

# Electronic Wall Newspapers for a Writing Project

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Students who are hesitant to produce English in typical language classrooms often become very active and creative when they engage in English writing activities using computers. This article will introduce one example of student-created English wall newspapers using word processing software. These can be printed, placed on the wall, and later converted into HTML files to be shown on a website to a larger audience. Teachers can save and display student writing examples in a school's computer system which will help them organize their thoughts and improve their teaching skills as well as technical knowledge needed in classroom teaching. This article will also introduce (1) pros and cons of using word processing software for such writing activities, (2) some comparisons between wall newspaper creation in MS Word and webpage creation using HTML tags in a text editor, and (3) ways in which to deal with different learning styles of students.

通常の英語のクラスでは英語で話したり書いたりするのが苦手な学生でも、コンピュータを使う英語のライティングの課題では、積極的に課題に取り組み、ライティングの内容も素晴らしいものになることがしばしばある。この論文では、学生が、MSワードを使って作成した英語の壁新聞のライティングプロジェクト例を取り上げる。壁新聞は、印字して展示したり、HTMLファイルに変換して、Webサイトで多くの人に読んでもらうこともできる。また、教師にとっては、学校のコンピュータシステムに学生のライティング作品例を保存、展示しておくことで、今後の教材作成や教授方法を改善する際の参考になるし、授業の指導に必要なコンピュータ技術の向上にも繋がるのが期待できる。また、この論文では、(1)このようなライティングプロジェクトにワープロソフトを使用する際の善し悪し、(2)MSワード使用の壁新聞作成とテキストエディター内でのHTMLタグ使用のホームページ作成の比較、(3)学生の学習スタイルへの対処方法、等も検討する。

Students who tend to be hesitant to produce English (both in writing and through speaking) in typical language classrooms often become very active and creative when they engage in English writing activities using computers, such as creating webpages, writing stories using authoring software, or communicating with people via e-mail.

This article will show an example of student-created English wall newspapers done with word processing software that can be printed and placed on the wall for an authentic audience on some special occasions such as school events, and converted into HTML files to be shown on a website to a larger authentic audience, where authentic audiences mean those who “by and large focus on the meaning of messages rather than on their form” (Johnston, 1999, p. 62).

One of the advantages with this kind of activity is that teachers can have teaching materials and writing examples in English ready at hand by saving their students' work on their school's web server or file server. Accumulating examples on their school's computer system will help organize their thoughts and improve their teaching skills as well as the technical knowledge they will need in the classroom setting continuously for years to come.

In the computer room, students interact with their teacher and peers more freely and creatively by searching for information on the Internet while engaging in their assignments. For this reason, webpage creation can be a very good English writing project for students. Actually the project of creating webpages in English had been successfully offered to this author's students for several years. Recently, however, some students became more absorbed in designing their webpages rather than concentrating on the content of their assignments, which was to write about various topics in English. To avoid such a problem, a new project of creating an English wall newspaper using word processing software has been adopted since 2003, where document files of wall newspapers can be converted into HTML files using the software's file converter at a later time.

Care should be taken in using any kind of software depending on the type of project and the type of students you teach. This article will therefore introduce (1) pros and cons of using word processing software for such writing activities, (2) some comparisons between wall newspaper creation in MS Word and webpage creation using HTML tags in a text editor, and (3) ways in which to deal with different learning styles of students.

### Why Wall Newspapers?

For several years, in the English Word Processing and Business Letter Writing course, which was offered to junior college computer science major students, students created English webpages using HTML tags in a text editor. In 2003, the writing project was switched to creating wall newspapers

using MS Word. The reason? Because students can concentrate more on the content of the project by using word processing software rather than spend a great deal of time designing their webpages using a text editor. All the students learned to use the word processing software beforehand. Also, it was hoped that a document file could easily be converted into an HTML file using MS Word's file converter.

### Students

In the spring semester of 2004, the above-mentioned course was offered to both junior college and four-year university students, all female, in the same class. This addition of four-year university students to a course that was formally geared only toward junior college students, was a big concern for the teacher in the beginning of the project.

The table below shows some different characteristics in the two types of students for the teacher to take into consideration.

English skills of the four-year university students majoring in International Relations were better on the average than those of the junior college computer science major students. On the other hand, the junior college students' computer skills were better than those of the four-year university students. It turned out that one year difference between two types of students and different majors had some effects in their choice of topics.

Table 1. Student Types

<b>Student type</b>	Second-year junior college students	Second- and third-year university students
<b>Major</b>	Computer Science	International Relations
<b>English ability</b>	Low to low-intermediate level	Low-intermediate to intermediate
<b>Attitude toward English</b>	Hesitant to practice English	More active and eager to practice English
<b>Computer use</b>	Knowledgeable in various computer techniques	Less knowledgeable but no problem in using word processing software
<b>Age</b>	19-20 years old	20-21 years old

Teaching the mixture of different types of students in the same language learning class is not very easy, but fortunately there were no major problems with this writing project this year. All the students chose their own topics, which means that they chose their contents more or less in accordance with their interests and levels of proficiency in both English and computer use. Also, this year compared to the previous year, students were assigned to write two pages instead of one, which meant possibly more topics to write about.

Both types of students learned Japanese word processing skills using the same software (MS Word) when they were

in the first year. In the beginning of this course, they learned to type and write business letters in English briefly and therefore, most of them had the basic knowledge of typing in English before starting this writing project. If we chose to do the webpage creation, it would have been necessary to set up some time to teach technical matters to the four-year university students.

### Activity Procedure

The course period is from April to July, once a week for 90 minutes in each class, and the time allotted for this project is about 4 to 5 class hours from June to July.

The procedure mentioned here mostly follows the one which was used and tested in a previous webpage creation project for the most part (Miyao, 2003, p. 70).

1. Several weeks before the writing project, ask students to start thinking about topics. If it is not the first time, you can show the previous year's wall newspaper examples to them. This will give useful hints about topics to choose and possible designs of wall newspapers.
2. On the first day of the writing project, explain how to write wall newspapers. The following are some of the instructions given to the students this year:
  - Number of pages: Two pages (one page only in 2003)
  - Newspaper name: Any name of your choice
  - Topics: Self-introduction, favorite things, interesting places to visit (restaurants, shops, amusement parks, foreign countries, etc.), events

(fireworks, festivals, etc.), interviews with friends, teachers, family, etc., advertisements (real or imaginative), or any other topics you want to introduce.

- Format: The final version is to be printed on an A-3 size super-fine paper and displayed at the college festival in October. Try to write in a reader-friendly manner because people other than your teacher and classmates will read your wall newspaper at the festival.
- Visual: You can include your favorite illustrations, pictures, photos, or background colors.

3. Have students write brief activity reports in handwriting at the end of each class. Collect and reuse the report sheets for your next class.

4. Check how students are doing by walking around in the computer room. Give students some suggestions for solving their problems, if they have any.

5. Ask students to evaluate the wall newspapers of two other students whom they do not know so well. This is a good opportunity for them to reflect on their own work and learn to evaluate other students' writing in a constructive way. Some of the criteria in the peer evaluation form follows the "Web Site Criteria" developed by Lasarenko (1997, p.212). The sample evaluation form is as follows.

--- Peer Evaluation Form ---

Name of the Writer:

Name of the Wall Newspaper:

Date of Evaluation:

Give a brief description of the wall newspaper:

- Overall design: Is it visually effective? (color, text, layout, graphics, etc.)
- Information: Is the information clearly stated? Is it effectively laid out? Is it easy to find?
- Topics: Are the topics useful, interesting, fun, new, etc.?
- Titles of the main topics: Write down the titles of the main topics.
- Suggestions: What suggestions for improvement did you provide? (Did you see any improvement because of your suggestions?)

--- (Two forms are printed on one sheet of paper.) ---

6. Provide instructions for submitting both printed and electronic versions. The following is the instructions given to the students at the end of the term:

- Check the content and design of the newspaper.
- Make a report and submit with your wall newspaper. In the report, answer the following questions:
  - How long did it take to complete?
  - What portion was difficult, fun, easy, etc.?
  - What did you find while working on your wall newspaper?
  - Do you have any comments about your classmates' wall newspapers?

- Do you have any comments, suggestions, or complaints about this project?
- Make your own file folder in the course folder on the file server, and save the .doc file in it.
- Convert the .doc file into an HTML file and save the HTML file together with its attachment folder in your file folder.

7. Create a top webpage containing links to each student's wall newspaper in the course folder, and upload the course folder onto the web server.

8. Display the wall newspapers in both or either .doc files and/or HTML files on the course website.

9. Three weeks before the college's fall festival, check all the newspapers again and inform students of revisions or corrections, if any.

10. Ask students to print the results on A-3 size super-fine papers and submit them up until three days before the college festival.

This year's wall newspaper examples are displayed at: <http://www.kasei.ac.jp/~student/report04/eibun04/>. Also, two examples are shown in the Appendix 1 of this article.

## Pros and Cons

### Pros

This is a student-centered writing project and students can choose their own topics. Therefore, even though they are hesitant in the beginning, once they decide what to write about, they become productive and creative.

Students realize that writing in English is rather difficult but they soon start checking various sources using the Internet and other means because they are writing about topics they are interested in. They actively seek whatever sources they want to find.

The wall newspapers are to be displayed at the fall festival. Expecting real readers is an incentive for students to strive for good-quality writing. They learn to become reader-friendly by writing in a way that readers like to read. For example, some students include actual advertisements of their club activities on the day of the festival.

### Cons

There are always technical problems you must take into consideration when using computers and software. Many problems occurred in 2003, the first year of this writing project.

For example, some students had problems when converting a document file into an HTML file. The reason was not known at the time but it became clear later that anything (letters and pictures) written outside the left and right margins in a document file would be cut off when converted into an HTML file. When using text boxes in a document file, it is possible to use the area outside of the margins. It is also possible to show and print whatever is written outside the margins in most cases, but that is not the case with HTML files. To avoid any problems like this, and simplify the procedure, only the document files are displayed on the course website this year so far. However, the converted webpages will also be displayed after double-

checking if those webpages can be browsed without any problem.

Also, we learned last year that any line spacing would be returned to single (default) line spacing when converted into an HTML file. Students use text boxes to write articles, and as a result, some sentences, if written with narrower line spacing, might be hidden under the end of the text box when the newspaper is converted into a webpage. Therefore, this year students were instructed not to use different line spacing. (Single line spacing in the Japanese version of MS Word is wider than the one in the English version, and thus the instructor originally suggested her students to use narrower line spacing without expecting this problem to occur.)

At the term end, students were asked to upload two (.doc and HTML) files and one attachment folder (for the HTML file) into a designated course folder on a web server, in addition to many other chores such as finishing writing the newspaper, submitting a report, or converting files into HTML files. The majority of the students had no problem following the instructions and completing the tasks. However, there were some students who did not follow the instructions, which were clearly written in both English and Japanese. They did not upload some files or saved them in a wrong folder. To simplify the procedure, this year, students were instructed to save all the files and folders in a designated folder on a file server only. The actual uploading was done by the teacher at one time during the summer vacation. For the design of the top page, a student was hired to do the job during the summer to reduce the teacher's workload.

Regarding the display of the students' wall newspapers at the fall festival, some students did not respond to any of the instructions (via e-mail) regarding corrections and printouts for the festival. Some of them were too busy by being involved in the festival's preparation committees, and some others thought it was OK not to respond because the instructions were given after they had already received their grades for the course. Only three or four students did not follow the instructions this year, but this is the area in which the teacher must consider what to do next year.

### Comparisons between wall newspaper creation and webpage creation

Some years ago, when webpages were simpler and less sophisticated to create due to many technical restrictions, the students in the English Word Processing course produced more writing. However, with all of the advanced technology available to us to use especially in the last couple of years, students tend to spend a great deal of time in perfecting the appearance of their webpages using colorful illustrations, moving pictures, or wallpapers found on websites. It also seems as if students today are more visually minded and tend to write less.

By hoping that students may concentrate more on their writing content by using word processing software, the writing project has been switched from webpage creation to wall newspaper creation. This kind of change may appear to go against the current trend in which we push ourselves to use more advanced technology in the language classroom. But sometimes it is better to use familiar and simple-to-use software so that the teacher and students can concentrate on the content of the writing project.

Also, if we want our student works to be shown on a website, we can still do so by converting document files into HTML files and then display them on a website.

### How to deal with the different learning styles of students

In this student-centered writing project, you can use several approaches to encourage your students to write actively.

In the English word processing course, students first learn about the basics of English business letter writing. Initially they need to read various forms of business letters and as a result, they tend to become rather passive in the class. Therefore, the latter half of the course is devoted to student-centered writing activities such as wall newspaper creation that give students “more control over what and how they are learning” (Richards, J. C., Platt, J. & Platt, H., 1997, p. 359).

It is necessary to give your students a reasonable deadline for each step of the project. If they do not have a deadline, they tend to waste too much time. Also, submitting their daily progress report serves as a reminder for them of how they are doing on the project.

In this type of writing project, you can give your students a real audience. If they realize that their wall newspapers are to be displayed, for example, at their college festival, they will try hard to make the paper look nice and interesting to read.

Peer evaluation makes students realize that some of their peers are really creative and innovative in writing, and stimulates them to improve their writing and learn to appreciate other students' writing.

It is also very important to encourage students who are not very good at writing in English to write in short and simple English. Some students in the course are at a low level of English proficiency and for them it is very difficult to write in English. Some of them resort to using Internet translation software. Those students usually write in long and complicated sentences in Japanese and think the translation software will take care of the rest for them, but the result is usually a mishmash of very strange sentences that are very hard or impossible to understand. In that case, they should be encouraged to write short sentences in very simple English rather than using translation software. They might be interested in expressing themselves in very simple Japanese first and then translating it into simple English. For such students, writing about themselves (self-introduction) or about their favorites (such as favorite singers, hobbies, etc.) are easy and interesting topics to handle in English.

In a writing project using computers, students have chances to brush up their computer skills as well as English skills. When in a regular classroom, we focus solely on language learning, but in the computer room, students can improve their computer skills while learning English at the same time without noticing it. Also, while using computer technology, they do not seem to mind at all trying to find solutions and/or information by themselves. In other words, they become active learners of English without realizing it themselves.

## Conclusion

This wall newspaper writing project has been under way for two years. Students enjoy the process of writing because they can choose their favorite topics and concentrate on the content of writing by using word processing software.

Another benefit is that we can save the results of student writing on a website or on a file server so that students and the teacher can go back and read the results whenever they like. That is especially helpful when you prepare for a new project or revise existing projects.

Other kinds of projects using computers and different software have been tried by this author at her college. Those are more suitable for smaller groups of students or seminar-type courses because more time has to be spent on learning how to use particular software or a computer environment.

In contrast, this wall newspaper writing project can be offered to a large group of students in a regular language learning classroom with less technical requirements because we use ordinary word processing software. We should avoid making technology a barrier when using computers. “If students must struggle in the language learning classroom, it should be with the language itself and not the tools” (Beller-Kenner, 1999, p. 373). All students need to have in this writing project is some word processing skills. Even if they don’t know a particular feature of the software, they tend to help each other to find a solution quickly and easily.

Therefore, if you are looking for a student-centered writing project using computers but do not want to spend too much time on technical matters, then this kind of wall newspaper writing project may be worth considering.

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## Appendix 1. Student-Created Electronic Wall Newspaper

### Example 1

# The Wind from the World

Issue21: August 2004

FREE MONTHLY

## The famous place for beauty; Perth, Australia

Perth is the most comfortable place to live all over the world. This month, we'll introduce the city. You must get very interested in Perth. **Claremont**

There are a lot of good stores in Claremont: a shopping mall, clothes shops, café and so on. If you walk at a side road there, you will find out a shop that you want to visit. I recommend you to visit Claremont early morning. Of course, no shops are opened. However it's not the same atmosphere as usual at all.

### Cottesloe

Cottesloe was named by sir Frederick Napier Broome on 21 September 1886. There are many beautiful beaches in Perth: the Scarborough beach and so on. However the best one is Cottesloe beach. A lot of people come to the beach every weekend, and enjoy their free time. The 'Fish & Chips' shops along the Cottesloe beach are fashionable and delicious. Why don't you get fish and chips there and eat it at the beach?

### Fremantle

The atmosphere of Fremantle Markets is like an old European street. All structures are built of stones. They are wonderful views. Moreover, you can do time at the Fremantle Prison. It was used as a prison until 1991.

### Rottenest Island

The Rottenest Island is so famous for a swimming race. The race is held every February. The participants swim to Rottenest Island from Cottesloe beach, 19.2 km. Many people visit the island to watch it.

### How to get there

There are two ways to get to Claremont, Cottesloe or Fremantle. One is train, another is bus. However I recommend you to get a train because it's easy and comfortable. When you go to Rottenest Island, you have to get a ferry. It takes about 45 minutes to arrive.



### Let's talk about a different culture!!

#### —Home Party in Australia

Australian people like parties. They have a party more than once a month: holding a birthday party, a B.B.Q. party and so on. When they go to parties, they bring something to eat for the parties. For example, a potato salad, some cakes, some chicken roasts or something. After they greet each other, they start to talk about stories of them. It's a good time.



## The Views of Perth



Cottesloe Beach



Claremont



Fremantle Market



The Swimming Race

## Free Perth Gallery

Day: October 23, 24  
Place: Tsukuba Women's University  
2202 room

We have a lot of FRESH information  
about Perth. You can get them.  
**Enjoy together!!!**

## INTERVIEW

with a person who joined home parties

**Q: How often did you join an Australian home party? And what kinds of parties?**

**A:** I've joined them twice when I stayed in an Australian family. One of them was a birthday party, another was a B.B.Q. party. Both parties were so lovely.

**Q: Where were the parties held?**

**A:** Both were at my host family's house. My host father likes gardening. He gets up early every morning to take care of flowers. So the garden is always beautiful.

**Q: How many guests joined these?**

**A:** So many guests joined. I think that more than 40 people came.

**Q: Did you enjoy the parties?**

**A:** Yes. I made *norimaki* for introducing Japanese culture at the birthday party. They looked happy. They are so interested in the traditional Japanese culture. So they asked me about it. I got good opportunities to communicate to Australia people.

**Q: Do you want to join more parties?**

**A:** Yes. Next time, I'd like to hold a home party and have a good time with my family and friends.

## The Monthly Kids Gallery

We received a cute picture painted by a five-year-old child this month, too. It's his mother's birthday this month. He sent this picture to her. It made her very happy.



Picture by Fred

## Movie "THE DISH"

Directed by Rob Sith

The Apollo 11's trip to the moon was one of the most exciting events. It sent some pictures that a man was walking on the moon. Now, do you know how it did that? This answer is in "THE DISH". You must be excited!!!

The official site:

[http://thedishmovie.warnerbros.com/index\\_flash.html](http://thedishmovie.warnerbros.com/index_flash.html)

## Mother's Recipe Book-100 good recipes no.21

### The Marinade of Cherry Tomato and Basil

#### Ingredients

20 leaves of basil / 30 cherry tomatoes / 5 tablespoon of oil / 3 tablespoon of vine  
Some pepper / Some salt / half of a minced garlic

#### Method

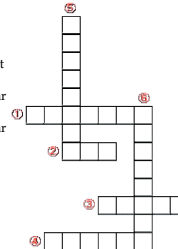
1. Take off the stems of cherry tomatoes, and then incise crosswise.
2. Mix vinegar, pepper, salt and garlic.
3. Put all ingredients into a bowl.
4. Put the bowl into a refrigerator for 3 hours.



## CROSSWORD for kids

### ACROSS

1. A tall animal with a very long neck.
  2. A bird with large eyes, which hunts at night
  3. An Australian animal like a small bear that climbs trees and eats leaves.
  4. An Australian animal like a small bear whose baby lives in a pocket of skin on its body.
  5. A DOWN
  5. An Australian animal that has strong back legs for jumping.
  6. A gray animal with a very long nose.
- Let's try!!!



## The editor's postscript

How was this wall newspaper? This February, I stayed in Perth, Australia for a month. It had so beautiful weather, beaches and so on. There were really a lot of interesting things to do there. I had a lovely time. I think that Perth is such a beautiful and exciting city. Why don't you visit Perth? I'm sure that you will have a nice time. Have a good time with "The Wind from World".

Next special issue...Seoul, Korea

## Example 2

# ★ Mari's News Paper ★

### Introducing My Family

My family consists of five people. Father, Mother, Older sister, younger brother. We are very friendly. My father looks like a bear. Because, he is very fat and easygoing. My mother is very kind. When I was admitted to hospital, she helped me a lot. My sister and brother are usually helpful for me. My family is my proud!!!

Right now, I am living in Tsukuba alone and my sister is living alone too. So three people live in my parent's home now.

Next year, I am going to work at the JR company. Maybe I will live in Mito or Tsuchiura. My parents are very sad. So I want to go back to Hitachi for the holiday.

### My Profile

name: Mari Shibamoto  
 birthday: \$59.11.12  
 Blood type: O  
 constellation: Scorpion  
 from: Hitachi  
 hobby: cooking  
 height: 165, weight: secret...  
 favorite food: Sweets  
 actress: Angelina Jolie  
 singer: Disn

### Who is She??

Her name is Ange lina Jolie. Her Birthday is June 4, 1975. She is from Los Angeles, Calif.

She is a famous actress. Her father is a famous actor, too. His name is Jon Voight.

She received the Golden Globe Best Actress Award by the 1999 Movie in which she was a main character. she has been appearing in many movies since then.

<Movies she appeared>  
 1993 cyborg  
 1995 GLA  
 1997 Road to Heaven  
 1999 My heart my love  
 1999 seventeen of chart  
 2001 TOMB RAIDER  
 2003 Beyond Borders

### Who is he??

His name is Ken Hirai. His birthday is January 17, 1972. He is from Mie.

He has a sweet voice. His music is very cool. I like his voice.

<His single collection>  
 1<sup>st</sup> Precious Junk  
 6<sup>th</sup> Heat up  
 8<sup>th</sup> paradise 9<sup>th</sup> Why  
 17<sup>th</sup> Ring 18<sup>th</sup> Life is . . .

### Ingredients

egg 1 egg  
 flour 200g sugar 40g  
 butter 100g vanilla little  
 baking powder little

### How to make a cookie.

- ① Melt butter and then add sugar and vanilla.
- ② Sift flour, baking powder and salt together.
- ③ Beat egg into sugar mixture, add flour.
- ④ Add chocolate chips.
- ⑤ Set cookies on the baking sheet.
- ⑥ Bake for 25 to 30 minutes at 180 degrees.

completion!!!!

I eat lunch
Last