

Using Peer Editing and Review in EFL Writer's Essays

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Introduction

EFL writers face many challenges when writing at the essay level. In addition to limitations in grammar, spelling, and vocabulary they also have difficulty with western-style logic and rhetorical structures. When a product-centered, single draft style of writing and evaluation is added to the situation, students' writing will not grow as it should. This is due to the fact that a single draft concept of the writing process tends to foster a "throw it against the wall and see what sticks" mentality where the student produces all of their writing in a short burst without the benefit of review or reflection, usually just before a deadline. In addition, this single draft approach creates a situation where the students do not rely on their own editing and reviewing skills but instead charge headlong towards a finished product.

This paper will discuss the concepts of multiple drafts, revisions, and peer review as well as how to incorporate them into classes or individual projects that focus on writing beyond the paragraph level

as an alternative to the one step writing process.

An overview of the concept of drafts and peer editing

Getting students to write in discrete drafts is more than having them write the same paper over and over with minor revisions, or having them write the same paper once in pen or pencil and once on a word processor. Each draft should have a specific purpose and the parameters should be well defined. The idea of distinct, individual drafts may have become less important from the students' point of view due to the nearly universal availability of word processing software and its editing capabilities. However, there is something to be said for having individual drafts written on separate, physical pieces of paper. Firstly, drafts give the students a concrete record of what they have done and where they have been. This allows students to compare and contrast what they have done previously with what they are currently working on. Secondly, individual drafts allow the students to see their papers develop with each successive revision. This gives the student a sense of having made progress on their paper and exposes them to the concept of writing an essay as a process rather than a goal.

Peer editing of drafts means that for each draft produced a peer, a classmate or fellow student if there is more than one section of the class, will read the draft and make comments and suggestions with regard to the essay within the specific writing and editing parameters of each draft. Peer editing allows students to have a broader perspective on the content and form of their essays by allowing others to read them. This makes their writing less insular and forces them to

focus on their audience, who they are writing for, rather than just worrying about page length or the number of words they need to fill up a sheet of paper. Peer editing also gives students the opportunity to see what their classmates are doing with a specific writing assignment. This allows them to evaluate their own writing more deeply and gives them a better appreciation of the process of writing.

The contents and purpose of each draft

As was previously stated, each draft of a student's essay should be discrete and have a specific, well-defined purpose. This section of the article will look at each draft in a typical three draft writing process that might be applied to an essay.

The first draft (ideas and organization)

The first draft of a paper should be concerned with the ideas, themes, in the paper and how they are organized. It is assumed that students have done some kind of pre-writing at this point and know what their main theme will be and have a rough idea of how they want to proceed. This prewriting may be done in the form of an outline, brainstorming on a piece of paper, or orally in class. Once the prewriting is finished it serves as the foundation for the first draft.

The first draft should be written quickly while the student's ideas are still fresh. Ray Bradbury gave the following three points as advice for writers, "Work, Relaxation, Don't Think." (125-140) This is sound advice for producing a first draft. The students should focus on writing the ideas and themes of their essays (work) and not

worry too much about their grammatical accuracy or the depth to which they explore each topic or theme that they are writing about (relaxation and don't think). The most important point of the first draft for the students is to get their ideas written on a piece of paper.

Between the First and Second Draft: Peer Review Number One

At this stage in the writing process it is important for the students to get feedback on their first draft. This is where the concept of peer review comes in. Students should exchange their papers with a partner or partners and have them read the first draft. The partner or partners should then comment on the ideas and themes in the essay with regard to which points need more information or detail, which have an adequate amount, and which need less. In addition the peer reviews should look at the clarity of the ideas in the paper and if they are easy to understand. The idea at this point is that the author is having someone unfamiliar with what they have written read their paper and give them advice on what they should add or take out. Peer reviewers should evaluate each section of the paper first and then look at the paper as a whole. This will give them an idea of the internal logic of the paper as well as its overall structure. Peer reviewers should strive to be as detailed and precise as possible when they are commenting on the ideas and themes of the paper. They must refrain from vague comments such as, "This is good." when reviewing their partner's paper and, instead, attempt to narrow down the areas in their partner's essay that need to be revised.

The Second Draft (refining and expanding ideas)

The purpose of the second draft is to take the ideas from the first draft and combine them with the comments and suggestions from the first peer review session to make a new draft of the paper with ideas that are clearer, more detailed, and easier to understand. The second draft will involve rewriting portions of the paper as well as adding new information and removing unneeded information from others.

Between the Second and Third Draft: Peer Review Number Two

The peer review between the first and second drafts is the hardest one for students to do. This step requires that the students proofread each other's papers with respect to spelling, grammar, and punctuation. Students should be given a checklist of common grammar problems to look for such as the list provided on page 18 of the workbook that accompanies David E. Klugh's book, "Basic Steps to Writing Research Papers." Editing checklists such as this one provide some common mistakes that the proofreader can look for, such as having the wrong form of a verb and the symbol the students should use to correct it on the paper (VF). Students can then use these checklists to proofread each other's papers. According to the in class survey given to an Essay Writing class this year, this was the hardest part of the essay writing process for the students with some of them saying they had "insufficient skills" to properly proofread they partner's papers. See survey results below for a more complete discussion of this topic.

The third draft is the final draft of the paper. This draft is turned in to the teacher who evaluates it using the criteria from the first and second peer review sessions. I.E. the ideas are detailed, clear, and easy to understand and the paper is free of grammatical and spelling errors. The students' papers should be returned to them after they are evaluated by the teacher for a final revision in which the students fix any errors and then re-submit the paper.

Student Survey on Drafts and Peer Review: Questions, Results and Discussion

For this survey the students in one section of Essay Writing, a second year elective class, were surveyed. Nineteen of twenty-two students in the class were present on the day of the survey. Due to the small sample size and limited scope of the questions only very general conclusions may be drawn from this survey and further research will be conducted in the future.

Question One: "Was writing your paper in drafts new for you, or have you done it in other classes? Please explain." The purpose of this question is to gauge any familiarity with the draft writing process. All the students answered "no" to this question, indicating that they have no previous experience with the concept of writing drafts.

Question Two: Was writing your paper in drafts; very useful, useful, not very useful, or not at all useful? Please choose one and explain. The purpose of this question was to determine how much value the students placed on the draft process and to explain why. The results

were that seven out of nineteen students found the process to be very useful, eleven out of nineteen students found the process to be useful, and only one out of nineteen students found it to be not very useful. Comments on the draft process included, "It was useful because I am getting better at writing."

"Very useful. Because I wasn't good at writing sentences." The student who said the draft process was not very useful said the reason was that she was writing about "personal things." I.E. topics that only she was interested in.

Question Three: "Have you done peer review of a partner's essay in other classes? Please explain." This question was to determine how much familiarity and prior experience the students had with peer review and editing. The class was nearly evenly split on this question with eight of them saying that they had done peer review and editing previously in their Writing 3 class and eleven of them saying that they had not. It is somewhat surprising that only half of the students have been exposed to such an important concept previously.

Question Four: What were some good points of doing peer review in this class? This question was used to determine what the students felt were some of the positive aspects of peer review and editing. Some samples of the students' responses are below.

"I can know my mistakes.", "I can learn more vocabulary and phrases.", "I must read more carefully.", "I got a wider outlook.", and "I got better at English."

Question Five: “What were some bad points of doing peer review in this class?” this question was used to determine what students felt were some of the drawbacks or bad points of doing peer review. As with question four, question five was of a free response type. Some samples of the students’ responses are below. It should be noted that seven of the students responded that there were no drawbacks to doing peer review and editing in the class.

“It is difficult to understand/do.”, “Insufficient skills”, “Classmates found a lot of mistakes”, “Pressure from deadlines”, and “Took a lot of time” These comments will be noted and the problems will be resolved in future classes. The comment stating that peer review is difficult to understand/do is something that needs to be addressed in order for the students to get more out of the class in general and the peer review editing process in particular.

Final Thoughts

Individual drafts and the peer editing and review process are two ideas that should be pursued in the ESL/EFL writing classroom. By approaching their work in stages the students can focus on a particular part of their essay at one time and then move on to another part after that. According to the limited research that was conducted for this paper, students value peer review and editing and find it, for the most part, useful. They do feel, however, that they need stronger ability in grammar and other basic writing mechanics. Students also related that they do not have any background in writing papers as a series of drafts but that they did find that using the draft process improved their writing. Further research should be conducted on

draft style writing for second language learners in the future.

Appendix One Draft/Peer Review Survey

Essay Writing Draft/Peer Review Survey

Please answer the questions below. You do not have to write your name on the survey form. Please answer all questions in English.

1. Was writing your paper in drafts new for you, or have you done it in other classes? Please explain.
2. Was writing your paper in drafts; very useful, useful, not very useful or not at all useful?
Please choose one and explain.
3. Have you done peer review of a partner's essay in other classes?
Please explain.
4. What were some good points of doing peer review in this class?
5. What were some bad points of doing peer review in this class?

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