub>: year two Y<sub>2</sub>: year two**

DF:	Unpaired t Value:	Prob. (2-tail):
12	3.12	.0089

Group:	Count:	Mean:	Std. Dev.:	Std. Error:
pass	7	10.16	1.222	.462
fail	7	8.333	.952	.36

2

**Unpaired t-Test X<sub>3</sub>: year three Y<sub>3</sub>: year three**

DF:	Unpaired t Value:	Prob. (2-tail):
12	1.048	.3152

Group:	Count:	Mean:	Std. Dev.:	Std. Error:
pass	7	11.101	1.251	.473
fail	7	10.247	1.757	.664

3

**Unpaired t-Test X<sub>4</sub>: year four Y<sub>4</sub>: year four**

DF:	Unpaired t Value:	Prob. (2-tail):
12	-.084	.9348

Group:	Count:	Mean:	Std. Dev.:	Std. Error:
pass	7	9.219	.947	.358
fail	7	9.277	1.596	.603

4

317  
APPENDIX P5

**Unpaired t-Test X<sub>1</sub>: year one Y<sub>1</sub>: year one**

DF:                      Unpaired t Value:    Prob. (2-tail):

12	-.166	.8711
----	-------	-------

Group:	Count:	Mean:	Std. Dev.:	Std. Error:
fail	8	1.74	.302	.107
pass	6	1.767	.292	.119

1

**Unpaired t-Test X<sub>2</sub>: year two Y<sub>2</sub>: year two**

DF:                      Unpaired t Value:    Prob. (2-tail):

12	.287	.7792
----	------	-------

Group:	Count:	Mean:	Std. Dev.:	Std. Error:
pass	7	1.749	.28	.106
fail	7	1.703	.316	.119

2

**Unpaired t-Test X<sub>3</sub>: year three Y<sub>3</sub>: year three**

DF:                      Unpaired t Value:    Prob. (2-tail):

12	1.262	.2308
----	-------	-------

Group:	Count:	Mean:	Std. Dev.:	Std. Error:
pass	7	1.76	.307	.116
fail	7	1.596	.157	.059

3

**Unpaired t-Test X<sub>4</sub>: year four Y<sub>4</sub>: year four**

DF:                      Unpaired t Value:    Prob. (2-tail):

12	.976	.3485
----	------	-------

Group:	Count:	Mean:	Std. Dev.:	Std. Error:
pass	7	1.596	.334	.126
fail	7	1.419	.345	.13

4

318  
APPENDIX P6

**Unpaired t-Test X<sub>1</sub>: year one Y<sub>1</sub>: year one**

DF:	Unpaired t Value:	Prob. (2-tail):
12	-.836	.4195

Group:	Count:	Mean:	Std. Dev.:	Std. Error:
fail	8	10.481	2.206	.78
pass	6	11.96	4.351	1.776

1

**Unpaired t-Test X<sub>2</sub>: year two Y<sub>2</sub>: year two**

DF:	Unpaired t Value:	Prob. (2-tail):
12	2.297	.0404

Group:	Count:	Mean:	Std. Dev.:	Std. Error:
pass	7	13.49	3.756	1.42
fail	7	9.87	1.809	.684

2

**Unpaired t-Test X<sub>3</sub>: year three Y<sub>3</sub>: year three**

DF:	Unpaired t Value:	Prob. (2-tail):
12	2.808	.0158

Group:	Count:	Mean:	Std. Dev.:	Std. Error:
pass	7	18.83	4.718	1.783
fail	7	12.459	3.711	1.403

3

**Unpaired t-Test X<sub>4</sub>: year four Y<sub>4</sub>: year four**

DF:	Unpaired t Value:	Prob. (2-tail):
12	1.96	.0736

Group:	Count:	Mean:	Std. Dev.:	Std. Error:
pass	7	13.46	1.579	.597
fail	7	10.95	2.997	1.133

4

319  
APPENDIX P7

**Unpaired t-Test X<sub>1</sub>: year one Y<sub>1</sub>: year one**

DF:                      Unpaired t Value:    Prob. (2-tail):

12	-1.649	.1251
----	--------	-------

Group:	Count:	Mean:	Std. Dev.:	Std. Error:
fail	8	35.25	13.73	4.854
pass	6	52.667	25.579	10.442

1

**Unpaired t-Test X<sub>2</sub>: year two Y<sub>2</sub>: year two**

DF:                      Unpaired t Value:    Prob. (2-tail):

12	2.423	.0322
----	-------	-------

Group:	Count:	Mean:	Std. Dev.:	Std. Error:
pass	7	49	23.714	8.963
fail	7	26.857	4.741	1.792

2

**Unpaired t-Test X<sub>3</sub>: year three Y<sub>3</sub>: year three**

DF:                      Unpaired t Value:    Prob. (2-tail):

12	3.966	.0019
----	-------	-------

Group:	Count:	Mean:	Std. Dev.:	Std. Error:
pass	7	61.857	17.948	6.784
fail	7	33.286	6.422	2.427

3

**Unpaired t-Test X<sub>4</sub>: year four Y<sub>4</sub>: year four**

DF:                      Unpaired t Value:    Prob. (2-tail):

12	3.098	.0092
----	-------	-------

Group:	Count:	Mean:	Std. Dev.:	Std. Error:
pass	7	64.571	19.295	7.293
fail	7	37.857	12.171	4.6

4

**APPENDIX Q**

The Number of Paragraphs Written by each Student in the Second and Fourth Year  
Papers

Name of Student	No. of Paragraphs
Samar	5
Mihidin	6
Asma	9
Hiba	6
Safa	9
Mohamed	6
Nuha	6
<b>Total</b>	<b>47</b>

Number of paragraphs written by the second year passing students

Name of Student	No. of Paragraphs
Nadia	4
May	4
Salwa	6
Sana	5
Huda	6
Nada	5
Najat	5
<b>Total</b>	<b>35</b>

Number of paragraphs written by the second year failing students

Name of Student	No. of Paragraphs
Samar	3
Hiba	4
May	4
Safa	8
Asma	5
Nuha	4
Huda	5
Total	33

Number of paragraphs written by the fourth year passing students

Name of Student	No. of Paragraphs
Najat	4
Sana	4
Nadia	3
Salwa	2
Mohamed	4
Mihidin	5
Nada	7
Total	29

Number of paragraphs written by the fourth year failing students

## APPENDIX R1

Name of Student	Nada	Sana	May	Salwa	Nadia	Huda	Najat
<b>UNITY</b>							
1. Does each body paragraph contain only one main idea? (does each topic sentence identify a main idea)	I	I	I	I	O	O	I
2a. Are topic sentences clearly recognizable ?	I	I	I	I	I	I	I
2b. Are topic sentences linked to the thesis?	I	O	I	I	I	I	I
<b>COMPLETENESS</b>							
1. Do body paragraphs contain enough detail-reasons, facts, examples-to support ideas?	O	I	I	I	I	I	I
<b>ORDER</b>							
1. Did the student writer construct paragraphs according to useful patterns? i.e patterns that readers will recognize and readily understand.	I	I	I	I	I	O	I
<b>COHERENCE</b>							
1. Did the student writer use transitions (pronoun reference, synonyms or repetition) to link sentences within paragraphs so that their relationship is clear?	I	O	I	I	I	I	O
<b>SPECIAL PURPOSE PARAGRAPHS</b>							
1.Does the introductory paragraph arouse the reader's interest and prepare him for what is to come?	I	I	I	O	I	I	O
2.Does the concluding paragraph sum up the main points or provide a sense of closure?	I	I	O	I	I	I	I

I= Yes, O= No

The degree to which second year failing students adhere to the requirements of content and organization in the written paragraph

## APPENDIX R2

Name of student	Moham -ad	Safa	Samar	Hiba	Mihidin	Nuha	Asma
<b>UNITY</b>							
1.Does each body paragraph contain only one main idea? (does each topic sentence identify a main idea)	O	O	I	I	I	O	I
2a.Are all topic sentences clearly recognizable?	I	I	I	I	I	I	I
2b Are all topic sentences linked to the thesis?	I	I	O	I	I	O	I
<b>COMPLETENESS</b>							
1.Do body paragraphs contain enough detail-reasons, facts, examples-to support ideas?	I	I	O	I	I	I	I
<b>ORDER</b>							
1.Did the student writer construct paragraphs according to useful patterns? i.e patterns that readers will recognize and readily understand.	I	O	I	I	I	O	I
<b>COHERENCE</b>							
1. Did the student writer use transitions (pronoun reference,synonyms or repetition) to link sentences within paragraphs so that their relationship is clear?	I	I	I	I	O	I	O
<b>SPECIAL PURPOSE PARAGRAPHS</b>							
1.Does the introductory paragraph arouse the reader's interest and prepare him for what is to come?	O	I	I	I	I	I	I
2.Does the concluding paragraph sum up the main points or provide a sense of closure?	I	O	I	O	I	O	I

I= Yes, O= No

The degree to which second year passing students adhere to the requirements of content and organization in the written paragraph

## APPENDIX S1

Student's Name	Nada	Sana	Mihidin	Salwa	Nadia	Mohamad	Najat
<b>UNITY</b>							
1. Does each body paragraph contain only one main idea? (does each topic sentence identify a main idea)	I	I	I	O	I	I	I
2a. Are all topic sentences clearly recognizable?	I	I	I	I	I	I	I
2b. Are all topic sentences linked to the thesis?	I	I	I	I	I	I	I
<b>COMPLETENESS</b>							
1. Do body paragraphs contain enough detail-reasons, facts, examples-to support ideas?	I	O	I	O	I	O	I
<b>ORDER</b>							
1. Did the student writer construct paragraphs according to useful patterns? i.e. patterns that readers will recognize and readily understand.	I	I	I	I	I	I	I
<b>COHERENCE</b>							
1. Did the student writer use transitions (pronoun reference, synonyms or repetition) to link sentences within paragraphs so that their relationship is clear?	I	O	I	I	I	O	I
<b>SPECIAL PURPOSE PARAGRAPHS</b>							
1. Does the introductory paragraph arouse the reader's interest and prepare him for what is to come?	I	I	I	I	I	I	I
2. Does the concluding paragraph sum up the main points or provide a sense of closure?	I	I	I	-	I	I	O

I= Yes, O= No

The degree to which fourth year failing students adhered to the requirements of content and organization in the written paragraph

## APPENDIX S2

Student's Name	May	Safa	Samar	Hiba	Huda	Nuha	Asma
<b>UNITY</b>							
1. Does each body paragraph contain only one main idea? (does each topic sentence identify a main idea)	I	I	O	I	I	O	I
2a. Are all topic sentences clearly recognizable?	I	I	I	I	I	I	I
2b. Are all topic sentences linked to the thesis?	I	I	I	I	I	O	I
<b>COMPLETENESS</b>							
1. Do body paragraphs contain enough detail-reasons, facts, examples-to support ideas?	O	O	I	O	I	O	I
<b>ORDER</b>							
1. Did the student writer construct paragraphs according to useful patterns? i.e. patterns that readers will recognize and readily understand.	I	I	O	I	I	O	I
<b>COHERENCE</b>							
1. Did the student writer use transitions (pronoun reference, synonyms or repetition) to link sentences within paragraphs so that their relationship is clear?	I	I	I	I	O	O	I
<b>SPECIAL PURPOSE PARAGRAPHS</b>							
1. Does the introductory paragraph arouse the reader's interest and prepare him for what is to come?	I	I	I	I	I	O	I
2. Does the concluding paragraph sum up the main points or provide a sense of closure?	-	I	O	I	I	O	I

I= Yes, O= No

The degree to which fourth year passing students adhered to the requirements of content and organization in the written paragraph

## APPENDIX T1

Student's Name	Nada	Sana	May	Salwa	Nadia	Huda	Najat
<b>STRUCTURE</b>							
1. Is the overall pattern of development appropriate for the topic and purpose?	I	I	I	I	I	I	I
2. Do all body paragraphs support the thesis?	I	I	I	I	I	I	I
3a. Can the thesis be easily identified and understood?	I	I	I	I	I	I	I
3b. Can all the supporting points be easily identified and understood?	I	I	I	I	I	O	I
<b>COHERENCE</b>							
1. Are there explicit connections between the thesis and the supporting information?	I	I	I	I	I	I	I
2. Are ideas presented in a logical sequence and paragraphs in a logical order?	I	I	I	I	I	O	I
3. Do clear transitions between paragraphs allow the reader to follow the paper's structure?	I	I	I	O	I	I	I
<b>COMPLETENESS</b>							
1. Did the writer present enough information-reasons, examples, arguments-to make his point?	I	I	I	I	I	I	I
2. Did the writer answer all the questions that he raised either explicitly or implicitly?	I	I	I	I	I	I	I

I= Yes, O= No

The degree to which second year failing students adhere to the requirements of content and organization in their written essays

## APPENDIX T2

Student's Name	Mohamad	Safa	Samar	Hiba	Mihidin	Nuha	Asma
<b>STRUCTURE</b>							
1. Is the overall pattern of development appropriate for the topic and purpose?	I	I	I	I	I	O	I
2. Do all body paragraphs support the thesis?	I	I	I	I	I	I	I
3a. Can the thesis be easily identified and understood?	I	I	I	I	I	O	I
3b. Can all the supporting points be easily identified and understood?	I	I	O	I	I	O	I
<b>COHERENCE</b>							
1. Are there explicit connections between the thesis and the supporting information?	I	I	I	I	I	I	I
2. Are ideas presented in a logical sequence and paragraphs in a logical order?	I	I	I	I	I	O	I
3. Do clear transitions between paragraphs allow the reader to follow the paper's structure?	O	I	I	I	O	I	I
<b>COMPLETENESS</b>							
1. Did the writer present enough information-reasons, examples, arguments-to make his point?	I	I	O	I	I	I	I
2. Did the writer answer all of the questions that he raised either explicitly or implicitly?	I	I	I	I	I	I	I

I= Yes, O= No

The degree to which second year passing students adhere to the requirements of content and organization in the written essay

## APPENDIX U1

Student's Name	Nada	Sana	Mihidin	Salwa	Nadia	Mohamad	Najat
<b>STRUCTURE</b>							
1. Is the overall pattern of development appropriate for the topic and purpose?	I	I	I	I	I	I	I
2. Do all body paragraphs support the thesis?	I	I	I	I	I	I	I
3a. Can the thesis be easily identified and understood?	I	I	I	I	I	I	I
3b. Can all the supporting points be easily identified and understood?	I	I	I	I	I	I	I
<b>COHERENCE</b>							
1. Are there explicit connections between the thesis and the supporting information?	I	I	I	I	I	I	I
2. Are ideas presented in a logical sequence and paragraphs in a logical order?	I	I	I	I	I	I	I
3. Do clear transitions between paragraphs allow the reader to follow the paper's structure?	I	I	I	I	I	I	I
<b>COMPLETENESS</b>							
1. Did the writer present enough information-reasons, examples, arguments-to make his point?	I	I	I	O	I	I	I
2. Did the writer answer all of the questions that he raised either explicitly or implicitly?	I	I	I	I	I	I	I

I= Yes, O= No

The degree to which fourth year failing students adhered to the requirements of content and organization in the written essay

## APPENDIX U2

Student's Name	May	Safa	Samar	Hiba	Huda	Nuha	Asma
<b>STRUCTURE</b>							
1. Is the overall pattern of development appropriate for the topic and purpose?	I	I	I	I	I	O	I
2. Do all body paragraphs support the thesis?	O	I	I	I	I	O	I
3a. Can the thesis be easily identified and understood?	I	I	I	I	I	O	I
3b. Can all the supporting points be easily identified and understood?	I	I	I	I	I	O	I
<b>COHERENCE</b>							
1. Are there explicit connections between the thesis and the supporting information?	I	I	I	I	I	I	I
2. Are ideas presented in a logical sequence and paragraphs in a logical order?	I	I	I	I	I	I	I
3. Do clear transitions between paragraphs allow the reader to follow the paper's structure?	I	I	I	I	I	I	I
<b>COMPLETENESS</b>							
1. Did the writer present enough information-reasons, examples, arguments-to make his point?	I	I	O	O	I	I	I
2. Did the writer answer all of the questions that he raised either explicitly or implicitly?	I	I	I	I	I	I	I

I= Yes, O= No

The degree to which fourth year passing students adhered to the requirements of content and organization in the written essay