

*Process Writing in high school EFL:  
What, How, and Why.*

*ETJ Kansai ELT Expo 2004*

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*This handout, a longer paper on process writing, and my contact information can be found on my website.*

*Search google for {Walsh EFL} or type in:  
[http://www.geocities.jp/walsh\\_sensei/](http://www.geocities.jp/walsh_sensei/)*

*The materials are in the 'Things I've Written' section.*

### Creative Process writing:

- > is a set of strategies.
- > comes from research of how good writers write.
- > helps the learner create a communicative text of their own origin.
- > can sometimes focus on types or genres of texts, but usually avoids mere imitation or servility.
- > helps the learners develop as thinkers as well as writers.

### The stages of process writing are:

- > A planning stage:
  - brainstorm, focus, organize.
- > A draft.
  - A purposeful lack of focus on form. Quick and messy.
- > Feedback:
  - The teacher or a fellow student gives you advice on how to improve your message.
- > Revision:
  - You change your text to make it more communicative.

### Problems with the traditional sequence:

Feedback after the fact: *often ignored, or not internalized.*

Teacher error treatment: *arbitrary.*

Teacher rule reminders: *vague.*

Student mistakes: *idiosyncratic.*

Student message: *global mistakes are misunderstood or left unexamined.*

### Some solutions:

Feedback early, before a rewrite.

Feedback on **meaning and content** (not form).

Ex. Unclear areas, message.

## **1. A planning stage**

### **1.1 Brainstorming:** ‘snowballing’ and graphic organizers.

Theme: *Why use creative writing in Japanese High School ELT?*

Use your graphic organizer to jot down as many good reasons as you can think of. Use the balloons on the outside, but leave the center one blank. Switch papers, and write the best 2 reasons you see on the board.

### **1.2 Deciding a focus.**

Choose 3 balloons as your focus, cross out the rest.

In a few words, describe a category or theme that the three you chose had in common in the middle balloon.

Borrow some from the board that fit your focus.  
Write them at the bottom.

### **1.3 Deciding an organization.**

Write numbers next to the balloons and notes that you have. This will be the organization of your paragraph.

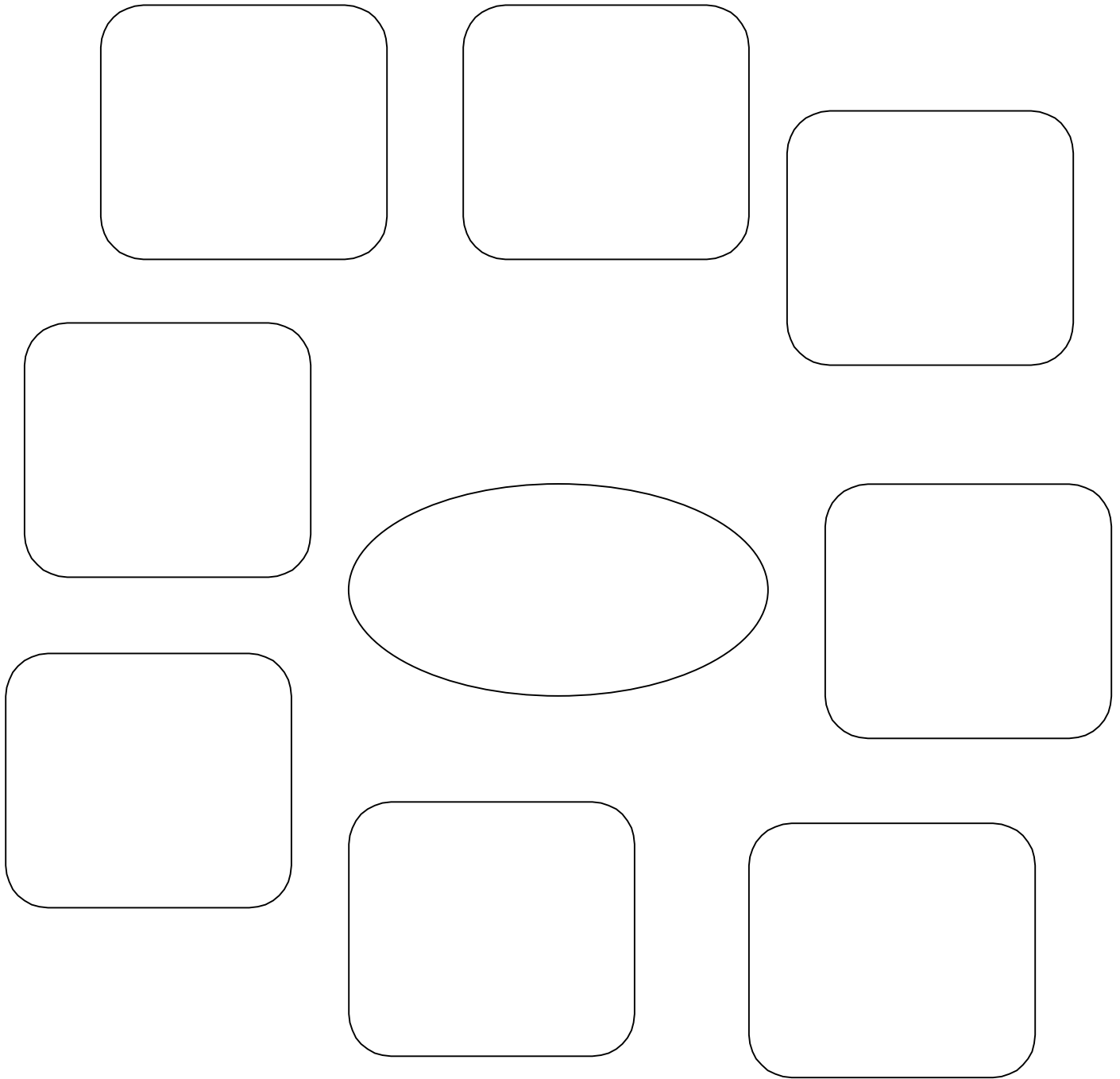
## **2. A draft. A quick write-out.**

Start with a sentence that includes or predicts your focus and write out the essay making the balloons and notes into sentences and joining them. Don't worry too much, just get it down on paper.

How about 5 minutes for this?

*For real language learners, it would be important to be explicit that they are not to be worried about accuracy at this stage; they could even patch up trouble areas in their mother language if they got stuck.*

# Graphic Organizer



Other good ones from board:



### 3) Feedback: Response as a basis for revision.

#### Characteristics of effective feedback:

3.1 On **content**, not form.

(maybe form the second the time around, better if not mixed)

3.2 Points out areas of confusion, or incongruity.

3.3 A mixture of praise and criticism.

3.4 Peer review

Teacher-time factor, builds analytic skills in learners, needs to be carefully planned and spelled out to learners.

An example of a peer review format: Use this one on your partner's draft. *This could also be instructor to learner oriented.*

Use the letters to mark the following places:

- (A) Something that you liked
- (B) Something you disliked or found unnecessary.
- (C) Something you found unclear.
- (D) Something you would like to know more about.

#### 4. Revision: A rewrite to make it more communicative.

- 4.1 Skilled writers make bigger, more drastic changes.
- 4.2 More attention (than in the draft) is given to form at a discourse level.  
(things like accuracy, cohesion, and topicality),
- 4.3 Larger choices determine smaller ones.  
Grammar choices become more apparent.  
Meaning over form.
- 4.4 It's difficult to convince the learners of the usefulness of a rewrite, but it is here where the most improvement occurs.

#### More discussion on feedback: members of the ETJ mail list:

The consensus: *It's hard to escape doing it yourself, but short-cuts can be created.*

"I print out small checklist cards to help speed up the checking process. On the checklist I include the writing areas we are focusing on in class along with the page numbers in the book for their own reference."

Dawn Shimauro

"Short, succinct comments focused on one or two specific writing points is sufficient"

Mark A.

"Starters just need encouragement and a bit of talking about what they've written, and encouragement." "If you're pressed for time never make more than three points. ...I usually just make one"

Martin Gore



A very creative peer feedback framework from Cherry Campbell:

Teaching Second Language Writing: Interacting with Text.

Ss post their writing on the wall, accompanied by a sheet asking for specific advice.

Ss roam the room, reading their peer's work and add advice if they have a good idea.

Research on error correction:

Written error correction and rule reminders are ineffective. Meaningful commentary provides useful correct L2 modeling related to the text and promotes critical thinking.

-Kepner, C. G. (1991)

However,

Students express a preference for receiving feedback on grammar over content, especially at a later stage of the composition process

-Hedgecock & Lefkowitz, (1994).

Long-term study:

Group A: Feedback on form only.

Group B: Feedback on content only.

Group C: Feedback on both content and form.

B out-performs A on both content and grammar!

- Fathman, Wally (1990)

L2 writing teachers' comments on form are often arbitrary, inconsistent, and impose rules and standards that are too abstract to be of use to the learner.

Teachers often misread students' texts.

Teachers should avoid the mixing substantive

Comments with grammatical corrections on the same draft and "replace vague commentary and references to abstract rules and principles with text-specific strategies."

-Zamel (1985)

### **Research on ownership of text:**

Teachers often look at a text, decide themselves what it's trying to say, and then start giving advice about how it should be changed.

The learner, having not been fully understood loses motivation to edit ( and change) what is now essentially the teacher's text.

Instead, teachers should act like a soundboard, listen more than speak, point out areas of confusion and elicit intent before offering advice.

-Brannon and Knoblauch (1982)

### **Research on criticism verses praise:**

L2 writers often ignore and feel hostile towards teacher comments.

-Leki (1990)

The combination of criticism and praise is most effective at affecting improvement.

-Cardelle, Corno (1981)

### Research on peer review:

Peer review takes advantage of collaborative learning that creates a bond, while developing critical skills that can be applied to the learner's own writing.

-Leki (1990)

Lateral 'learner-to-learner' talk is often clearer to the learner, and less threatening than from teacher to learner.

Learners don't acquire mistakes from isolated exposure to them.

### Problems with process writing:

Learners always produce the same kinds of texts (narratives), and never learn how to write the different types of things that will be expected of them.

### Solution:

Process type course books often call attention to the features of different types of texts before writing commences in a series of reading activities.

Learners then use these conventions to create a text of that genre.

### Good Books on process writing:

The standard. Very practical. Good for university. Out of print.  
White, R., and V. Arndt. (1991) *Process Writing*. London, Longman

Also very practical and readable.

Tribble, C. (1996) *Writing*. Oxford, Oxford University Press

Campbell, C. (1998) *Teaching Second Language Writing: Interacting with Text*. Cambridge, MA., Heinle & Heinle

Academic. Lots of usable references. Many questions answered.

Ferris, D., & J. S. Hedgcock, (1998) *Teaching ESL composition: Purpose, Process, And Practice*, Mahwah, NJ. Lawrence Erlbaum Associates

### Good coursebooks; ready to go!

'Share your Paragraph' Rooks, G.M. (1999)

'Writing from Within' Kelly, C, A, Gargagliano (2001) *He's here! Go listen to him!*

'Journeys 3' Silver, R. (1999)

'Writers at work' Singleton, J. (1998)

Process Writing: Why?  
(My little spiel)

There's a lot of focus on grammar, vocabulary, and reading in the Japanese high school English curriculum. To balance things out, communicative and interactive techniques are being adapted more and more, but there still are too few chances for the learners to use the language for themselves.

Current theories of learning say that people learn while doing something, or even *by* doing it. Practicing language through creative writing gives learners a chance to test out language new to them and try to make it fit a meaning they themselves want to create.

Also, by using language that they already know and applying it to specific meanings they want to create, the ability to recall and put to use those parts of language becomes more automatic and writing (or speaking ) gets quicker.

So, creative writing is a good tool for developing both fluency (speed), and the creation, expansion or *construction* of the learner's foreign language itself.

Beyond these general advantages of creative writing *process writing* in particular takes the student writer through many stages where the message of a writers text is built up and adjusted or changed. The writer doesn't know what the outcome or main message of their text will be until they go through the processes. The writer actually discovers what they think on a certain subject by going through the process. In this way the development of the student writer could be thought of as actually the development of the thinker.

On a final, more practical note, essay writing is becoming a skill more important to the high school student with the introduction of the AO (admission's office) special entrance procedures which allow the student to avoid sitting the 'Senta' standardized university exams as well as secondary exams for the specific university, but often require an essay in English to accompany an interview. Also in the secondary exams for the specific universities, there is quite typically an essay question, referred to as 'Jyuu Eisaku Bun'. Finally, in terms of exams, the TOEFL while not so practical unless a student intends to matriculate directly into a US university without taking the year or two of ESL as is typical, now has a written section in all of it's computerized exams.

Thanks for coming! Good luck with the writing classes!

