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The Use of Model Texts for an Experimental EAP Writing Program

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This paper primarily introduces the what and how of using "model-text analysis" as an instructional approach to enhance a group of history major students' persuasive writing competence within an experimental writing program at a university in Hong Kong. The course was designed based on cooperative learning principles which highlight group dynamics as much as individual accountability. In order for readers to visualize how the teaching and learning process took place, we will provide chronological accounts of the procedures taken. Specifically, we will introduce the process of conducting model text analysis as well as the cycles of implementing the writing tasks. For extra information, related activity sheets guiding students through the process are appended. Finally, students' learning outcomes in terms of their writing proficiency as well as their changed attitude towards persuasive writing are reported.

The EAP writing course under study was designed at the request of the history department which believes that language competence is crucial to being an effective historian. A research team spearheaded by the chairman of the parent department was set up to address concerns regarding

course design and course evaluation. It was decided, among other things, that authentic model persuasive texts be used as basic awareness-raising learning materials which would be analyzed in detail for their distinctive features. These include the overall organization of the text, sentence structure, style and tone, and, in particular, the persuasive strategies employed. This paper documents our experience in designing, implementing, and evaluating a new tailor-made EAP writing course, which was first offered in September 2000 as a pilot. This course was a one-credit compulsory course for second year history major students (n=56) studying in a bilingual university in Hong Kong. A total of 10 contact hours were allocated over a 13-week course term with 10 to 12 students enrolled in each class.

As early as the early 80s, text analysis has been put forward by writing experts as a promising teaching approach (see Connor, 1994 & Leki, 1991 for a detailed discussion). The use of model texts for writing instruction is not a new idea (Krueger & Ryan, 1993). In a survey conducted by Stolarek (1994), it was found that as many as 76% of university-level composition instructors reported using models in their classes. This is probably due to the assumption that the provision of such kind of text will help student writers familiarize themselves with the conventions of a given genre, be it content, sentence structure, organization, or style. Although its effectiveness is not well established, research shows that models do exert a positive influence on the content and organization of students' texts (Charney & Carlson, 1995).

In the present study, the expected outcome is not so much the enhanced topical information to be incorporated in students' writing tasks. It is more the salience of linguistic and para-linguistic features which we hope the history majors would *identify* for themselves and *transfer* to new writing tasks through the explicit experiential cycles of analyzing persuasive texts. This was a practical decision in view of the limited instruction time (10 hours in total). We wanted to make sure that the model texts would be thoroughly explored through ample guided small-group discussions. As suggested, one of the main reasons why the use of model texts may not produce desirable results is perhaps due to its misuse by student writers (Smagorinsky, 1992; Werner, 1989). In the absence of systematic training, as is often the case, students may fail to interpret the texts properly and thus apply the model inappropriately in a new task setting. Thus, we were determined to dispel the possibility of misuse of such texts by making the *analysis process* the main focus of learning—thus sure-footedly preparing students for writing persuasive texts.

Approach

As the course has a tight schedule, inordinate care must be paid to making effective use of each

contact hour. To initiate our students who are mostly unmotivated English users, the first two hours were spent on revising basic English writing skills and doing grammar exercises. Subsequently, they started to engage in two experiential learning cycles of conducting model text analysis and implementing the writing tasks of producing position papers and proposals. Authentic persuasive texts were identified from newspapers, commercial organizations, and institutes of higher education. With instructional prompts, students were guided to actively engage in structured textual analysis in order to identify the persuasive strategies, organization structure, and rhetorical moves, and specific language features of the good models before attempting the authentic writing tasks.

To enhance students' motivation in learning, a cooperative learning classroom was created with most of the learning activities conducted in small-group settings (Johnson, Johnson & Smith, 1998). In addition, in order to deepen student learning, the portfolio assessment method was used to monitor and measure students' improvement in English writing proficiency (see Cheng & Steffensen, 1996; Ferris & Hedgcock, 1998; Grabe & Kaplan, 1996 for more information). This was adopted alongside the process approach to writing which encourages multiple revisions through self-, peer-, and teacher reviews.

Course objectives

Though the course was short, we still aimed high, as demonstrated from the following list of course objectives:

By the end of the course students should be better able to:

- demonstrate an awareness of and employ effective strategies in persuasive English writing;
- consider the purpose and audience when writing;
- write well-organized persuasive position papers/ proposals of two to three pages long, containing a clear thesis and topic sentences;
- avoid common errors of grammar and sentence structure;
- correct, revise, and rewrite their writing with the aid of feedback from peers and the teacher; and
- strengthen self-motivation, creativity, enjoyment, confidence, and impact awareness in language learning attitude by the portfolio assessment.

Principles guiding course design

Similar research involving Hong Kong students draw attention to the fact that most of our students, though having successfully entered the tertiary level, are generally passive, shy, and reluctant to use English as a medium of communication both inside and outside the language classroom (Lee, 2000). In our case, most of the subjects obtained either a D or an E in the *Advanced*

Level English Exam and are taking mainly history courses taught in Chinese, their mother tongue. Nor did they perceive a strong need for English for their present studies or possess strong motivation to enhance their English proficiency to meet future job needs.

To break this pattern of passive learning and inhibition, our challenge was to address two related concerns: motivation and relevance. Thus, in making decisions regarding course design, we were preoccupied by the following questions: (1) How can we arouse our students' interest in learning English by overcoming their fear of it? (2) How can we help them see the significance and benefits of learning English by making their learning experiences related to their needs? Being informed by literature (Brinton & Snow, 1989; Swales, 1990), we identified a possible way out by resorting to a well-focused EAP writing course which emphasizes persuasive writing abilities—key techniques required in producing history texts—through conducting elaborate and systematic model-text analyses. This cyclical sensitizing process was believed to help students grasp the fundamental technical know-how for producing persuasive texts.

Selection of model texts

The reasons supporting the inclusion of model texts in this course are obvious. First and foremost, it goes without saying that authentic texts of appropriate level of difficulty and suitable topic can better cater for both the interests and the needs of the students. Besides, the provision of concrete models of the expected writing products allows students to form a clear conception of what they can aim for in fulfilling their writing task. More importantly, the successful decoding of the text message in professional writings through in-depth textual analysis also boosts the academic self esteem of the students, thus generating stronger interest and motivation to engage in tasks completion. In our case, we had identified several model texts which highlighted the following persuasive strategies:

- expert and authority
- scientific evidence and facts
- benefits and significance
- compare and contrast
- emotional appeal
- refute counter-arguments
- threat and warning

Classroom implementation
Pre-writing preparation: Model text analysis

Two cycles of model text analysis were conducted as a pedagogical approach to develop students' ability in *identifying* and *applying* the persuasive writing strategies concerned. Ultimately, they were required to draft two short policy proposals, one in the form of an open letter to the history department head and the other

in the form of a formal proposal to the university's vice chancellor proposing an education reform in undergraduate programs.

In each cycle of model text analysis, two 45-minute sessions in two consecutive weeks were allocated. The first session, with the aid of a worksheet of guiding questions (see Appendix 1), focused on identifying the content and persuasive strategies used by professional writers in influencing and convincing readers. The second lesson helped students understand the possible rhetorical moves in persuasive writing, such as the conventional problem-cause-solution pattern and the Rogerian approach of addressing counter-arguments before stating one's view. In this lesson, students also realized the importance of creating sentence variety and complexity, using appropriate words and other language features to improve the persuasiveness of texts. As shown in Appendixes 2a and 2b, guided worksheets were provided to help students complete the demanding task of text analysis.

Because of the very tight course schedule, students must prepare for lessons for successful completion of learning activities in class. Each student had to read one of the model texts at home with the help of the worksheets before attending the weekly lesson. During the lesson, the students' main activity was to sit in groups to complete a jigsaw-reading task designed under the cooperative learning principles. To put it more

clearly, a set of model texts with four good models, numbered one, two, three and four, was distributed to each student before the two lessons devoted to analyzing model texts. Though four models were given, only one specific text was particularly assigned to each student so as to reduce their workload. More importantly, this would enable each student to develop a sense of being a *mini-expert* in one specific field during the jigsaw-reading task in class. In this case, both group interaction and individual accountability are called for.

In the 45-minute lesson, students participated in two group discussions to jointly explore the outstanding features of each model. In the first group meeting, students sat together with other students who had the identical text to gather information and to clarify ideas. After a brief discussion of 15 minutes, each student should have a reasonable amount of information about the model text regarding the content and persuasive strategies (in session 1), and the rhetorical structure and linguistic features (in session 2). The whole class was then restructured to run the second group discussion in a heterogeneous format with one student from each model text sitting together. Each student then took turns in teaching the whole group about his/her specialty. The carefully planned classroom discussions were deliberate. They served to enhance a comprehensive understanding of the text from different perspectives. They also reinforced student self-confidence in relating ideas to

fellow classmates, as intermediate English students may probably find reading, comprehending, analyzing, and sharing a model text inside the class within 45 minutes daunting and unmanageable.

The creative role of the language teacher should be underscored in such a learning environment. Besides structuring the jigsaw reading tasks, preparing the learning materials and organizing the classroom setting, the principal and most significant task at this stage was to monitor the group discussion in progress. Necessary and timely assistance was provided to help students focus on the task, clarify misconceptions, overcome barriers in communication, and confer encouragement and support for completion of the cognitively-demanding tasks. Undoubtedly, successful establishment of a social environment signified by respect, intimacy, positive interpersonal relationships and effective discussion skills is considered a major factor underpinning the enjoyable and fruitful learning experience of this group of students.

Writing cycle

The two cycles of model-text analyses serve as solid foundation for appreciating what professionally written texts entail. Students then needed to proceed systematically from the awareness of the writing techniques and conventions to the mastery of the writing skills. In the course of attending to the writing tasks, they were given ample opportunities for discussion, revision and independent decision-making. Each writing cycle was consisted of seven steps.

Step 1: Draft the proposal
After completing the two lessons on model text analysis, students drafted the proposal at home, and in the following week, they came to class with two copies of their draft intended for peer review.

Step 2: In-class peer review
One 45-minute lesson was spent on conducting the peer review, which focused on ideas and persuasive strategies while grammar accuracy was regarded as a secondary concern at this stage. A structured peer review form was used to guide the activity (see Appendix 3).

Step 3: Revision based on peer review
One special element of this step is a revision checklist (see Appendix 4). This is a metacognitive learning tool (see Wenden, 1998 for example) to help students self-monitor and self-evaluate their writing tasks. More often than not, checklists can be a very useful and concrete aid in developing a habit of revising one's writing purposefully and critically to meet the expectations of the readers.

Step 4: Teacher review

With the help of a feedback form (see Appendix 5), explicit criteria of successful persuasive writing were communicated to the students. By identifying the strengths to boost students' confidence in writing and suggesting ideas and techniques for improving the draft, the teacher aimed at motivating students to expend time and effort on polishing their writings.

Step 5: Revision based on teacher review

This was the second chance for students to further polish their work before submitting it for assessment. The revision checklist and the teacher response sheet were important sources of information and students were expected to be more well-focused and purposeful in revising and improving their work.

Step 6: Final version of proposal 1

As shown in Appendix 6, a scoring guide, modeled on Ferris and Hedgcock (1998), with detailed breakdown of the evaluation criteria in the domains of innovative ideas, rhetorical soundness and language use, was used for assessing the writing output.

Step 7: Feedback on writing by teacher-student conference

To further elaborate and explain the written response on the final draft, an individual teacher-student conference was held to discuss the strengths and weaknesses of the writing in a more interactive two-way communication mode. At this stage, the idiosyncratic writing style and common grammatical errors of each student could possibly be identified so the conference helped to heighten the awareness and provide methods for future improvement.

This writing cycle was repeated for the second assignment.

Course effectiveness

Course evaluation is a necessary step to improving any course design (Rea-Dickins & Germaine, 1998). This is especially crucial with a pilot program such as the current EAP course in question. To elicit data for program evaluation, the following instruments were used:
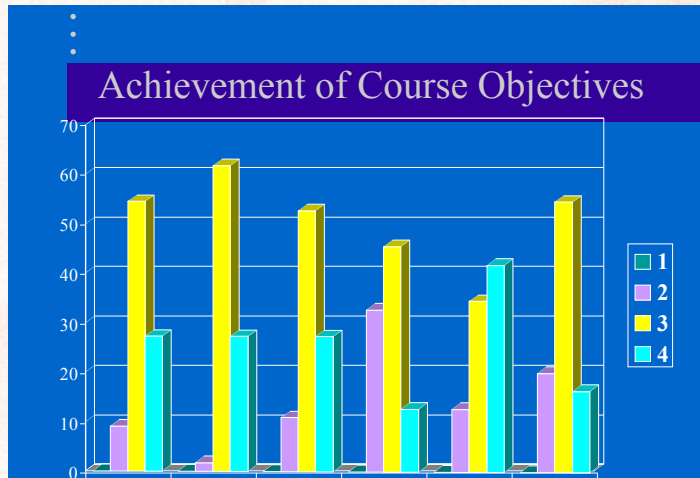
- Pre- and post-course self-report questionnaires
- Pre- and post-course writing tests (not part of course assessment)
- Students' guided reflective journals (not part of course assessment)

Preliminary findings documented specific indicators of learning progress in general language proficiency and persuasive writing techniques in particular, as well as students' reported change in attitude, motivation and confidence level towards writing. Students' perceived

usefulness of model-text analysis was also evident, both in the statistical data as well as in their reflective journals.
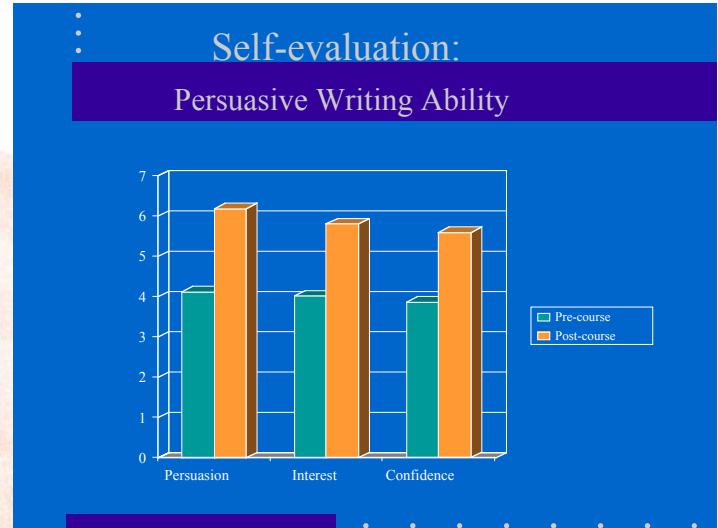
Overall outcomes

It was found that all course objectives were achieved to a great extent (based on a 4-point Likert Scale, with 1 being the lowest) including students' enhanced skills, interest and confidence in English writing:

Self-evaluation:
Persuasive Writing Ability

This corresponds with the positive t-test results (p=0.000) generated based on the formal writing tests scored by two independent raters:
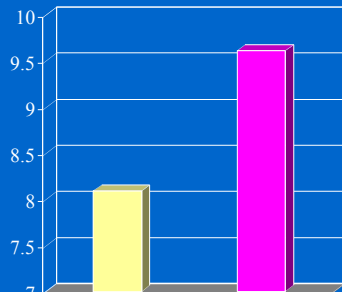
Specific writing outcomes

Statistics show that students tend to find their competence, interest and confidence enhanced over the course term.

Formal Writing Assessment (*t*-test)

The inter-rater reliability was also calculated, with a positive result as follows:

Formal Writing Assessment
Inter-rater Reliability

Usefulness of model text analysis

It was reported that model text analysis was found most useful in enhancing their persuasive writing skills, among other impacts.

Usefulness of MTA

Course Materials Model Text Analysis	Frequency				(Mean)
	1	2	3	4	(usefulness)
a) general writing	0	11	29	10	(2.98)
b) persuasive writing	0	5	36	9	(3.08)**
c) confidence/interest (general)	0	23	19	8	(2.70)
d) confidence/interest (persuasive writing)	0	18	26	6	(2.76)

Changed attitude

It was indeed gratifying to find that students' attitude towards writing in English has become more positive.

Changed Attitude towards Writing

Confidence level (persuasive writing)	Pre-course (Freq)		Post-course (Freq)	
Not confident at all	6		0	
Not confident	26		2	
Neutral	15		36	
Confident	3	15.5%	10	95.9%
Very confident	1		1	

Motivation

Taking an advanced writing course	Frequency	Mean	%
(1) Not likely at all	0		
(2)	2		
(3)	7		
(4)	23	4.23	
(5)	11		77.5
(6) Very likely	6		

Intrinsic motivation

The results gave the research team tremendous impetus on providing further training to the students as most of them (40 out of 49 returnees) indicated willingness to take an advanced writing course if offered (ref. Note 1)

Overall impression

In their reflective journals, students clearly indicated the following: They

- prefer history-related texts to general texts as the genre is more related to their discipline
- enjoy learning specific writing skills and attending to features of good writing (model text analysis)
- have developed a higher self-awareness of their strengths and weaknesses in writing
- find intensive textual analysis critically useful especially among those with higher proficiency level
- benefit from the constructivist classroom using

model texts as bases for effecting active interaction and deep learning

Conclusion

There was evidently a positive indication of personal learning in producing persuasive texts resulting from the explicit instruction through their experiential processes of model text analysis. Instead of mechanical "rule-applying," students showed signs of strategy-transferring capability. They were able to creatively transfer specific persuasive writing strategies and language features to a new task setting (ref. note 2). It is believed that the subtle difference lies in the experiential nature of the learning process itself. We did not make use of model texts simply as guidelines for students to imitate; we took students through the analysis process concretely and experientially in order for them to appreciate the power of the features highlighted. Last, but not least, we needed a congenial classroom ethos to nurture the intended skills. The small-group interaction with individual accountability built in has given us this breeding ground. Undoubtedly, successful establishment of a social environment signified by respect, intimacy, positive interpersonal relationships, and effective discussion skills is considered a major factor underpinning the enjoyable and fruitful learning experience of this group of students.

Notes

1. In response to students' expressed need for more contact hours, the current course under study was extended to become a 20-hour session starting September 2001. Besides, an advanced writing course to commence in September 2002 is underway.
2. Enhanced writing competence was evident in students' final proposals as well as the end-of-term writing tests. Specifically, deliberate effort was shown in their skillful use of persuasive strategies for support, as well as their overall organization of the text with key ideas well expressed in good English.

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Appendix 1

ELT 2408 Bilingual Historians
Reading passage response form

Passage title: _____

Name of author: _____

1. What is the main idea of this passage? Try to summarize in one sentence.

2. List the events/ examples/ experiences the writer uses to communicate the main idea.
   a.
   b.
   c.
   d.

3. What did you like best about the passage?

4. What persuasive writing techniques (e.g. compare and contrast, facts and evidence, expert and authority, emotional appeal, refute counter-arguments) can you learn from this passage?

Appendix 2a

ELT 2408 Bilingual Historians
Model Text Analysis
Organization and Language

Rhetorical structure
- Which organization principle is used in the letter? (e.g. problem → cause → solution; old → new; important → less important; general → specific; compare and contrast)
- Does the first paragraph attract the reader's attention?
- Does each paragraph support the **thesis/main theme** and help to build the reader's confidence in it?
- Is the necessary supporting information provided where it is needed?
- Does the whole piece of writing stick to the thesis, or does it digress and wander away?
- Does the final paragraph give a sense of completion?
- Are there clear and helpful transitions between paragraphs?

Language, diction and grammatical forms
- Do the sentences show enough variety of structures and opening techniques?
- Are there too many short, choppy sentences or too many long, tangled ones?
- Is the vocabulary clear, appropriate, specific and effective?
- Is the document written in standard written English?

Appendix 2b

ELT 2408 Bilingual Historians
Model Text Analysis
Organization and Language

Read the passage carefully and analyze the sentence construction techniques used by the writer to achieve the writing purpose. Write down some examples on the space provided.

1. Sentence openers

Begin with a noun/noun phrase	
Begin with a conjunction	
Begin with an adverb or "ly" words	
Begin with "ing" words	
Begin with a prepositional phrase	
Begin with "ed" words	
Begin with a "To infinitive" phrase	

2. Sentence combining skills

Using conjunctions	
Using that/which/who clauses	
Using parallel structures	
Using appositive structures/parentheses	

Appendix 3

ELT 2408 Bilingual Historians
PEER REVIEW FORM

Writer's name: _____ Reviewed by: _____

Your purpose in answering these questions is to provide an honest and helpful response to your partner's draft and to suggest ways to make his/her writing better. First read the paper straight to get a quick, general impression. On the second or third reading, record your responses to the following questions. Please offer specific comments and suggestions, then discuss your ideas with the author.

1. Does the letter state the **purpose** of writing clearly in the opening paragraph?

2. Does the letter contain **a clear issue/problem** for discussion?

3. Is the **introduction** effective? Any better ideas?

4. What **evidence** (facts, statistics, past studies, quotations) can you find to support the writer's viewpoint?

5. Did you find any **counter-arguments**? Are the counter-arguments well-addressed and refuted?

6. Is the **conclusion** effective? Any suggestion for improvement?

7. Is the letter **well organized**?

8. Comment on the **word choice** and **sentence construction skills** of this letter.

9. What are the strengths of this letter? **Are you convinced** that the writer has a convincing argument?

Appendix 4

ELT 2408 Bilingual Historians
Proposal 1: An Open Letter
Revision Checklist

Audience & purpose analysis
- Who will read this document?
- Why does he need this document?
- What will he do with it or because of it?
- How much does he know about this topic?
- Does he know and trust me?
- What are his expectations about the ideas, structure, tone and style of this document?
- What is my purpose in this writing situation? (To inform? To complain? To persuade?)
- What basic message do I want to tell my Department Head?

Innovative ideas
- Does the document have a clear, properly limited, and persuasive thesis?
- Is the thesis adequately supported?
- Are substantial, specific and relevant details provided?
- Should I include personal experience as examples?
- Are probable objections to the thesis anticipated? Are counter-arguments refuted?

Persuasive strategies & rhetorical structure
- Which organization principle is best? (problem→cause→solution; old→new; important→less important; general→specific)
- Which persuasive strategies are more appropriate? (authority, benefits, common beliefs & values, compare & contrast, emotional appeal, statistics and facts, threat & warning)

- Does the first paragraph attract the reader's attention?
- Does each paragraph support the thesis and help to build the reader's confidence in it?
- Is each paragraph a new point or merely a repetition of ideas in different words?
- Is the necessary supporting information provided where it is needed?
- Does the whole piece of writing stick to the thesis, or does it digress and wander away?
- Does the final paragraph give a sense of completion?
- Are there clear and helpful transitions between paragraphs?

Language, diction and grammatical forms

- Do the sentences show enough variety of structures?
- Are there too many short, choppy sentences or too many long, tangled ones?
- Is the vocabulary clear, appropriate, specific and effective?
- Is the document written in standard written English?
- Check subject-verb agreement, tenses, prepositions, articles, active-passive voices, and singular-plural forms.
- Check each sentence for dangling modifiers, run-on patterns, sentence fragments and unparalleled structures.
- Are the words correctly spelled and all the forms of punctuation correctly used?
- Am I satisfied with the *readability statistics* generated by the computer review?

Appendix 5
ELT 2408 Bilingual Historians
Proposal 1: An Open Letter
Evaluation criteria for revised writing based on peer review

Innovative ideas
- Good understanding of topic, writing context, purpose of writing and intended audience
- A thesis or proposition stated clearly in your introductory section
- Thesis well supported with sound generalizations and substantial, specific and relevant details
- Rich distinctive content that is original, perceptive and persuasive

Persuasive strategies & rhetorical structure
- Appropriate and effective persuasive strategies connected to thesis/purpose of writing
- Well-developed plan with attention to logical order, emphasis, flow and synthesis of ideas
- Paragraphs coherent, unified and well-developed with specific and convincing evidence
- Striking title/subject line that reflects your thesis or proposition
- With effective introduction to preview your entire structure
- With effective conclusion summarizing your main points/restating your claim

Language, diction & grammatical forms
- Sentences skillfully constructed, unified, coherent, forceful and varied
- Deftness in emphasizing, coordination and subordinating ideas
- Impressive, sophisticated and varied use of words
- Consistent and effective use of conventional grammatical structures with no errors

If quoted materials are used in your writing, special attention will be paid to the following areas:
- Clear distinctions between your ideas and those of the authors/sources you cite.
- A bibliography that follows the Chicago Manual of Style for all the sources you have quoted.

Appendix 6

Scoring guide for Proposal 1 (An open letter)

Score	Innovative ideas	Rhetorical soundness/ persuasiveness	Language use
6	The writing displays evidence of original, creative and perceptive thoughts, relevant ideas and examples, and effective arguments.	The author's position is stated clearly and fully developed. The writing is presented in a good logical structure.	Language is direct, fluid, and generally accurate; vocabulary use is sophisticated and varied.
5	The writing is good with relevant ideas supported by examples, though some parts are not well elaborated.	The author's position is stated clearly and supported by relevant information in well-structured paragraphs.	Language control is good; vocabulary use is nicely varied.
4	The writing shows adequate relevant ideas, original thoughts and supporting examples.	The author's position is sufficiently explicit but could be stated more clearly. The writing is coherent and logical but not adequate in some places.	Language shows satisfactory but inconsistent control; vocabulary use shows adequate variety.
3	The writing is somewhat relevant but weak in elaboration. The arguments and supporting ideas are weak.	The author's position is not sufficiently explicit; references are sketchy and the points are not well structured.	Language shows inconsistent control; vocabulary use shows a lack of variety.
2	Most of the ideas are not directly related to the task, weak elaboration and unclear arguments.	The author's position is either not explicit or is ineffectively developed and incoherent; references are minimal and inadequate.	Language shows inconsistencies that distract the reader; vocabulary use is highly restricted.
1	The writing lacks ideas, effective arguments and supporting examples.	The author does not state a position; references are unacceptable or nonexistent. The writing is disorganized, incoherent and poorly developed.	Language control frequently distracts the reader; vocabulary use is highly restricted and/or inaccurate.
Sub-total	X 5	X 5	X 3.35

TOTAL _____/80%

Remarks_____

(Adapted from *Teaching ESL Composition* by Dana Ferris & John S. Hedgcock, 1998.)