Feedback in Writing

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Feedback is a natural part of learning viewed as a process that occurs in time and that involves change, development, and progress. For example, a child learning to walk benefits from the natural process of receiving feedback in terms of balance and coordination from the child's body and senses and from the environment as to how to maneuver on different surfaces such as a floor, a rug, or a sandy beach. In addition to self-generated assessment and improvement of performance through trial-and-error coupled with reflection and interaction with the physical environment, feedback can be trained through learning from and with others how to assess and improve performance. In addition to training to improve feedback processes, new sources and kinds of feedback can also be offered by experts as well as other interested audiences to one's performance. Thus, other children as well as adults often assist toddlers in learning how to walk by telling or showing them what to do and what not to do, by encouraging and rewarding their efforts, by offering them a helping hand, by walking along with them, or simply by serving as audience to their performance and newly developed skills. Feedback is thus an important feature of self-directed as well as other-influenced and interactive, social or instructed, learning.

Feedback is a natural part of the writing process involved in the recursive thinking–writing loop that results in coherent text (Bereiter and Scardamalia, 1987). Writing is a recursive process of thinking to come up with ideas or conceptual content (i.e. conceptualizing), organizing that conceptual content into a meaningful linear sequence of words (i.e. languaging), and then considering whether the language properly expresses the writer's original conceptualization – or perhaps represents a better idea than the original concept (for discussion, see Pennington, 1996, ch. 3; in press; forthcoming). Feedback in this case is a writer-managed mental
process of assessing written text in terms of whether it expresses what the
writer wishes to express. The writer’s self-reflective feedback process may
then result in tinkering with already generated content or language, or
further conceptualizing and languaging, to get a better match between the
two or to further develop the writing by building on previously generated
text.

The potential for feedback exists in the gaps between (a) the mental
representation of the content of writing, (b) its linguistic representation
as a specific and meaningful sequence of words, and (c) its physical represen-
tation on the page as written text. There is first of all a gap between (a)
and (b), that is, between the mental representation of a text in terms of its
content or conceptualization and its linguistic expression in semantic and
rhetorical structure. Thoughts may not be easily represented in words, and
there are usually choices in exactly how to put ideas into words – that is, in
how to express meanings in wordings (Halliday, 1978). In addition, concepts
may be further refined as the writer works to find just the right wordings
– that is, just the right words, in just the right order – to express them.
In this (a)–(b) gap, feedback aids the writer to continue developing both
ideas and the specific wordings which create and express her/his intended
meaning. This gap includes the potential for feedback to encourage and
increase original thinking, meanings, and wordings.

There is a further gap between (b) and (c), that is, between wording or
languaging in the sense of giving linguistic form to mental form and the
writing of language on a screen or page as text, including punctuation,
matters of formatting, and connection to other pieces of text. Feedback in
the (b)–(c) gap assists the writer to fine-tune the text, in order to increase its
cohesion, correctness, aesthetic appeal, and audience orientation in terms
of such features as contextual linkage (within and outside the writer’s own
text), genericity, and novelty or style (Johnson and Pace, 2005) – which may
all be modified via word choice and mode of expression. Feedback aimed at
increasing aesthetic and audience appeal may focus on the appearance of
the text, which is an increasingly important consideration of design (Purdy,
2014) that impacts writing in both online and offline contexts.

The feedback which helps to generate and refine a writer’s text can be
aided and expanded by additional sources and kinds of input from teachers
and others with writing expertise as well as by non-expert audiences to
the writer’s work, such as classmates or online readers who are themselves
novice writers. Writing experts may assist writing novices in learning
how to write by explicitly telling or instructing them what to do and
what not to do in relation to their own writing; by pointing out strengths
and weaknesses or errors in their texts; or by presenting model texts for
purposes of comparison, contrast, and inspiration for their own in-progress
work. Experts and non-experts can offer other kinds of feedback, serving as engaged readers and audience to a piece of writing, such as by discussing the writer’s topic and ideas, writing reflective commentary on the text, and/or indicating orally or in writing what they find most engaging or would like to know more about. Other kinds of feedback may proffer encouragement and rewards for the writer’s efforts, such as receiving a positive written comment or grade, or having work read aloud, posted, published in a class book, or disseminated in some other way to wider audiences.

This Special Topic Issue of *Writing & Pedagogy* on “Feedback in Writing” is a reflection of the focal status of this topic in the teaching of writing. Feedback is a key theme of applied research, especially in second-language writing, and appears as a frequent focus in postgraduate theses and dissertations as well as in submissions to journals (including this one) that publish papers on writing pedagogy. The strong interest in feedback in writing stems from its centrality to teaching and learning, in the “expert” role it gives to the teacher of modeling linguistic and rhetorical knowledge and processes for students as writing novices and apprentices and also in the capability of feedback to foster such goals of process-oriented and interpretive education as critical reflection, peer interaction, and increasing self-understanding and self-actualization over time. The topic of feedback in writing embraces the types of feedback given to students on their written work as well as guidance on writing processes and on self-assessment and improvement of performance in both giving and receiving feedback from teachers and from other writers and audiences including peers.

The overall shape of the Feedback in Writing issue and its main content represent the joint efforts of the Guest Editor, Miriam Eisenstein Ebsworth, who is also our Research Matters Editor, and I over a two-year period. Reflecting Dr. Eisenstein Ebsworth’s focus on research, each of the articles in this issue has a research orientation, with the majority representing empirical studies of different types, as described in the Guest Editor’s overview of contents which follows this Editorial. The first article is a Featured Essay authored by Eisenstein Ebsworth offering a historical view of research on feedback. The remainder of the issue includes five empirical research studies on different approaches to feedback (Research Matters), two practice-focused studies of teachers’ own feedback practices (Reflections on Practice), one empirical study about online feedback practices (From the e-Sphere), and two book reviews (New Books). The first article and one of the books reviewed in this issue address the question of automated feedback and what the research suggests about its value and effectiveness, and the other book reviewed takes a broad look at feedback from a variety of research perspectives. There is a focus in the issue on writing in ESL or EFL contexts, together with individual articles focused
on secondary-level writing and on the community college context. Thus, the issue spans a wide range of orientations within the overall topic of feedback in writing, offering valuable theoretical and practical information underpinned by research which the Guest Editor and I expect will be of considerable interest to the Writing & Pedagogy readership.

References


Upcoming Issues

*Writing & Pedagogy* has expanded and will now publish three issues per year: one open topic issue (Spring), one special topic issue (Winter), and one other issue (Summer) – either open topic or special topic. Submissions for the two Special Topic issues planned for 2015 will still be considered (see revised Calls for Papers and deadlines below).
REVISED CALL FOR PAPERS Vol 7(2) Summer 2015, Special Topic Issue

Orality and Literacy in the 21st Century: Prospects for Writing Pedagogy

Twenty-five years ago, *Comprehending Oral and Written Language* (Horowitz and Samuels, 1987, Academic Press) was published. Chapter One of that book began with the following statement, which still holds:

In the next century it will be virtually impossible to pursue the study of written language and literacy without attention to oral language. Speculations are that 100 years from now, not only will there be a mingling of research perspectives, but since features associated with oral and written language and social-psychological factors associated with language processes are constantly in a state of flux, our very object of study will also change dramatically. The lexis, grammar, and larger structures of oral language and written language may become alike, with the norm being a writing that is largely indistinguishable from speech. (p. 1)

We are soliciting contributions for a special topic issue on “Orality and Literacy in the 21st Century: Prospects for Writing Pedagogy.” The issue will address attributes of orality and literacy that are gaining heightened attention world-wide and that we believe will significantly influence the nature of classroom instruction in writing. Scholarly examination of oral and literate cultures and spoken-written expression and their cognitive representation will influence the pedagogical practices that are advanced in the 21st century in educational policy, teacher education, and classroom learning and teaching.

The special topic issue will include articles in the categories of critical essay, empirical research, pedagogical reflections, technology-focused or
internet-focused articles, and reviews of books to be published in the period from Summer 2013 to Summer 2015. We are seeking articles relevant for any level of education or type of writing pedagogy or practice, such as the following topics and areas of inquiry:

- **The evolving nature of orality and literacy, historically and culturally** – How are changes in orality and literacy reshaping writing pedagogy? How have the oral and written dimensions of language, whether primary or second languages, been characterized by scholars and how might different perspectives have influence on pedagogical practices in writing?

- **The functions of oral vs. written communication among individuals and/or in given social groups or communities** – Are the functions of the oral and written dimensions of language changing within specific cultures or social-contextual settings, and if so, how are these changes influencing writing pedagogy?

- **Interactions of oral and written expression and knowledge development within different academic disciplines** – How is spoken language used to support writing tasks, genres, and writer-reader goals of different academic disciplines? How do oral and written modes of communication interact in contrasting types of knowledge domains, such as in science versus history?

- **Ways in which forms of speaking influence writing** – How do speech styles and genres work as precursors to writing, and how do they strategically enter into and follow writing? How do discussions influence motivation and processes of writing and the products that are produced by learners? How can students in classrooms progress from spontaneous utterances to more planned discourse?

- **Spoken versus written input to writing** – What is the comparative value of spoken versus written feedback or other kinds of contributions on students’ writing?

- **Linkage of oral and written competence across languages or dialects** – How might students’ oral or written competence in their primary language be used to support or enrich writing in another language? How can writing pedagogy incorporate bilingual or bidialectal competence?

- **The role of the body in oral versus written expression** – How do the mouth, ear, eye, hand, or larger human body contribute to the production of written discourse, such as through incorporation of specific features of oral language, gestures, or overall performance? How do visual and manual processing contribute to writing when writers use specific tools such as pen, computer, or hand-held
devices? How should connections between mind and body be studied or employed in writing pedagogy?

- **Timing and prosody of speech and writing** – How do timing and prosody through features such as intonation units, punctuation, and utterance/sentence length differ in speech versus writing? How are the rhythmic elements of language and discourse conveyed in writing? How might these be taught to developing writers?

- **Voice in speech and writing contexts** – How is voice conveyed in specific speaking and writing contexts? How do writers adjust voice to geographic space or social-situational contexts? How can voice be defined and developed in the writing curriculum?

- **Audience awareness or interaction in speaking versus writing** – How is audience incorporated into acts of speaking versus writing, and what are the pedagogical implications?

- **Cognition and consciousness in speech and writing** – How does written language influence cognition and consciousness differently from speech, and what are the implications for teaching and learning how to write for cognitive development? In what ways are differences in speech and writing as modes of meaning and thinking incorporated into educational curricula?

- **Methods of oral and written discourse analysis** – What methods, including with technologies, may be useful for the analysis of spoken and written discourse, and how can they be applied to writing pedagogy?

Contributions to this issue may come from researchers and practitioners from a range of disciplines, such as Rhetoric and Composition, Communication, Psychology, Culture Studies, Linguistics, Education, Media and Information Technology, as well as from those interested in writing in specific disciplines. A range of methodologies are welcomed, including quantitative, qualitative, and mixed-method empirical studies as well as historical or issues-centered analysis and pedagogical description and critique. Contributors may suggest an issue or topic that is not listed but that may be germane to the theme of this special issue.

For articles in all categories other than book reviews, interested potential authors should send their email and postal addresses along with a provisional title and draft article or detailed abstract, summary, or outline of contents by email or hard copy by post to the guest editor. The final deadline for these to be submitted is 15 October 2014. Also send a 75–100 word biographical statement that includes highest degree and where from, current institutional affiliation and job title, and major achievements. For book reviews, please notify the guest editor of relevant books appearing
or to appear in the period of Summer 2013 to Summer 2015 and whether you would like to be considered as a possible reviewer of a specific book or books, for which the reviewer would receive a free copy. If you wish to be considered as a reviewer, also send email and postal address along with a 75–100 word biographical statement that includes highest degree and where from, current institutional affiliation and job title, and major achievements.

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Potential contributors will be notified within two months of submission of a decision about their proposed contribution and, if positive, given feedback towards a first or revised draft. The final deadline for complete papers to be received is 1 December 2014. Both the guest editor and the other editors of the journal will work closely with selected authors to aid in producing a unique and memorable issue on this important topic.

REVISED CALL FOR PAPERS Vol 7(3) Winter 2015, Special Topic Issue

Writing Assessment

Thirty years ago, writing assessment appeared to be the intellectual domain of a relatively few testing experts worldwide and to be the commercial domain of even fewer commercial testing agencies. The main activity revolved around the generation of valid and reliable summative scores for a range of gatekeeping purposes such as university entrance, job promotion, and immigration prerequisites. However, the field of testing and assessment has opened up in a remarkable way over the last two decades, embracing and supporting classroom writing pedagogies at schools and universities, and embracing and supporting a range of workplace and professional writing needs. So in 2015, what is this thing we call writing assessment, and how and why has the change come about?
The changes are multifaceted and are not confined to changes in pedagogy, but also involve changes in, and the potentials of, new technologies and the new demands of the globalized world around us. In pedagogy, language teachers now talk and practice “assessment for learning,” seen in the adoption of a range of formative assessment practices for diagnostic and writing improvement purposes. In addition, these same teachers in decentralized school and university contexts take more responsibility for the design and use of “assessment of learning,” that is, summative assessment of their students’ work.

Students today construct writing in different ways using new technologies, and writing assessment practitioners are exploring the possibilities of using automated scoring and feedback. These new practices must ultimately change how we currently assess writing both formatively and summatively.

Finally, in our globalized world, questions are being asked about what constitutes good writing in the different contexts and audiences for which we write. How do we assess, for example, the business correspondence of a Chinese business manager writing to her colleagues in the Asian region where the recipients are also second language writers (and readers)? All of these contexts, changes, and questions set a broad agenda in this call for writing assessment contributions from colleagues researching and practicing in this area.

Invitations for papers on writing assessment broadly fall under the following themes:

(i) Writing assessment practices and policies in primary and secondary schools
(ii) The link between pedagogy and assessment in schools and universities
(iii) Re-evaluating high stakes writing assessment in different contexts
(iv) Writing assessment in local and global workplaces
(v) Writing assessment technologies and possibilities
(vi) Formative writing assessment practices and the place of feedback

Contributors may suggest an issue or topic that is not listed but that may be germane to the theme of this special issue.

We seek articles in all categories, as follows:

- **Featured Essay** A mid-length or full-length article which argues a controversial point, advocates for a specific theoretical position or type of practice, reviews issues, or presents new ideas about writing assessment;
• *Research Matters* A full-length article which presents empirical research (e.g. comparative research, developmental study, ethnographic research, case study, issues-centered survey, etc.) on writing assessment;

• *Reflections on Practice* A mid-length referenced discussion of practices relating to the assessment of writing;

• *From the e-Sphere* A short, mid-length, or full-length discussion or description focused on new technologies or new uses of familiar technology and/or the internet in writing assessment;

• *New Books* A short review or full-length review article on books published or to be published in 2014 or 2015 that center on writing assessment.

For articles in all categories other than book reviews, interested potential authors should send their email and postal addresses along with a provisional title and draft article or detailed abstract, summary, or outline of contents by email or hard copy by post to the guest editor. The final deadline for these to be submitted is 15 October 2014. Also send a 75–100 word biographical statement that includes highest degree and where from, current institutional affiliation and job title, and major achievements. For book reviews, please notify the guest editor of relevant books to appear in 2014 or 2015 and whether you would like to be considered as a possible reviewer of a specific book or books, for which the reviewer would receive a free copy. If you wish to be considered as a reviewer, also send email and postal address along with a 75–100 word biographical statement that includes highest degree and where from, current institutional affiliation and job title, and major achievements.

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Potential contributors will be notified within two months of submission of a decision about their proposed contribution and, if positive, given feedback towards a first or revised draft. Both the guest editor and the other editors of the journal will work closely with selected authors to aid in producing a unique, cutting-edge issue on this important topic.
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Special Topic Issue
Children’s Writing: Perspectives on Teaching and Learning
Guest Editor: Sherry Taylor
University of Colorado at Denver

Research Matters
Process Writing Instruction in Elementary Classrooms: Evidence of Effective Practices from the Research Literature
Vicki McQuitty, Towson University

Improving Writing Instruction in Second and Third Grade Classrooms: The Fossil Creek Writing Project
Jana Hunzicker, Bradley University; Cecile Arquette, Bradley University; and Ann Quinzio-Zafran, Coal City Community Unit District 1, Illinois

Middle School Students’ Reading Responses: A Linguistic Analysis
Zhihui Fang, University of Florida; Richard E. Ferdig, Kent State University; Zhijun Wang, Shanghai University of Finance and Economics, and Brian K. Trutschel, Orange County (Florida) Public School

The Sound of Pencils on the Page: Freewriting in Junior High School
Amy Alison Lannin, University of Missouri

Writer Identity and Writing Workshop: A Future Teacher and Teacher Educator Critically Reflect
Cynthia B. Leung, University of South Florida St. Petersburg, and Jacky Hicks, Paideia School of Tampa Bay

The Impact of Social Networking and a Multiliteracies Pedagogy on English Language Learners’ Writerly Identities
Janette Michelle Hughes and Laura Morrison, University of Toronto Institute of Technology

Reflections on Practice
Writing Their Worlds: Young English Language Learners Navigate Writing Workshop
Amy Seely Flint and Teresa Renee Fisher, Georgia State University
Using PhotoVoice to Empower K–12 Teachers and Students through Authentic Literacy Engagements
Susan R. Adams, Katie Brooks, and Michelle C. S. Greene, Butler University

Who Wins? First Grade Authors Do!
Rebecca G. Harper, Augusta State University

Reflections on Effective Writing Instruction: The Value of Engagement, Expectations, Feedback, Data, and Sociocultural Instructional Practices
Kara Mitchell Viesca and Kim Hutchinson, University of Colorado at Denver

From the e-Sphere
Harnessing the Power of Blogging with Young Students
Rebecca Lee Payne Jordan, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill

New Book
Ruth Culham, The Writing Thief: Using Mentor Texts to Teach the Craft of Writing
Reviewed by Lynn Baynum, Shippensburg University of Pennsylvania