

UNIVERSITY OF EL SALVADOR
SCHOOL OF ARTS AND SCIENCES
FOREIGN LANGUAGE DEPARTMENT



AN ANALYSIS OF THE WRITING SKILL DIFFICULTIES OF THE
ENGLISH COMPOSITION I STUDENTS AT THE FOREIGN
LANGUAGE DEPARTMENT OF THE UNIVERSITY OF EL
SALVADOR

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UNDERGRADUATE WORK PRESENTED TO OBTAIN THE DEGREE OF
LICENCIADAS EN LENGUAS MODERNAS ESPECIALIDAD EN FRANCÉS E
INGLÉS

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INTRODUCTION

This undergraduate project has been done to analyse the current writing skill difficulties of the English Composition I students, as well as to know some of the errors these students usually make and the reasons why they have this kind of problems when creating compositions.

First of all, chapter one deals with the statement of the problem, the objectives (general and specific of this document), research questions, justification, and delimitation, which are the basis of this project.

Chapter two presents the theoretical framework, i.e. the different pieces of information regarding the writing skill difficulties not only for native speakers of English, but also for the ones who are studying it as a second or foreign language. Likewise, part of the history, real facts, important concepts and experiences of some students and teachers are presented.

Then, Chapter three comprises the methodology applied by the researchers to the different groups of English Composition I courses in the first semester. Information about the purpose of the study, type of research, sampling technique, data collection techniques, type of instruments and content analysis are presented here.

Data analysis and interpretation are in Chapter four. The results of the surveys passed to students of English Composition I and teachers of the groups 01, 02, and 03 are shown to give an idea about the level and quality of knowledge students have towards the composition field. Besides, some considerations are based on the different results.

Also, some conclusions and recommendations are provided to students and teachers of the Foreign Language Department in order to improve the writing skills during the teaching-learning process.

In addition, bibliographic references are presented, containing the different authors, psychologists, English Composition teachers, theoreticians and writers consulted by the researchers to enrich this graduation work.

Finally, the team includes the appendices as an example of the different instruments applied during this academic process, a table of the behavioural differences between skilled and unskilled writers and a glossary for a better comprehension of the topic.

I. STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

The writing skill difficulties are one of the most significant problems that affect not only native English speakers, but also hundreds of students that are learning English as a second or foreign language around the world. The fact that the latter do not have interest in the Composition field leads them to be poor writers, have low scores in their courses, increase the errors in their homework, write run-on sentences and create incoherent paragraphs.

Many students have learned in high school to camouflage their lack of reading and writing skills, so it is often difficult for teachers to identify their weaknesses until students hand in papers or take exams. Then writing deficiencies are obvious. For this reason, it is important to say that academic writing involves many requirements that students must put into practice to avoid difficulties and complications at the moment of writing essays or report papers.

Besides, not only self-strategies influence students' performance, but also the effectiveness of the methods and techniques that teachers apply in their English Composition courses. Each method is useful with some students but fails with others, so writing needs to persist and teachers must take into account other strategies if they want their students to develop effective writing skills. Therefore, students and teachers must work together as a team. If students want to improve their writing skills, only in this way they will have good results and they will notice the difference in their compositions.

Due to the requirements that academic writing demands to students when delivering an English composition at the Foreign Language Department, it was necessary to carry out an investigation, showing whether or not students had strong difficulties for writing reports, essays and summaries, or the skills that they are able to apply when asked for compositions, giving more indicators of students' failures and strategies and making teachers' feedback easier on the composition field. Good writing requires practice and appropriate feedback, which teachers must never de-emphasize.

A. OBJECTIVES

GENERAL OBJECTIVE

To identify the difficulties that English Composition I students have at the Foreign Language Department of the University of El Salvador in order to provide the department with a proposal to eradicate such weaknesses.

SPECIFIC OBJECTIVES

- To show the main factors for FLD students poor writing quality so as to determine their possible solution.
- To identify the English Composition methods and techniques applied by the FLD's professors of the University of El Salvador with the purpose of determining its effectiveness.
- To discover the FLD professors' reactions to students' written compositions in English in order to propose strategies to improve students' writing skill.
- To present the professors' main concerns over their students' writing so as to provide an explanation about students' problems and their probable solutions.
- To explain the most difficult techniques for English Composition I students during the writing process with the purpose of stating some proposals for improving the methodology applied.

B. RESEARCH QUESTIONS

1. GENERAL QUESTION

What are the main writing skill difficulties that affect the performance of the English Composition I students at the University of El Salvador?

2. RELATED QUESTIONS

1. Do writing skill difficulties of English Composition I students depend on the quality of the techniques that teachers apply?
2. Do writing skill difficulties of English Composition I students depend on the strategies they apply when writing?
3. Is it useful for the students to have previous knowledge in writing for the composition requirements at the University?
4. Are the methods that teachers apply the most appropriate to the level of knowledge of the English Composition I students?

C. JUSTIFICATION

Since it is difficult for almost every student to write essays or compositions in their native language, it is worst for the students that are learning English as a second or foreign language. It is for that reason that the research team decided to investigate and analyze this situation, since it was noticeable that English Composition students were having serious difficulties when writing.

The main problem is that students do not understand some topics. Other topics are not clear enough for them or the methods, techniques or strategies teachers are applying during classes are not very helpful at the time of writing about any topic. So, it was indispensable to gather all the information possible and in this way to propose some recommendations not only to the authorities of the Foreign Language Department but also to every single English Composition teacher in order to improve the learning process of the English Composition students and help them to understand better each topic and in this way create good compositions.

The importance of this research lies on the following facts:

1. To improve teaching techniques and strategies.
2. To improve student's writing quality.
3. To establish a previous knowledge on both teachers and students for a better performance when writing.
4. To design a new study plan for the major offered by the FLD in which English Composition I should be given an appropriate status.
5. To develop FLD student's learning strategies through writing exercises, and this cannot be attained in English Composition classes if the students do not possess the level for those exercises.

D. DELIMITATION

This investigation project was divided according to the following delimitations:

- **Time:** The investigation was developed from March to September 2013.
- **Place:** The project took place at the Foreign Language Department of University of El Salvador, on the Main Campus.
- **Scope:** It was to identify the main difficulties that students have at the moment of writing in order to improve their composition skills.
- **Model:** The research was studied under the qualitative method.

II. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

One of the main problems among students is the fact that many of them cannot develop their writing skills, mostly the ones who are making compositions in a foreign language. This has become very difficult not only for students but also for professors, because all of them are looking for good results in every single step of the learning process.

Through history there have been many cases of this situation and it is important to say that this problem happens not only in our country but also in many others around the world. In the United States in 1874, 97% of the nation's high school graduates entered college. However, although they were native speakers of English, their writing skill was poor. For example, the Harvard faculty was distressed by the low level in English on the freshmen students' part, including upper-class students. For this reason, they sought to remedy writing deficiencies by instituting freshman English (a remedial course). The original purpose given for the almost universal instituting of freshman English in college across the country, following the Harvard model was to "make up" for what students "failed to learn" in High school, in essence.

In addition, first remedial writing course at the University of California at Bekerly, subject A (a prefreshman English course) began in 1898. At that time the University required high schools to take subject A, a non-credit composition course. There have been many disputes about the course and its effectiveness; however, the decline in essay writing scores of college students provided more objective evidence that the writing skill was getting worse. There was a significant increase in errors involving awkwardness of expression, run-on sentences and incoherent paragraphs. There were more poor writers and their scores were lower than in other years.

Moreover, the theoretician Kitzhaber, A. R. (1963) surveyed composition courses in four year colleges and concluded that their quality and content were exceedingly diverse. He punished composition instructors and their approaches with phrases that ring true today: "Teaching young people to write well has always proved so frustratingly difficult and the methods used so time-consuming and laborious for teachers and students alike". In other words, no one approach has solved the problems nor does it seem likely that any strategy or

philosophy will provide remedy. “Each method helps some students and fails with others. Writing needs to persist; teachers must teach composition if students want to develop effective writing skills“, Kitzhaber added.

Although some of the strategies teachers use encourage their students to be creative and organized, that is not enough. Students must take into account many aspects at the time of writing such as: vocabulary, mechanics, grammar, organization and content and not only one of these items because to create adequate compositions students must take into account every single detail. The problem is that they do not care about the kind of essays they are creating and they do not follow the correct steps that will provide all the sources for their compositions. They just care about the grade they will receive at the end of a homework assignment.

Besides, remedial writing courses for students with problems regarding this skill are not accepted by some theorists. For Example, in 1974 the English composition teacher Karliner A. said that placing students in special remedial writing courses is not a solution. He added that *“writing competency is a skill which needs continual reinforcement; it is impossible to expect that one student will become a good writer if he has never written before and if it will not be required to write again in their college career.”*

If professors require little or no writing experience when they do require a paper and provide no constructive feedback, when writing is found to be inadequate, then it is foolish to expect that most undergraduates will develop their writing skills. Professors must expect a development of the writing skills according to what they have taught to students in the writing area.

Likewise, the National Assessment of Educational Progress Report by the writer Martha Maxwell (1975) stated that “poor writers seem to be getting poorer in those skills that are specific to written communication, but seldom called for in conversation: that are acquired largely through broad reading and considerable rewriting; that are most seldom taught, and when taught who have little use for written communication.”

The continuing drop in average scores on college entrance examinations provides additional evidence of the pervasiveness of the problems. The composition researcher R. Lloyd-Jones (1976) argues that the media have decided poor writing is news and that there is no crisis. He continues by saying, “*A crisis is a good turning point; perhaps our need for good writing has increased, so our inadequacies are more poignant. Still our disease about writing is probably chronic rather than acute.*”

Jones has criticized tests and other indicators of a decline in writing skills on the ground that they emphasize grammar and mechanics, which are superficial aspects of writing, and he points out that professors have secretaries and editors to make ‘silent changes’ in their works. Besides, English instructors struggling to teach open admission to students and claim that their student papers need more than editing.

In the same year, the press reported that only 34% of the entering freshmen responding to the American Council of Education questionnaire taken of an article of the magazine “Science News” thought their high schools had prepared them very well for college English courses, although only 13% had planned to ask their colleges for special assistance in writing.

The main problem is that students who received high grades in high school may be unaware of their poor writing. Consequently, students entering college with good grades in English composition may have not been required to write in high school and may have minimal skills.

The problems that colleges face today in developing and maintaining effective programs for poorly prepared students must be viewed in the context of the changes that are occurring in higher education in this country, the individual institution’s standards and goals, the diverse expectations and characteristics of the students themselves, and the attitudes, teaching strategies, and expectations of the faculty. Fiscal realities and the shrinking pool of highly qualified recent high school graduates who choose to attend college are other significant influences on the kind of programs colleges offer and their effectiveness.

Although the definition of *underprepared* varies from one institution to another, one fact remains: colleges, whatever their standards will continue to accept large numbers of poorly prepared students. Colleges today are in transition, faced with rising costs and the specter, if not reality, of declining enrolments. As a consequence, students who have not been considered college material in the past are now being courted by colleges. Former college dropouts are also being sought to return and fill college classrooms. Increasing federal and state financial aid programs permit these new kinds of students to pay for higher education. At the same time, the number of well-prepared students (that is those in the upper quarter of their high school graduating classes) who enrol in four-year colleges continues to decline, paralleling the decline in scores on college admission tests. The high-ability student has more options if he decides to attend college. These factors combine to change the basic quality of freshman courses by removing high-ability students from those courses and increasing the number of students with lower ability and weaker skills.

While faculty members complain about the lower skills of entering students and the disintegration of academic standards (blaming the latter on the students), grade inflation continues, confusing able students and robbing lower-ability students of their incentive to learn.

Good writing requires practice and adequate feedback, which many high school teachers have de-emphasized. In fact, students may substitute such electives as journalism, speech and drama for the traditional high school composition and literature courses. When given an option, students who must need writing practice choose subjects that do not require writing. In addition, students are rarely able to assess the quality of their own writing; they are usually not taught how to evaluate their work and are unaware of the criteria teachers use in grading it.

Therefore, it is not possible to understand students' writing problems without considering the expectation of college professors. Every professor, whether in a university or a community college, expects students to be literate because of the educational process it is supposed that every student has already followed at that level.

Some writer professors take an issue with the trend away from teaching writing. The composition teacher Miles, J. (1975) expresses the position that teaching writing is responsibility of each faculty member. He says, “*We know that good writing, like good thinking, cannot be taught ‘once and for all’ it is not a simple skill like swimming; indeed even a swimmer can be coached to get better and better*”. Thinking is one of the most complex abilities, and writing is an evidence of it. So students need help with writing at many stages from third grade to eighth, to tenth to high school, to college and beyond and from subject to subject. Whenever a new stage of thought and a new subject matter comes along, the accumulated abilities of the students need conscious thoroughgoing adapting to the new material and maturity.

On the other hand, there are many problems that students present at the moment of writing. The individual with writing difficulties may have one or more of the following problems:

- Poor handwriting/ writing illegibly
 - ✓ Does not follow lines on a paper
 - ✓ Writes too small or too large
 - ✓ Writes too light or too hard
 - ✓ Pencil grip incorrect
 - ✓ Does not visually track writing
 - ✓ Writes letters or numbers backwards or upside down
 - ✓ Mixes capital and lower case letters inappropriately
- Poor spelling skills
 - ✓ Spells phonetically and cannot remember patterns
 - ✓ Spells words differently in the same document
 - ✓ Reverses letters in spelling
- Difficulty with copying or completing work on a printed page
 - ✓ Difficulty copying from board
 - ✓ Difficulty copying from a book or other printed material
 - ✓ Difficulty filling out forms
 - ✓ Difficulty completing fill-in blank worksheets

- Difficulty taking notes from oral presentations
 - ✓ Unable to write homework assignments correctly
 - ✓ Writing is too slow to get lecture points on a paper
 - ✓ Takes notes but is unable to distinguish important information from extraneous information
 - ✓ Reverses or ignores numbers, parts of sentences and/or whole words taking notes

- May have problems with grammar, syntax and organization
 - ✓ Demonstrates inconsistent memory for sentence mechanics (e.g. lack of punctuation and capitalization)
 - ✓ Persistent problems with sentence structure (sentences may be incomplete or syntax may be incorrect or disassociated)
 - ✓ Does not have all parts of a well organized paragraph (Topic sentence and supporting sentences)

- Demonstrates writing skills inconsistent with verbal abilities
 - ✓ Writes short and/or simple essays even though he can verbalize more complex thought
 - ✓ Can verbalize answers to tests but written answers are wrong, left blank or incomplete
 - ✓ Oral vocabulary more complex than written vocabulary

Some psychologists have investigated about all these problems and they have identified three types of students that can suffer these difficulties among them it can be mentioned: the basic writing, the cognitive egocentrism and the focused argumentative student.

First of all, the college student with minimal writing skills and little previous exposure to books and readings has been called “the basic writing student”. For this kind of student academic writing is a trash, not a way of saying something to someone. They have severe grammatical or other basic writing problems and have difficulty with writing academic

assignments. Unfortunately, these errors tend to persist and they are seldom addressed in courses where writing is assigned.

Many college students who do not have severe grammatical or other basic writing problems do have difficulty with academic writing assignments. The major problems areas in students' attempts at academic writing are shown below, which have been identified by the psychologist Williams J. Lamberg:

- They lack self-management skills. Symptoms include a history of incomplete courses, turning in papers late, and not knowing specifics details of the assignments such as due date or amount required.
- They lack a strategy for composing and have no set of procedures for working through a writing assignment from beginning to end.
- They fail to understand and follow directions. They may write good papers but do not follow the instructor's assignment.
- They write poorly organized papers and sometimes fail to select a topic.
- They have many errors and patterns of errors; in other words, they lack a system of proofreading.
- Their papers lack introductions.
- They have problems in understanding and accepting the teacher's criticism.

Moreover, the cognitive egocentrism is a situation that affects many students. This is when they are asked to compose paragraphs, analyse objective data and instead they write about personal opinions provided by the data. In 1979, the writer Andrea Lunsford used Piaget's concept of egocentrism to explain the reasons why these writers have problems, but she realized that apparently they are unaware that they have veered from the assigned topic. That means that they are not conscious of what they are doing, this just happens.

In addition, the focused argumentation was studied by the professor Dean Drenk, who said that many students as writers have difficulty discovering issues within a topic or formulating thesis statements that take focused positions on issues. He realized that either they write a diffuse thesis statement, or they write a paper that has no thesis statement at all

and also illogical papers. Therefore, it comes an inadequate thesis statement, which is missing sense of the issue at hand.

Many of the problems that have been presented here are not only for native English speakers but also for the ones that are learning English as a second or foreign language. A second-language or dialectic speaker who has thoroughly mastered English grammar, spelling, and sentence structure may still have problems in organizing his ideas and writing essays.

It is more difficult for a foreign or second language learner to put into practice all the strategies and techniques that have been taught to them in their composition courses since they have to think in English, not in their native language. Besides, if they have not developed this ability in their own language, probably it will be impossible to become a good writer in a field that is completely strange to them.

If professors believe that just by taking a writing course their students will be better and will be able to create excellent compositions, they are wrong. This is a subject that needs to improve the techniques every day and mostly in teaching composition to non-English speakers. The instructor must be very careful in the strategies he/she will apply with his/her students, and must pay attention to every single detail during the class.

Each culture has its own ways of organizing and perceiving speech and its own rhetorical conventions, Spanish speakers use a digression pattern, roaming far from the point before returning to it and dialect speakers use rhetorical patterns that differ from those of Standard English.

Finally, in 1982, 1987, and 1988, the theorist in the field of composition, James A. Berlin presented a model that suggests that all complete rhetorical theories and, by extension, all approaches to teaching composition must include the following elements: the writer or knower, the audience or reader, reality and truth, and the sources of language in written texts.

Berlin's four components become the organizing principles for a presentation of 3 categories of approach to composition theory: the process approaches, the interactive views, and the social constructionist views. These are presented in the following matrix.

BERLIN'S FOUR COMPONENTS MODEL

Elements/ Approach	Process Approaches	Interactive Views	Social Constructionist View
Writer (or knower)	Viewed as originator of written text, and the process through which the writer goes to create and produce discourse is the most important component in the theory.	Envisions the writer as a person involved in a dialogue with the audience. In this approach, text is what an individual creates through a dialogue with another conversant; thus, both the writer and reader take responsibility for coherent text.	The written product is considered a social act that can take place only within and from a specific context and audience. The language, focus, and form of a text stem from the community for which it is written.
Audience (or reader)	It is the competent writer who establishes purpose, meaning and form; in so doing the writer “creates” an audience that conforms to the writer’s text and purposes.	Students are urged to appeal to their reader’s needs and interests in order to mature as writers.	When the writer, like most ESL (English as a second language) students, is an “outsider”, that reader/ audience has the power to accept or reject writing as coherent, as consistent with the conventions of the target discourse community
Reality and truth	They reside in the writer’s mind.	The writer attempts to appeal to the reader through a reality upon which the writer and the reader can agree and to convince the reader through a reality of a particular argument within this reality.	The nature of the text is determined by the community for which it is written.
Language	It is the writer’s own, stemming from prior experience and the creative urge.	The writer must make concessions to the language of the reader; and likewise, the reader must concede to the writer his language, or L2 language limitations, and previous background, employing this to instantiate and modify the reader’s content scheme.	Views language as an outgrowth of the discourse community for which a text is written. The “outsider” writer’s alternatives for language use are therefore severely constrained.

III. METHODOLOGY

A. Purpose of the study

The team developed an explanatory research which is a type of [research](#) conducted for a problem in which the reasons have not been clearly defined. Explanatory research was useful to determine the best [research](#) design, [data collection](#) method and selection of subjects

The reason why the researchers decided to conduct an *explanatory research* was because the team was not only looking for describing the problem selected but also giving an explanation about the phenomena. This study allowed the team to identify the problem, describe it and suggest some solutions.

B. Qualitative Study

The research team chose this method because the aim of this research was to describe some of the different problems students have when writing compositions in English as well as to determine and analyze the techniques that teachers use when teaching English Composition.

C. Purposive sampling

The team applied this sampling technique because it allowed the researchers to study the entire population. It means that the whole universe was studied under this technique according to the stated objectives.

D. Data collection techniques

1. Interview

The group employed the interview as the instrument for collecting data from the teachers of English Composition I it provided important information not only from the conversation with them, but also from their gestures, facial expressions and pauses.

The team made use of the interview because it was completely necessary to get as many details as possible in relation with the major and what professors think about it in order to know the areas in which they show problems.

2. Survey

The research team selected the survey as the instrument for collecting information from the students; it was addressed to the groups 01, 02 and 03 of English Composition I in the first semester of 2013.

3. Content Analysis

This research technique was applied for examining the results of the instruments addressed to students and teachers. The technique was selected due to the fact that through this research it became extremely necessary to analyze in a deep way the content provided by the data which made easier the process to understand the way students and teachers perceive the English Composition I course and what they expected to be improved in the future.

IV. DATA ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION

The application of the instruments took place in different phases. First of all, the team looked for the students already selected, English Composition I groups, in order to pass a survey which would reveal essential information about the topic under study. This instrument was really important because of the information acquired.

Second, the researchers applied other instrument, the interview, to some already selected English Composition I professors. At the beginning the team explained the directions to fill the instrument, and then those instruments were passed to the professors. After this, the team checked and analyzed every single question and answer to verify whether or not they were fully filled.

SURVEY RESULTS

1- Which of the following writing techniques do you use?

Techniques	Brainstorming	Free-writing	Making a list	Editing	Mapping
Total of students	52	42	22	10	9

2- Which of the previous techniques do you consider difficult to use? Why?

Techniques	Mapping	Editing	No answer	Free-writing	Making a list	Brainstorming
Total of students	34	14	7	5	4	3

3- Which of the writing techniques do you think are more effective in creating compositions? Why?

Techniques	Brainstorming	Free-writing	Making a list	Editing	Mapping
Total of students	29	27	11	3	2

4- Do you know how to write an outline?

Answer	Yes	No
Total of students	54	6

5- Do you usually make a draft before hand in your final composition?

Answer	Yes	No
Total of students	55	5

6- Are you careful enough about the punctuation when writing compositions?

Answer	Always	Sometimes	Never
Total of students	45	10	5

7- In your opinion, what are the pros and the cons of the techniques applied by the FLD professors when teaching English Composition?

	Pros	Cons
Answer	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Learning about essays 28 • Good methodology 14 • Job improvement 11 • Easiness of the techniques 6 • No answer 1 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Time class and confusion 30 • Same Techniques used, difficult to use 16 • Teachers' attitude 6 • No answer 8

8- Having identified the structure of a paragraph, do you have difficulty in defining the thesis statement?

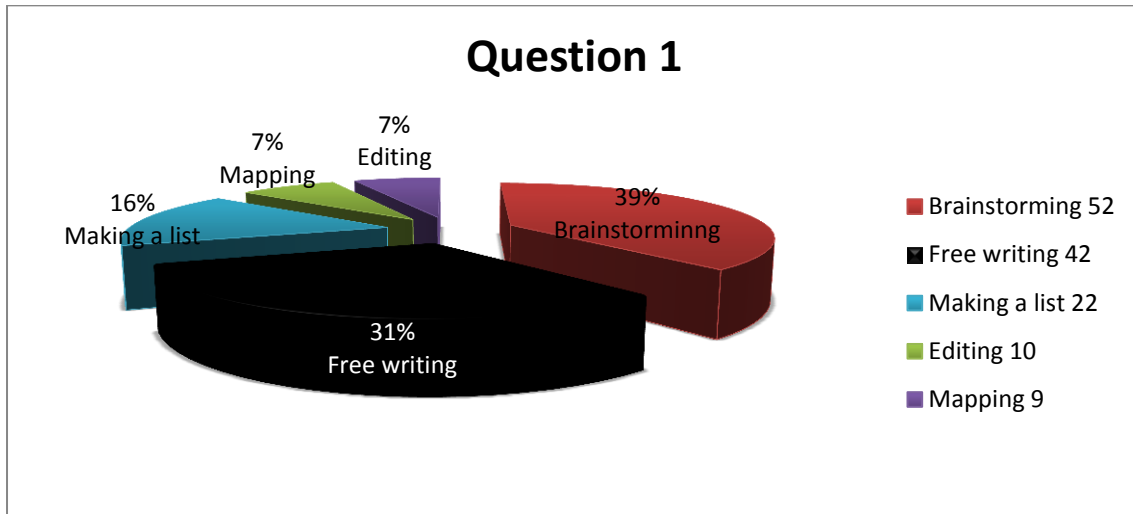
Answer	No	Yes
Total of students	47	13

9- How often do you write more about personal opinions rather than real facts in relation to the assigned topic?

Answer	Usually	Often	Rarely	Seldom	Always	Never	No answer
Total of students	25	12	12	5	3	2	1

DATA ANALYSIS

1- Which of the following writing techniques do you use?

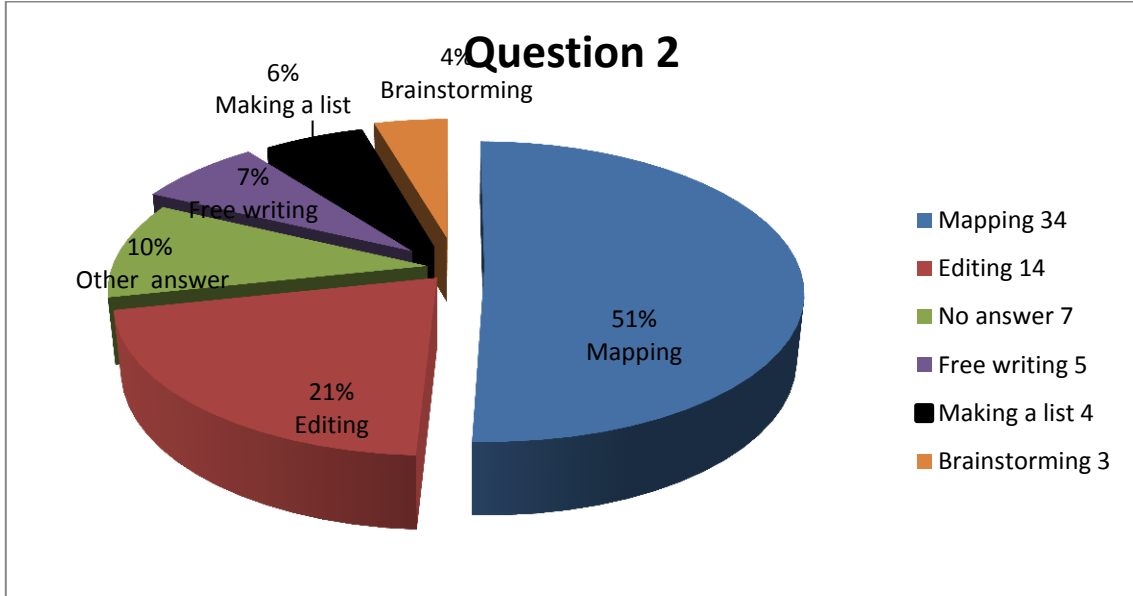


Source: Results taken from the survey addressed to the groups 01, 02 and 03 of English Composition I

39% of the students admitted that the writing technique they commonly use is brainstorming. Then, 31% of them said that they normally use the free writing technique. Next, 16% of students expressed their choice for making a list. Finally, 7% of the sample stated their preference for mapping and an identical percentage of the students expressed that they normally use the editing technique.

There is a considerable tendency on the students' part to prefer brainstorming and free writing techniques at the moment of making a composition, whereas the rest selected making a list and a minimal part of them chose mapping and editing in a similar percentage. The preferences of students for selecting certain writing techniques is related to their English level and practice as well as the previous knowledge they have about a specific writing technique.

2- Which of the previous techniques do you consider difficult to use? Why?



Source: Results taken from the survey addressed to the groups 01, 02 and 03 of English Composition I

51% of the students, which is a somehow significant part of them, considered mapping as the most difficult technique, followed by editing with a lower percentage, that is 21%, while some of the students gave another answer and they made a 10%, next comes free writing, making a list, and brainstorming which got 7%, 6%, and 5% respectively, which were considered as the least difficult for the sample.

There is a moderate tendency on the students' part to consider mapping as the most difficult writing technique whereas editing just got a lower percentage in order of difficulty and the rest of the writing techniques were easier according to the answer of a minimal part of students. According to students, the level of difficulty was measured by the previous information they have of each writing technique, their structures and time students use practicing those techniques besides the fact that some students stated that they did not know all the writing techniques, so they considered them difficult to use and did not know how to apply them at the moment of making a composition and in the case they had heard about them, the possible explanation or information was not enough.

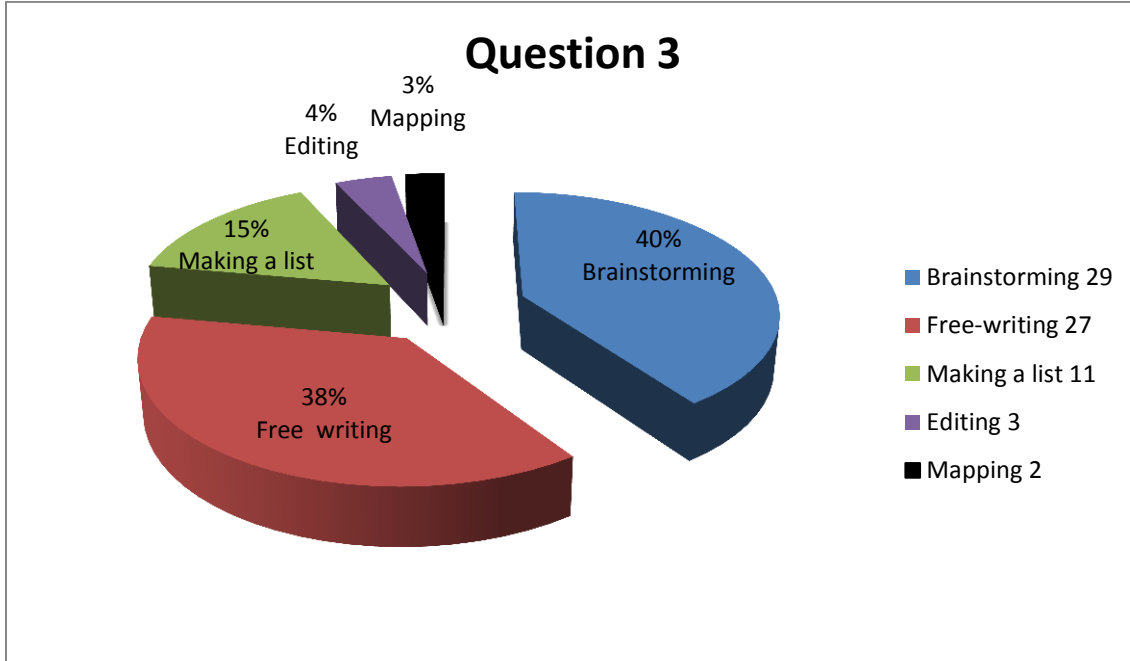
2.A Why?

Technique which is difficult to them	Reasons of that difficulty
Mapping	<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Difficult for the students to organize their ideas.▪ They have never used it.▪ It is complicated, too general.
Editing	<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Difficult to edit ideas correctly.▪ They do not know about it.▪ Too detailed.
Free writing	<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ The technique does not give them any help.▪ Too difficult.▪ The students' level of English is not enough for this technique.▪ The students do not know what to write about
Making a list	<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ It is difficult to find the supporting details.
Brainstorming	<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ It requires too much work.▪ It is difficult.

51% of the population under study said that they considered mapping the most difficult writing technique. Next comes editing with 21% of difficulty for the students. 10% of the subjects under study provided other type of answer and mentioned other kind of techniques that are complicated for them. Then, free writing, making a list and brainstorming with a lower percentage of difficulty which were 7%, 6% and 4% correspondingly.

The sample exposed different reasons why those techniques are difficult to use. First of all, students said they consider difficult to organize their ideas at the moment of making a composition using the mapping technique, which is the reason why they think it is complicated and too general. Besides this, 14% of the students who selected mapping expressed they did not know what mapping is about. Second, according to students another difficult technique is editing because they cannot edit ideas correctly as well as it is too detailed. Unfortunately, almost half of the population that chose editing said they did not know this writing technique. Finally, the rest of students selected free writing, making a list and brainstorming as the least difficult ones but they still have problems applying them, those techniques require too much work and the students' level of English is not enough for taking advantage of them.

3- Which of the writing techniques do you think are more effective in creating compositions? Why?



Source: Results taken from the survey addressed to the groups 01, 02 and 03 of English Composition I

40% of students said they considered brainstorming as the most effective writing technique, followed by a similar percentage of students, 38%, who expressed that free writing is a useful writing technique. Then, a minimal number of students, 15%, stated that making a list is their choice. Next comes editing with 4% and, finally, mapping, with 3% of the students.

There is a strong tendency on the students' part to consider brainstorming and free writing as the most effective writing techniques in creating compositions, which have a similar acceptance by students in matter of effectiveness. Then, it is making a list with a lower percentage of recognition by the sample of the population. Next comes editing and mapping with a similar and lower percentage of approval by the students. These answers are close to the English level of students and how many times they practice these writing techniques as well as how far they have gone through these techniques in class because some of the students said that they use as many techniques as they know.

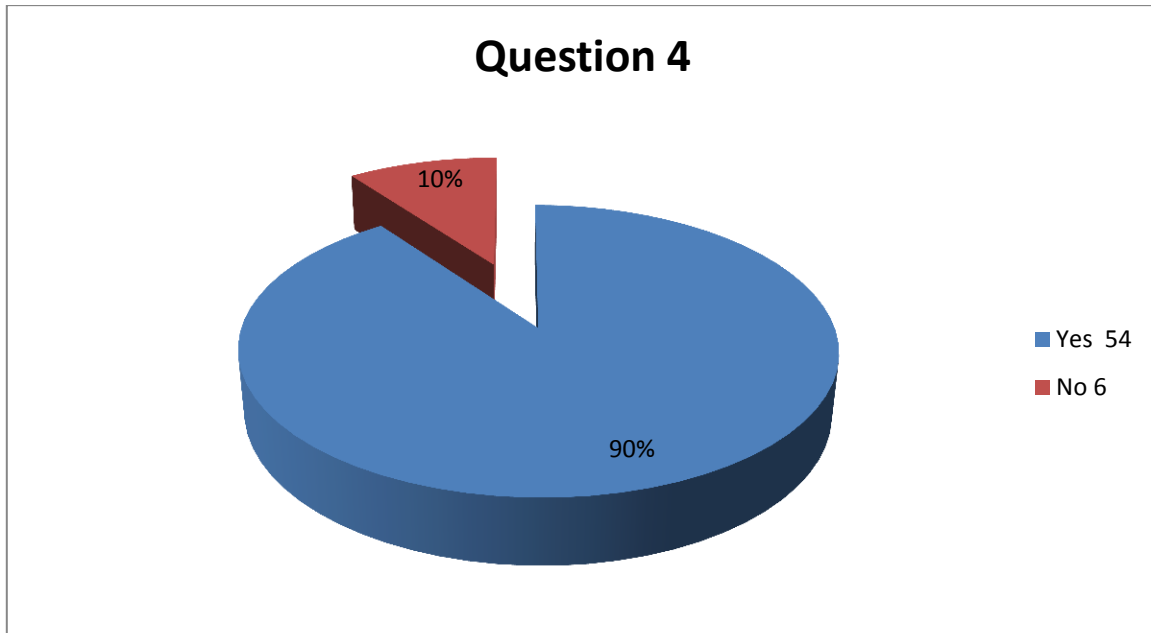
3.A Why?

Technique which is effective in creating compositions	Reasons of that effectiveness
Brainstorming	<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ It is easy to gather ideas.▪ Do not forget ideas.▪ Select the best ideas for a good writing.▪ Effective, important, useful
Free writing	<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ It provides ideas.▪ Write what come to mind.▪ Previous steps for the final text.▪ Effective and easier to edit.
Making a list	<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ It serves as a guideline.▪ Gather ideas and do not forget them.▪ Organizing ideas.
Editing	<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Organize ideas and correct them.
Mapping	<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ It serves as a guideline.

40% of students expressed their preference for using the brainstorming technique at the moment of making a composition. Next, in a similar percentage, 38%, free writing was considered effective. Then, making a list came with 15% of recognition in terms of effectiveness. Finally, came editing and mapping with 4% and 3% of acceptance respectively.

Most of the subjects under study prefer brainstorming and free writing at the moment of making a composition. According to students, their preference is close to the advantages of each writing technique, which are: i. e. the easiness to gather ideas and at the same time organize them. Also, those ideas are very helpful in order to write what comes into the mind and it is considered one of the previous steps for the final composition. Then, making a list is effective because it functions as a guideline. Finally, there are editing and mapping, which help in order to organize ideas and correct them as well as serves as a guideline for the final text.

4. Do you know how to write an outline?



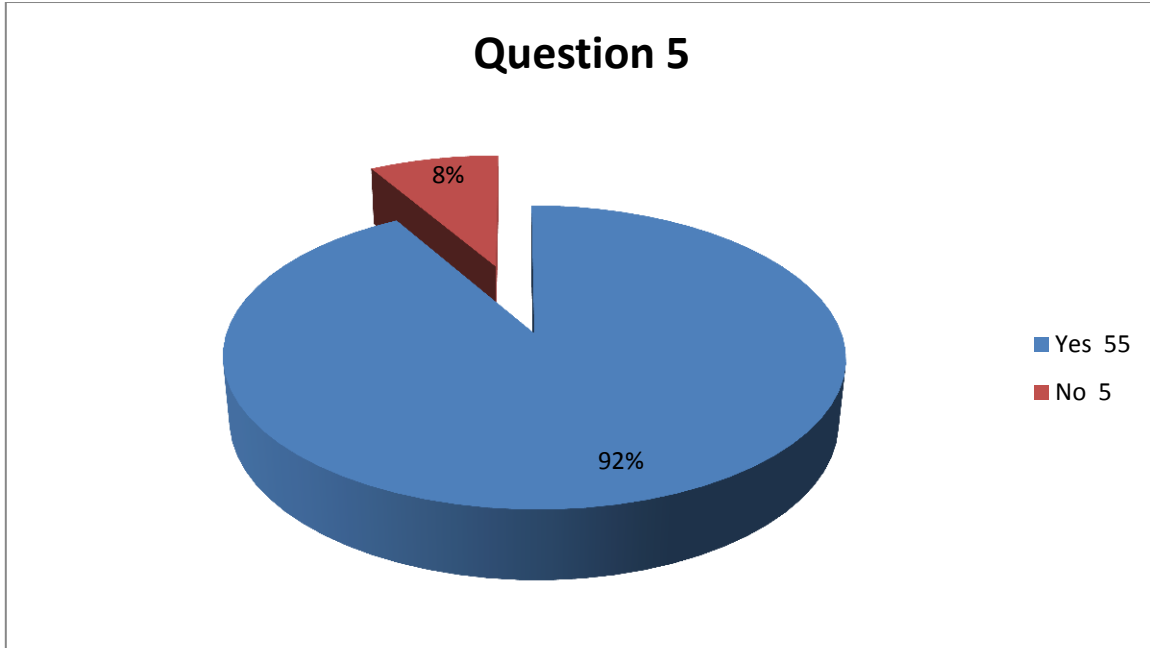
Source: Results taken from the survey addressed to the groups 01, 02 and 03 of English Composition I

The 90% of the students know how to write an outline and said that making it in advance is very useful. On the other hand, 10% of the students do not have any idea of what an outline is or how to write it. Although some of them said that they had studied that part in the English composition course, they still have problems with that.

There is a very strong tendency on the students' part to admit that they do not have any problem regarding an outline making. This is highly contrasted with the rest of them (10%), who recognized not to know how to write an outline.

The results showed that almost all the students know clearly how to write an outline but six of them still have problems in relation to that topic.

5. Do you usually make a draft before hand in your final composition?



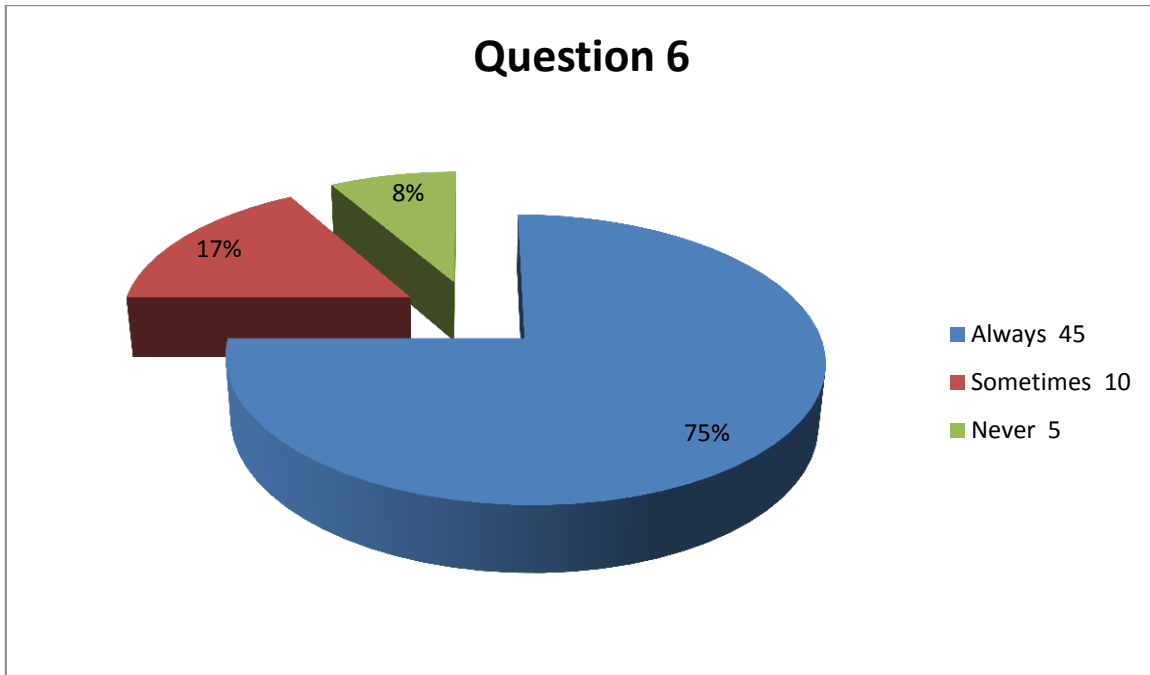
Source: Results taken from the survey addressed to the groups 01, 02 and 03 of English Composition I

The 92% of the students said that they make a draft before handing in their final compositions in order to use some of the writing techniques such as mapping and editing. 8% of the students do not do this because they do not consider it important, though.

Almost all the subjects under study expressed that they make a draft before handing in their final composition. Only 5 of them admitted the opposite.

The students' commitment towards making a draft of a composition before handing in that paper is clearly observed as revealed by their answers.

6. Are you careful enough about the punctuation when writing compositions?



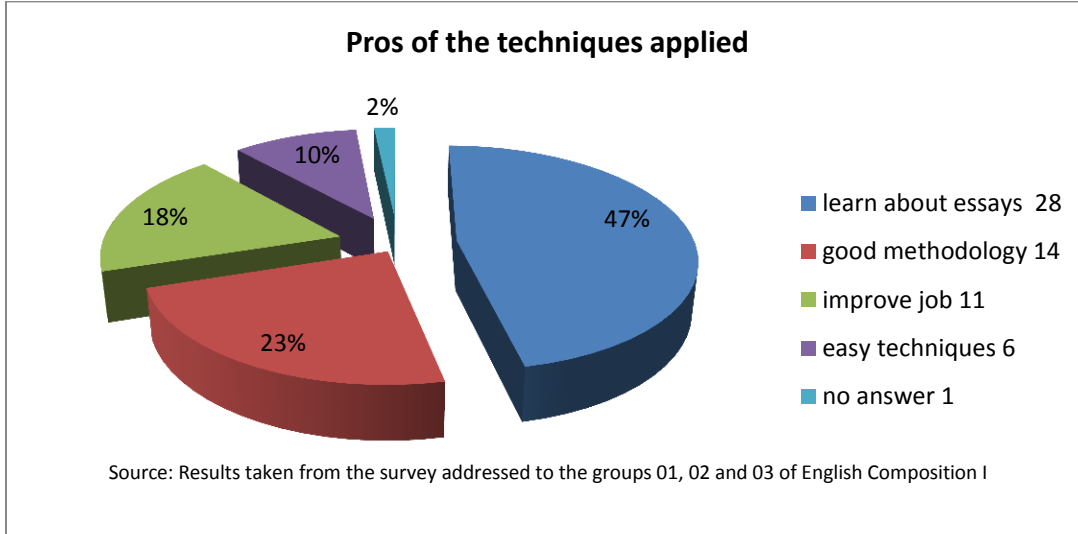
Source: Results taken from the survey addressed to the groups 01, 02 and 03 of English Composition I

Most of the English Composition I students are very careful about the punctuation when writing. The 75% of them answered that they always care about punctuation, the 17% of the surveyed students said that they try, sometimes when they have enough time to do it, but there is still 8% of them that never care about this. They said that in the composition field what is important is the content of writing, not the punctuation, since they are studying composition not orthography.

When asked about their care regarding punctuation, 75% of the subjects under study expressed that they always take punctuation into consideration when writing. Next, 17% of them admitted that they do it sometimes. Only 8 % of them answered that punctuation is not important to them.

The data reveal that the subjects under study are very careful about punctuation as shown by their answers. This is very significant, because only 8% of them do not care about this fact.

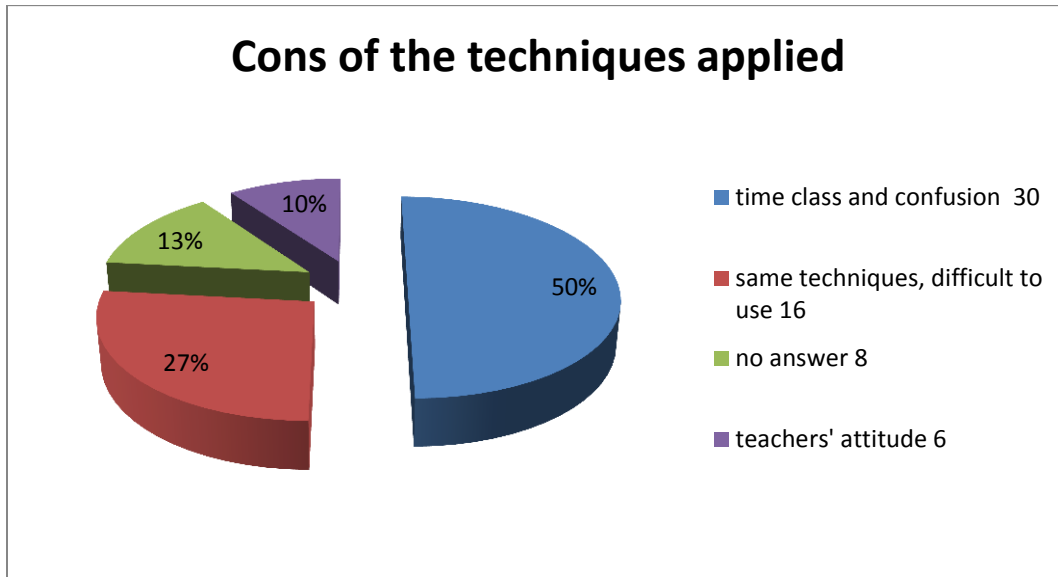
7. In your opinion, what are the pros and the cons of the techniques applied by the FLD professors when teaching English Composition?



As to the pros of the techniques applied by the FLD professors when teaching English Composition, 47% of the surveyed students said that the techniques used during classes help them not only to learn theory but also practice about essays. Then, the 23% of them expressed that the methodology applied inside the classroom is good and helps them to understand the writing process. Regarding job improvement, 18% of the students agreed that the techniques applied enhance their skills when creating English compositions. Regarding the low percentages, 10% of the students think that the techniques used by their teachers are easy to apply and the remaining 2% did not provide any opinion related to the topic.

It is clear that most of the students agree they learn about essays as an advantage of the techniques used in the English Composition class, which shows that, if previously they did not have any knowledge regarding the structure of an essay, this methodology applied guides for them to know how to do it. As a consequence, it is also noticeable that a considerable percentage of students find out that they can improve their skills (accuracy, quickness, precision, objectivity, etc.) through the use of these techniques. Finally, 10% of the students find them easy to understand and the rest 2% did not provide any answer related to this aspect.

7. A

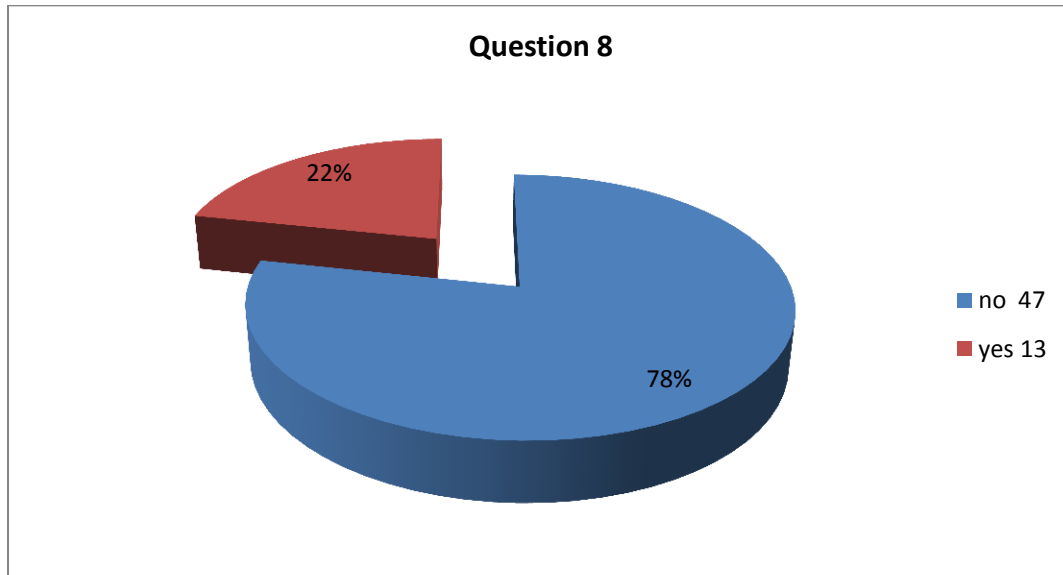


Source: Results taken from the survey addressed to the groups 01, 02 and 03 of English Composition I

50% of the cons, according to students, are related to the reduced time for classes, the confusion generated by teachers' methodology, the routine and also boring classes. 27% of the subjects under study consider that there is no variety in the techniques and they think that some of those techniques are difficult to apply. Then, 13% of them did not provide any answer. And the remaining 10% of the students expressed that the attitude of some teachers is one of the cons whenever they restrict students' opinion or when they provide difficult explanations for some topics.

Half of the students interviewed relate their negative viewpoints with regard to time allotted to classes, their confusion as a result of a non-appropriate methodology on their teachers' part, and their exposure to a lot of information from several sources instead of giving time to a particular technique. This is to get focused on one. Moreover, the fact that classes are not scheduled adequately and the boring condition of these academic activities reflect a bad image of their professors.

8. Having identified the structure of a paragraph, do you have difficulty in defining the thesis statement?



Source: Results taken from the survey addressed to the groups 01, 02 and 03 of English Composition I

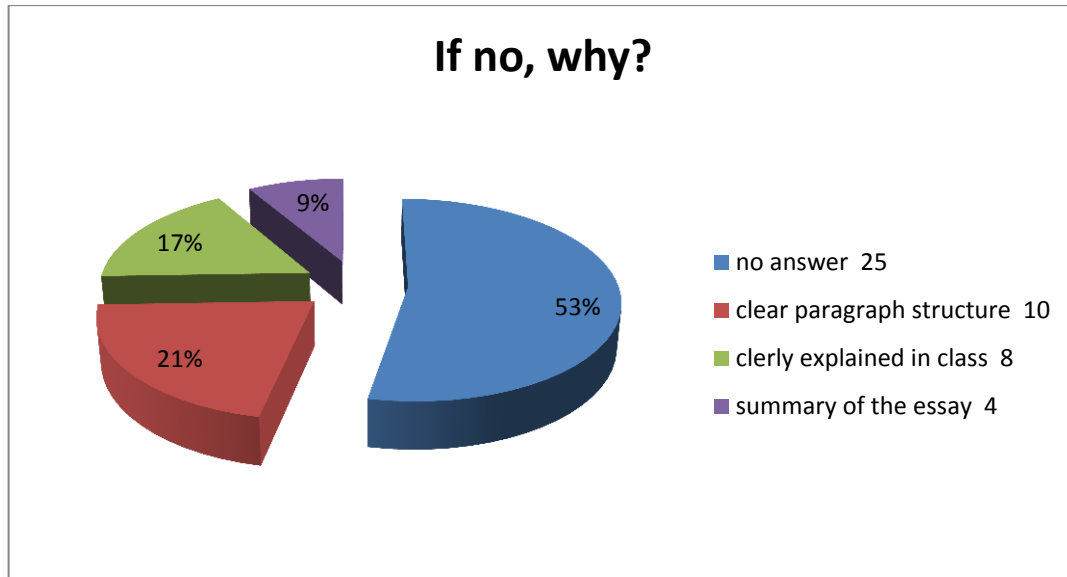
When identifying the structure of a paragraph, the majority of English Composition students, 78%, stated they do not have difficulty defining the thesis statement, while the remaining 22% affirmed they experience difficulty at the time of showing the main statement of the essay.

Showing the major frequency, English Composition students expressed that they do not experience difficulty defining the thesis statement- although most of them did not provide any reason why this is easy. A regular number of them made clear they get good explanations in classes and can see that the paragraph structure shown is noticeable, which means that the methodology applied helps them to understand the structure used, getting the idea that the thesis statement is like the summary of the essay. On the other hand, students who affirmed it is difficult for them explained that this topic is still unclear and this is the reason why they have problems organizing their ideas.

Despite the fact that most of the students do not have problems when determining the thesis statement, there is a minority that keeps showing difficulty because of the topic provided

when writing essays, the little attention they pay or the real importance that this knowledge implies in the composition field. As well, this leads them to have problems when organizing the appropriate ideas through the essay.

8. A



Source: Results taken from the survey addressed to the groups 01, 02 and 03 of English Composition I

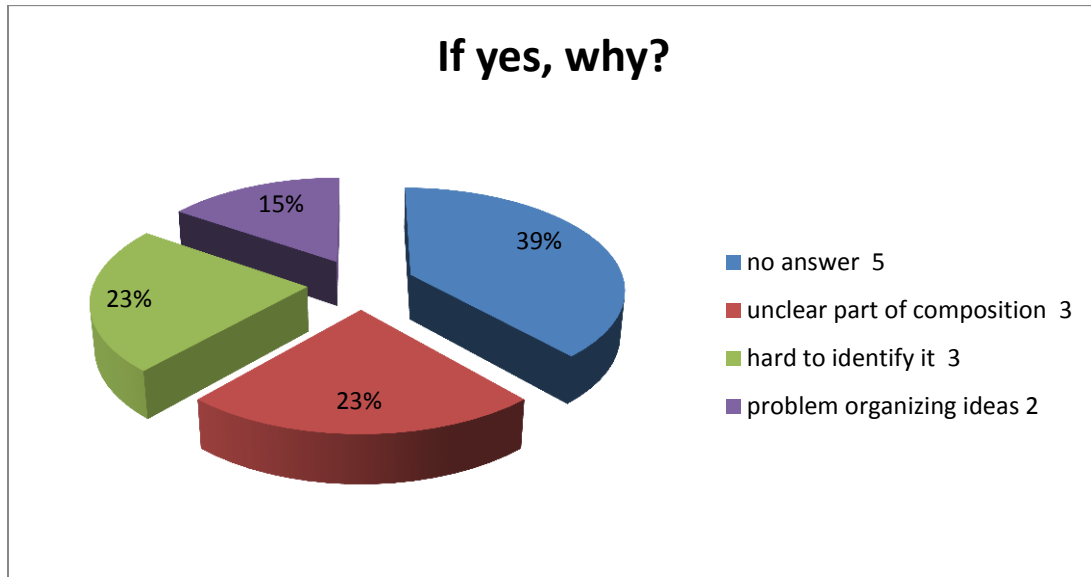
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have difficulty or not. Regarding the negative response, a little more than a half of them, 53%, did not provide any opinion, showing they do not have problems when identifying the thesis statement. Following, the 21% stated that the paragraph structure is clear through the essay. Then, a similar number of them, 17%, said this is clearly explained in class and the lowest number of students, 9%, has in mind that it is the summary of the essay.

Most of the students do not have any difficulty defining the thesis statement in a paragraph but they did not provide any opinion related to this. Also, a significant number of them mentioned that the paragraph structure is clear so that they do not have any problem defining it. A similar quantity said that teachers have clearly explained that topic during classes. It is for that reason that it is easy for them to find it inside the paragraph. Finally, a minimal number of students mention that the thesis statement is simply a summary of the essay.

These results showed that although almost all the students can define the thesis statement in a paragraph, they still have problems defining it because they do not understand this topic or maybe get confused with other parts of the essay.

8. B



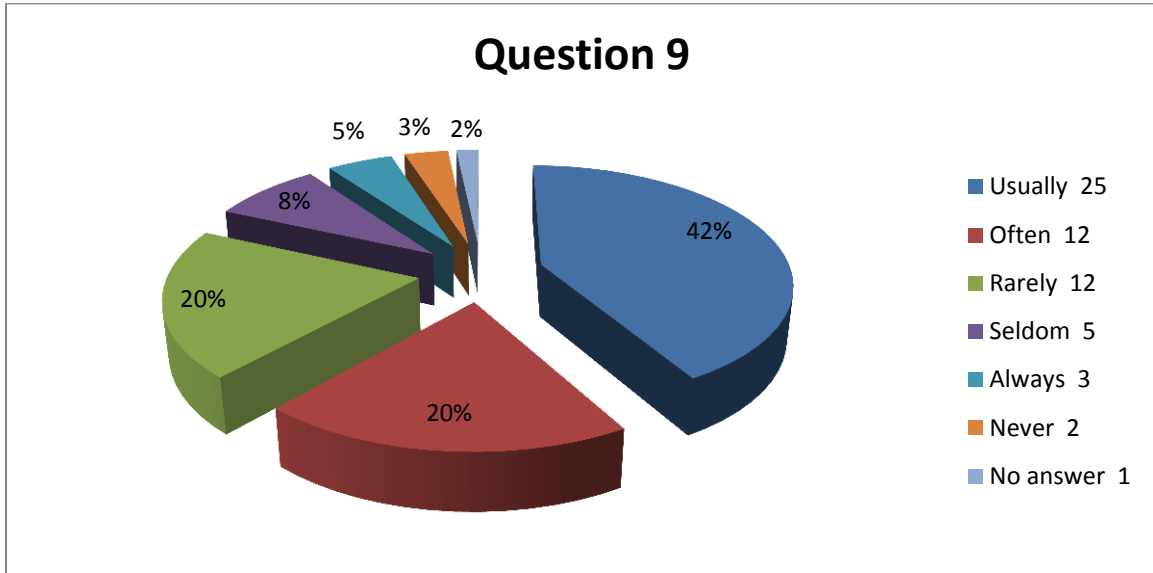
Source: Results taken from the survey addressed to the groups 01, 02 and 03 of English Composition I

Regarding students who affirmed they have difficulty, 39% of them did not provide any opinion, being over the 23% that belongs to both, students who find it hard to identify it and the ones who still see the thesis statement as an unclear part of the composition. The lowest number of students, 15%, said they have problems organizing ideas through the essay.

Over the third part of the subjects under study did not provide any opinion in relation to the difficulty they have defining the thesis statement in a paragraph. Others (23%) said that they do not understand which part of the composition is this and a similar quantity mentioned that it is really hard for them to identify it. Finally, a moderate number of students, 15%, said that they have problems organizing their ideas when they are creating their compositions.

The data obtained reveals that although English Composition students know the correct structure of a paragraph, they still have serious difficulties defining the thesis statement.

9. How often do you write more about personal opinions rather than real facts in relation to the assigned topic?



Source: Results taken from the survey addressed to the groups 01, 02 and 03 of English Composition I

in relation to the assigned topic, almost half of the students, 42%, show they usually refer to their opinion. The 20% of the sample belongs to students who do it often or rarely. Starting with the minimal percentage, the 8% of the students assured they transmit their thoughts first in compositions, followed by a 5% of them, who answered they always write more about personal opinions. Then, 3% never prefer writing based on their knowledge about the topic given, looking for real facts to be transmitted in their pieces of writing. Finally, 2% did not provide any answer regarding personal opinions or real facts at the time of writing.

The results of this survey reflected that almost all the students usually like to write about personal opinions, 12 of the subjects under study mentioned that they do it often or rarely. 5 assured that they transmit their thoughts seldom if that is really necessary, 3 of them showed that they do it always they can, only 2 students said they never do this and just I did not provide any answer.

The data provided shows that students prefer to write more about personal opinions rather than real facts, situations or something related to get informed, investigate or analyze.

**RESULTS AND CONCLUSIONS OF THE INTERVIEW QUESTIONS
ADDRESSED TO ENGLISH COMPOSITION I TEACHERS**

The interview questions addressed to English Composition teachers of the Foreign Language department pertaining to groups 01, 02 and 03 have shown the results that led the research team not only to analyze the current state of the writing skill difficulties in English composition I, but also to know the point of view that teachers have in relation to the strategies and methodology applied in the English Composition subject.

First of all, according to the strategies applied by teachers for the classroom activities and assignments, they agreed that besides providing the students a specific topic to write about, it is necessary to assist them in developing arguments that are sensible to another reader's views and counter-arguments. That means that to create good compositions students and teachers have to work together. As professionals, teachers must encourage their students to be creative and find their own topics and organization for their texts.

With regard to responding to students as real readers or as writing teachers, the interviewed professors said that both options are okay. They have to respond to meaning and form but they must be real readers to give suggestions that they have to include in their last drafts. They added that it is necessary to ask them questions about what they want to say between lines in order to be clear when writing.

When referring to the interventions on students' final drafts rather than on the intermediate ones when writing, English Composition teachers suggest that it is better to analyze and correct the students' compositions from the very beginning. This can help students to prepare their final drafts taking into account all the teacher's suggestions in the different writing stages.

Due to the fact that academic writing implies deeper analysis, professors stated that they guide students to apply the correct structure of a paragraph following the American Conventions (topic sentence, supporting sentences and concluding sentence). The problem is that most of the students can do only free writing when they arrive to the writing classes,

but if they apply the correct structure it will be very helpful for them to follow the adequate steps of a good composition.

Besides, language activities such as talking, keeping a journal, understanding the audience, reading writing and collaborative research help the students to learn how to write adequately and improve their composition skill, avoiding the use of other techniques that are not very helpful for their writing.

Moreover, the teachers' main concerns over students writing are: vocabulary, organization, content, mechanics and grammar. They agreed that at the time of assigning a grade to a specific composition they look for every single detail. For that reason, it is necessary to apply all the techniques mentioned above in order to improve the students' compositions. Teachers consider that taking the Advanced Intensive English subject before the composition course, it is really necessary to have the adequate basis to understand all the rules that students must follow when writing. On the contrary, they will not be able to be good writers because probably it will be more difficult for them and it will be worse if they cannot even create compositions in their mother tongue.

In addition, in most of the courses students are encouraged to speak and listen and there is not enough training related to reading and writing. So, they arrive to the writing classes not knowing how to organize their pieces of writing. It is for this reason that teachers agreed that this is the main factor of the students' poor quality of writing.

English Composition students usually write about personal opinions, which shows that sometimes they do not get informed of real situations and almost always they write based on what they think in relation to the topic provided. A lower number of students make emphasis on the importance of reading before writing. Such situation clarifies the fact that reading is not taken into account as this must be done as the most important base for writing, helping them to have an overview of different topics when composing. In this point, if students do not enhance the habit of reading or do not take into account this fact before the writing process, students will not be able to create adequate compositions.

Finally, professors believe that students can reach the expected level of competence in writing by including the systematic teaching of writing in all the English courses. This could be very helpful because at the time to arrive to the English Composition course students will be prepared in advance to write in a good way and it will not be necessary to explain some of the rules that they will have already studied. Also, another way to improve is by providing those opportunities to write in classes by following different prompts. This could be the perfect occasion to teach writing by providing constructive feedback and make learners go over their drafts and write them again until they will be sure that they have done a good job.

V. CONCLUSIONS

Through the development of this project, and according to the information gathered from students, teachers and some background information, the following conclusions were made:

- Most English Composition I students have difficulty applying some writing techniques such as mapping and editing because they do not know what those techniques are about due to the fact that students did not have a previous explanation about them.
- Students generally come to English composition I without any idea about organizing their ideas, even in their mother tongue.
- Students in English Composition I class considered mapping as the most difficult technique. This was due to the lack of information about it and the need of practice and explanation, as well as the difficult structure of such technique which is considered not adequate for the level of English of these students.
- FLD students writing quality is close to the superficial way in which English Composition I is taught, as well as the lack of practice, the few time invested studying this subject and the deficient methodology applied.
- English Composition I professors usually make use of the following techniques: brainstorming, free writing, making a list, editing and mapping. These techniques are presented according to their effectiveness where the most accepted are brainstorming, free writing and making a list.
- Professors argue that the main problem for students in organizing their pieces of writing is that students do not usually read and this is the reason why they cannot organize their ideas because they do not know what to write about.

VI. RECOMMENDATIONS

Looking at the position of English Composition I students and professors, some recommendations are given in order to solve some of their needs. According to the information received the following suggestions were stated:

To students:

- English Composition I students must apply the writing techniques, by practicing them they will be able to write good essays, they will make them organized, clearly focused and it will be helpful to keep them to forget any important point at the time of creating their paragraphs.
- English Composition I Students should attend English conversation clubs in order to enrich their vocabulary, knowledge and fluency to better organize their ideas at the moment of making a composition about a specific topic.
- English Composition I students must read their pieces of writing many times before delivering any composition or essay in order to clarify their ideas about the message they want to give to the reader and correct some possible mistakes.
- English Composition I students must try to make every day the workbook exercises in order to practice what they have learned in classes, if they do not have a workbook, they must read the text book to better understand each topic.
- Students do not have to be afraid of asking any question to the teacher. He/she is the one that will help them to understand the different topics and clarify doubts.
- Students must look for more information in magazines, books or the internet if the explanation about a specific topic was not clear enough; there is a lot of teaching material and websites related to writing that will be very helpful for them.
- In order to write good and complete essays or compositions, students must follow these steps:

- ✓ State the main idea in the first sentence.
 - ✓ Use short sentences to emphasize ideas, use the longer ones to explain, define or illustrate ideas.
 - ✓ Put key words and ideas at the beginning or end of a sentence.
 - ✓ Vary sentence types and structures by including occasional questions and commands.
 - ✓ Use dynamic verbs in the active voice.
 - ✓ Use concrete and specific words that show what you mean.
 - ✓ Eliminate unnecessary words.
 - ✓ Read aloud and then revise your work.
 - ✓ Actively edit and proofread.
 - ✓ Use a dictionary.
- Students must try to make peer reviews with their classmates. That is a great method of sharing perspectives to correct mistakes.

To professors:

- English composition professors should apply a different methodology in class at the moment of verifying the lack of understanding on the students' part, reinforce those techniques that present difficulties and solve students' problems and doubts.
- English Composition teachers must provide a supportive environment where students can feel comfortable, to share opinions and to have a better teaching-learning process.
- Teachers must clarify the students what is expected about the subject, provide enough information and ideas to write about, give and adequate feedback and not programmed texts. Just in that way students will create good compositions and with the time they will improve their writing skills.
- English Composition teachers must make the students read at least one history, article or news per day in order to enrich their vocabulary and knowledge about different topics.

- Professors must center the students' essays around current topics or let them choose their own topic. In that way students will be more comfortable and interested in what they are writing about.
- Teachers should ask their students about keeping notebooks by making students practice their writing based on the different experiences of the day it will be funnier for them.
- Teachers must make the students write paragraphs of a specific number of words. In that way they will not just copy one paragraph or essay from internet. Instead they will have to write their own.
- Professors should help the students to discover their own errors through different exercises, examples or dynamics.
- Teachers must have meetings with the students individually at least once a week to give them a chance to privately share their progress and fears about writing.
- On the very first day of the semester teachers must ask the students to write about past experiences and expectations of the subject. This will be very helpful to know in which areas they have more problems.
- Professors must use extra material from magazines, web sites and different books in order to make the students' learning process easier.
- Teachers should explain the writing techniques by using different dynamics. In that way it will be easier to understand each of them.

- If there are more than 25 students per group, teachers must ask for some assistants (T. As) in order to help them during and after classes.

To students and professors:

- English Composition I students and professors should study the writing techniques in a deeply way in order to manage the main ones in practice and theory, using new and different methodology in class.
- Teachers and students must have a previous knowledge in writing with the purpose of having a better performance in the composition field.

To the FLD's authorities:

- In order to use the writing techniques in an effective, easier and adequate way complementary English Compositions courses are needed in the B.A. in Modern Languages with Specialty in French and in the B.A. in English oriented to the teaching curricula.
- Some advisory courses could be opened in order to avoid some problems or difficulties in understanding the writing techniques, reinforce the previous knowledge about a specific topic and solve several questions or doubts.
- The previous courses to English Composition should include pieces of writing in order to motivate students to start writing.

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VIII. APPENDICES

APPENDIX A



UNIVERSITY OF EL SALVADOR

SCHOOL OF ARTS AND SCIENCES

FOREIGN LANGUAGE DEPARTMENT

Objective: To analyze the difficulties that English Composition students from FLD of the University of El Salvador have in order to reach the expected level of competence in writing, as well as know the importance and satisfaction with the course they are studying.

Directions: Answer the following questions.

1. Which of the following writing techniques do you use?

Brainstorming ____

Free writing ____

Making a list ____

Mapping ____

Editing ____

2. Which of the previous techniques do you consider difficult to use? Why?

3. Which of the writing techniques do you think are more effective in creating compositions? Why?

4. Do you know how to write an outline?
5. Do you usually make a draft before you hand in your final compositions?
6. Are you careful enough about the punctuation when writing compositions?
7. In your opinion, what are the pros and cons of the techniques applied by the FLD professors when teaching English composition?

Pros: _____

Cons: _____

8. Having identified the structure of a paragraph, do you have difficulty in defining the thesis statement? Yes_____ No_____ why?
9. How often do you write more about personal opinions rather than real facts in relation to the assigned topic of the composition?

Always_____ Usually_____ Often_____

Rarely_____ Seldom_____ Never_____

APPENDIX B



UNIVERSITY OF EL SALVADOR
SCHOOL OF ARTS AND SCIENCES
FOREIGN LANGUAGE DEPARTMENT

Interview questions addressed to English Composition I teachers of the Foreign Language Department, pertaining to groups 01, 02 and 03.

Objectives:

- To know the teachers' point of view toward the way that English students write compositions.
- To determine the level and quality of the English Composition methodology.

Research team: Claudia Esmeralda Aragón Jiménez

Dalia Cecilia Baires Mira

Gloria Stephany Rodriguez

Directions: Answer the following questions in relation to strategies applied in the classroom, evaluating compositions and with the students' performance on this subject. The answers given will lead the research team to analyze the current state of the writing skill difficulties in English Composition at the Foreign Language Department.

1. Which strategy or strategies do you apply for the classroom activities and assignments?

- a) I encourage students to be creative and to find their own topics and organization for their texts.
 - b) I assist students in developing arguments that are sensitive to another reader's views and counter-arguments.
 - c) I just give the students a specific topic to write about it
2. Do you respond to student writing as real reader or as writing teacher? Why?
 3. Do you think it is more necessary to intervene on students' final drafts than on their intermediate drafts when writing? Why?
 4. Do you guide students to apply the correct structure of a paragraph (topic sentence, supporting sentences, concluding sentence, etc.)? Yes___ No___ why?
 5. Do you use the language activities below to help students to learn to write adequately?
 - Talking___
 - Problem posing, problem solving___
 - Keeping a journal___
 - Understanding the audience___
 - Reading Writing___
 - Collaborative research___
 6. As an evaluator, which are the main concerns of your comments over students' writing?

Vocabulary___

Organization___

Mechanics and grammar___

Content__ All of them__

7. Do you consider that students must have some previous knowledge about academic writing before the subject requirements at the university? Yes__ No__ Why?
8. In your opinion what are the main factors of the students of the FLD poor quality of writing?
9. How do you think students can reach the expected level of competence in writing?

APPENDIX C

Behavioral differences between skilled and unskilled writers.

An important body of process research has investigated how good writers and poor writers differ in the physical and mental strategies that they use in the act of writing. Notable differences have emerged, which have crucial importance for a teacher in any discipline who hopes to help and improve student writing. The summary in the table is based on the research by the English Composition teacher Emig, J. (1971).

Skilled/ successful writers	Unskilled/ unsuccessful writers
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Conceive the writing problem in its complexity, including issues of audience, purpose, context.• Shape writing to the needs of the audience.• Are committed to the writing.• Are less easily satisfied with first drafts. Think of revision as finding the line of argument. Revise extensively at the level of structure and content.• Are able to pay selective attention to various aspects of the writing task, depending on the stage of the writing process.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Conceive the writing problem narrowly, primarily in terms of topic.• Have little concept of audience.• Care little about the writing.• Are more easily satisfied with first drafts. Think of revision as changing words or as crossing out and throwing away. Revise only at the level of single words or sentences.• Often try to do everything perfectly on the first draft. Get stuck on single word choices or on punctuation, even at early stages, when good writers ignore punctuation and concentrate on getting ideas down.

APPENDIX D

The six steps of the writing process

2 Read about the writing process. These are the steps you will practice in this book.

Process writing

When we write, we do more than just put words together to make sentences. Good writers go through several steps to produce a piece of writing.

Pre-writing

STEP ONE: Choose a topic. Before you write, your teacher gives you a specific assignment or some ideas of what to write about. If not, choose your topic yourself.

STEP TWO: Gather ideas. When you have a topic, think about what you will write about that topic.

STEP THREE: Organize. Decide which of the ideas you want to use and where you want to use them. Choose which idea to talk about first, which to talk about next, and which to talk about last.

Drafting

STEP FOUR: Write. Write your paragraph or essay from start to finish. Use your notes about your ideas and organization.

Reviewing and revising

STEP FIVE: Review structure and content. Check what you have written. Read your writing silently to yourself or aloud, perhaps to a friend. Look for places where you can add more information, and check to see if you have any unnecessary information. Ask a classmate to exchange papers with you. Your classmate reads your paper, and you read his or hers. Getting a reader's opinion is a good way to know if your writing is clear and effective. Learning to give opinions about other people's writing helps you to improve your own. You may want to go on to step six now and revise the structure and content of your paper before you proofread it.

Rewriting

STEP SIX: Revise structure and content. Use your ideas from step five to re-write your text, making improvements to the structure and content. You might need to explain something more clearly, or add more details. You may even need to change your organization so that your paper is more logical. Together, steps five and six can be called *editing*.

Proofread. Read your paper again. This time, check your spelling and grammar and think about the words you have chosen to use.

Make final corrections. Check that you have corrected the errors you discovered in steps five and six and make any other changes you want to make. Now your text is finished!

Steps five and six can be repeated many times.

APPENDIX E

Sample essay: first draft

➤ The comments on the essay were written by one of the writer's classmates.

Don't Support Nuclear Energy!

Can you add some kind of introduction before giving your thesis statement?

Even though it can provide the world with a source of electricity, nuclear power is not a good energy source because it is too expensive, the materials used in the power plants are not safe, and there is a great possibility of accidents.

Good thesis statement—very clear

Can you add a topic sentence to this paragraph?

First of all, nuclear fuel is expensive. It must be taken out of the ground and transported great distances. As fuels are used up, they will become even more expensive, just as oil and gas have become more expensive. In addition, nuclear

Can you explain this idea a little more?

power plants are expensive to build and to operate. It is expensive to train workers.

Needs transition

You have used "expensive" 5 times in the paragraph ...

Nuclear materials are not safe. When uranium is taken out of the ground, radioactive gas is released. This is not safe for the miners. Uranium itself is also not safe. Being around uranium is not safe for workers.

Needs transition

Nuclear waste is also dangerous. It is very radioactive, and it is difficult to dispose of it or even to store it safely. *This is a very short paragraph ...*

Nice transition

Most significantly, there is always a possibility of nuclear accidents. The power plants themselves can fail when they get old or if they are not built correctly. The machinery can malfunction, too. In 1979, problems at the Three Mile Island nuclear power plant in the United States resulted in radioactive materials escaping into the nearby community. More recently, equipment failures were responsible for accidents in power plants in Tarapur, India (1992) and Darlington, Canada (1992).

Nice specific example

Can you explain what happened at these places?

Workers at nuclear power plants can make mistakes. Perhaps the most famous

Can you add a transition?

of these incidents occurred at Chernobyl (in the former U.S.S.R.) in 1986.

Radioactivity from the Chernobyl accident was recorded as far away as Eastern

Good detail

Europe, Scandinavia, and even Japan. Human error was responsible for power plant accidents in Kola, Russia (1991) and Tokaimura, Japan (1999). There is no way we can guarantee that workers will not make mistakes again in the future.

Even natural disasters can affect nuclear power plants. An earthquake in Bulgaria in 1977 damaged the nuclear power plant in Kozloduy, and a big storm in the Pacific Ocean in 1981 washed nuclear waste out into the ocean.

It is true that oil and gas cannot supply all of the world's energy needs much longer. However, we cannot replace them with an energy source that is too expensive and is dangerous from the time the fuels are taken out of the ground and even after the plant is running.

Can you give some comment about this?
Good restatement of thesis
I think you need some kind of concluding sentence. What do you recommend instead of nuclear power?

Good essay! You have a lot of information and specific examples. Your arguments are very clear. Your organization is good, too.

Sample essay: second draft

Carol Chan
Academic Writing
Argument Essay, Second Draft
October 15, 2002

Don't Support Nuclear Energy!

These days, it seems like everyone is worried about how the world will meet its energy demands when we have run out of oil and natural gas. Scientists and researchers are investigating such power sources as solar energy, wind energy, and even energy from hot rocks beneath the earth's surface. However, there is one energy source that I believe should not be developed any further. In fact, I believe that we should stop using it as soon as possible. Even though it can provide the world with a source of electricity, nuclear power is not a good energy source because it is too expensive, the materials used in the power plants are not safe, and there is a great possibility of accidents.

Nuclear power is not an economical energy source. First of all, nuclear fuel is expensive. It must be taken out of the ground and transported great distances. As fuels are used up, they will become even more expensive, just as oil and gas have. In addition, nuclear power plants cost a lot of money to build and to operate because of the great care that must be taken with safety. Because the people who work in nuclear power plants must be highly trained specialists, salaries for workers are also high.

In addition to being expensive, nuclear materials are not safe. When uranium is taken out of the ground, radioactive gas is released. This is not safe for the miners. Uranium itself also is not safe because of its high radioactivity. Because of this, people who work with nuclear fuels are at risk of cancer. As nuclear power plants run, they create nuclear waste, which also is dangerous. It is very radioactive, and it is difficult to dispose of or even to store safely. No town wants nuclear waste buried nearby, and for good reason.

Most significantly, there is always a possibility of nuclear accidents. The power plants themselves can fail when they get old or if they are not built correctly. The machinery can malfunction, too. In 1979, problems at the Three Mile Island nuclear power plant in the United States resulted in radioactive materials escaping into the nearby community. More recently, equipment failures were responsible for accidents in power plants in Tarapur, India in 1992, and Darlington, Canada, also in 1992. Both of these accidents led to leaks of radioactive material.

It is not just buildings and equipment which can fail, but people, too. Workers at nuclear power plants can make mistakes. Perhaps the most famous of these incidents occurred at Chernobyl, in the former U.S.S.R., in 1986. Radioactivity from the Chernobyl accident was recorded as far away as Eastern Europe, Scandinavia, and even Japan. Human error has been responsible for numerous power plant accidents. Some recent well-known examples include Kola, Russia, where workers accidentally caused an equipment failure in 1991, and Tokaimura, Japan, in 1999. There is no way we can guarantee that workers will not make mistakes again in the future.

Even natural disasters can affect nuclear power plants. An earthquake in Bulgaria in 1977 damaged the nuclear power plant in Kozloduy, and a big storm in the Pacific Ocean in 1981 washed nuclear waste from Moruroa out into the ocean. Of course, it is impossible for people to predict or to prevent events like this. Different types of severe weather or natural disasters can strike almost anywhere in the world.

It is true that oil and gas cannot supply all of the world's energy needs much longer. However, we cannot replace them with an energy source that is expensive and dangerous, from the time the fuels are taken out of the ground to even after the plant is running. Instead, we must develop cheaper and, most importantly, safer types of energy to power our world.

APPENDIX F

Understanding Why Students Avoid Writing

By: Regina G. Richards

It is common for students in today's educational system to dislike and/or avoid the writing process. Many students feel writing *takes* too long. For some, writing is a very laborious task because there are so many sub-components which need to be pulled together. For others, the reason lies in some processing difficulties, such as dyslexia or dysgraphia. Some educators wonder if students no longer enjoy the slower, more refined process of written communication because they spend so much time watching the faster-paced visual modality of television.

Students with learning problems, even those who read well, frequently submit written work which is brief and/or difficult to read. Such students can be victims of misunderstandings, a problem which becomes much more pronounced at the secondary level. "Accusations of laziness, poor motivation, and a reprehensible attitude are often directed toward deficit writers. The results can be a serious loss of incentive, a generalized academic disenchantment and demoralization" (Levine 1998, 363).

There are many reasons students avoid writing. Primary reasons may be one or more of the following:

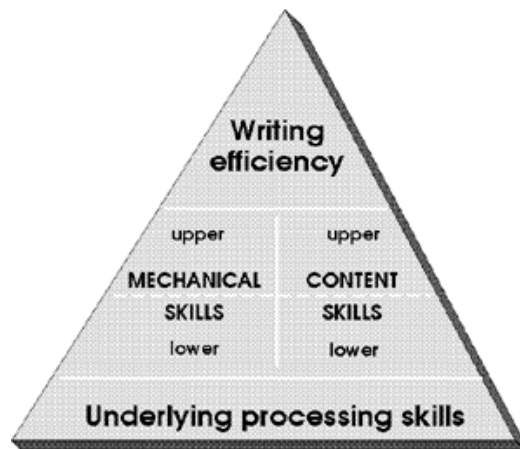
- They have a hard time getting started and feel overwhelmed by the task.
- They need to concentrate to form letters: it is not an automatic process.
- They struggle to organize and use mechanics of writing.
- They are slow and inefficient in retrieving the right word(s) to express an idea.
- They struggle to develop their ideas fluently (poor ideation).
- They struggle to keep track of their thoughts while also getting them down on paper.
- They feel that the process of writing on paper is slow and tedious.
- They feel that the paper never turns out the way they want.
- They realize that the paper is still sloppy even though substantial time and effort were spent.
- They are dysgraphic, which causes multiple struggles at the basic processing levels.

- They are dyslexic, which causes very poor spelling and interferes with automatic use of writing mechanics.

As parents and teachers, we can help students deal with their lack of enjoyment of the writing process and also with poor skill development. The techniques are twofold. Students need to:

- develop a greater understanding of and appreciation for the purpose of writing.
- develop more efficient skills.

When students have a combination of this understanding and the skills, they are then free to apply techniques and abilities in a wide range of situations. This is especially true and necessary for dyslexic and/or dysgraphic students who are compensating for processing inefficiencies in the language domain.



Skill development

This graphic represents the necessary steps in developing writing skills. These steps are in a hierarchy: if a student has too many gaps in one (or more) of the lower levels, then the top levels may be shaky and unstable.

The underlying processing skills involve development in a variety of memory, motor, and language areas. Examples include:

- Physical components of writing
- Speed of motor performance
- Active working memory
- Language formulation and ideation

The mechanical skills involve lower level tasks such as automatic letter form, use of space, basic spelling, capitalization, and punctuation. More mature mechanics involve speed, clarity of expression, and appropriate grammar.

The content skills relate to organizing and expressing ideas. The upper level skills include:

- Writing using different writing styles
- Being flexible in the writing process
- Understanding the viewpoint of the reader
- Writing with enthusiasm

Overall guidelines to help students avoid the avoidance of writing

There are many reasons a student may avoid writing, but most relate to the concept that writing is not fun or enjoyable. When writing is not meaningful, it is difficult to pull together the variety of skills needed to develop enthusiasm about writing. Students learn to write by writing, which then gives them the confidence to continue to write and continue to develop their skills. Using a variety of modalities can help create enthusiasm for writing and help students view writing as a more meaningful activity.

It is also important to analyze the lower level skills to ensure that the student has appropriately developed automaticity in these skills. When students are frustrated with individual components related to the task of writing and/or when they struggle to get started or to keep track of their thoughts, then the writing process is not fun, and their lack of enthusiasm becomes evident. Writing remains at the level of drudgery no matter how exciting the topic and students may feel threatened by the process of writing.

The goal for these students is to reduce the frustration, struggles, and feeling of threat. Increasing automaticity of skills is required to increase overall writing automaticity for a student. When automaticity, as developed by metacognitive awareness of the writing process and use of specific strategies, is combined with skill development and bypass strategies, the student should be able to deal with the vast majority of written expression tasks. The next step is to integrate purpose and meaning to generate fun and lead to enthusiasm for writing.

Why are students coming into college poorly prepared to write?



Writing is a complex intellectual task involving many component skills, some of which students may lack completely, some of which they may have only partially mastered. These skills involve, among other things:

- Reading comprehension
- Analytical skills
- Writing skills, including:
 - writing mechanics: grammar, sentence structure, spelling, etc.
 - planning a writing strategy
 - communicating ideas clearly and concisely
 - constructing a reasoned, demonstrable argument
 - effectively marshaling evidence and using sources appropriately
 - organizing ideas effectively

When students lack skills in these areas, their writing may be unsatisfactory in multiple ways – from poor grammar and syntax to unclear organization to weak reasoning and arguments. Complicating matters is the fact that many students' reading skills are also poor. For example, if they cannot recognize the main point of an argument in their reading, they obviously cannot respond to this point in their writing.

In addition, students often lack the **meta-cognitive skills** (automatic awareness of their own knowledge and their ability to understand, control, and manipulate their own cognitive processes) to recognize the areas in which their **prior knowledge and skills** are insufficient – and thus which skills they need to work to improve.

During their high school careers, most of our students were not writing with the frequency we might expect, nor were they doing the types of writing that we will require of them in their college years. In a study at George Washington University (2007), first-year undergraduates reported that the most frequently assigned high school writing tasks required them to offer and support opinions, with a secondary emphasis on summarizing and synthesizing information. Students were rarely required to criticize an argument, define a problem and propose a solution, shape their writing to meet their readers' needs, or revise based on feedback. Furthermore, according to a survey conducted by The Chronicle of Higher Education (2006), 61% of high school teachers said their students have never written a paper that was more than five pages. As a result, students have not had enough practice to develop a set of sophisticated writing skills. When students lack skills in these areas, their writing may be unsatisfactory in multiple ways – from poor grammar and syntax to unclear organization to weak reasoning and arguments.

Moreover, students may have learned bad habits in high school that they need to un-learn. For example, some students were taught in high school to avoid the first person and thus may use awkward grammatical constructions to avoid it rather than learn the contexts when its use is appropriate.

Recognition of students' prior experience with writing and the complex nature of writing can help us to more effectively design assignments and provide support as students continue to hone their skills.

APPENDIX G

GLOSSARY

- ✓ **ACCURACY:** To have correct grammar and spelling
- ✓ **ARGUMENTATION:** The process of forming reasons justifying beliefs and drawing conclusions with the aim of influencing the thoughts and /or actions of others.
- ✓ **BRAINSTORMING:** This is a technique considered like a storm in the brain; its goal is to collect data and thought as they come into the mind. It helps ideas flow easily. (There are three types of brainstorming: making a list, free writing and mapping).
- ✓ **COGNITIVE DEVELOPMENT:** Is the construction of thought processes, including remembering, problem solving and decision-making, from childhood to adulthood
- ✓ **COMPOSITION:** In written language, refers to the collective body of important features established by the [author](#) in their creation of [literature](#). Most often, composition relates to [narrative works](#) of literature, but may also relate to essays, biographies, and other works.
- ✓ **CONCLUDING SENTENCE:** This may be found as the last sentence of the paragraph. It can finish the paragraph by repeating the main idea or just giving a final comment about the topic.
- ✓ **DRAFT:** Is a previous activity students must make to correct all the mistakes they could have before hand in their final composition, by doing this they can organize better their ideas and see how the introduction, thesis statement, body paragraph and conclusion will work together.
- ✓ **EDITING:** After gathered plenty of ideas it is needed to go back and edit them. This is the time to choose which ideas are the most interesting, and which are the most relevant to the topic.

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- ✓ **EGOCENTRIC:** People that are unable to fully understand or to cope with other people's opinions and the fact that the reality can be different from what they are ready to accept.
- ✓ **EGOCENTRISM:** According to Piaget and his theory of cognitive development egocentrism is an inability to see any point of view other than their own perspective.
- ✓ **ESSAY:** Is generally a short piece of writing written from an author's personal [point of view](#), but the definition is vague, overlapping with those of an [article](#) and a [short story](#).
- ✓ **FREE-WRITING:** It is to write whatever comes into the head about the selected topic, without stopping. Most free writing exercises are short, just five or ten minutes.
- ✓ **MAIN IDEA:** The most important or central thought of a paragraph or larger section text, which tells the reader what the text is about.
- ✓ **MAKING A LIST:** It is to write single words, phrases or sentences that are connected to the topic assigned.
- ✓ **MAPPING:** It is simply to make a map and to write the topic in the middle with a circle around it, then put the ideas above or below the topic and connect the circles with lines, the lines show that the two ideas are related.
- ✓ **METHOD:** An establish, habitual, logical or prescribed practice or systematic process of achieving certain ends with accuracy and efficiency, usually in an ordered sequence of fixed steps.
- ✓ **METHODOLOGY:** A system of broad principles or rules from which specific methods or procedures maybe derived to interpret or solve different problems within the scope of a particular discipline.
- ✓ **MIND-MAPPING OR CLUSTERING:** It is a technique for organizing into categories and sub-categories the previous information obtained in the brainstorming technique. It is also used for discarding information that is not vital for the report.

G-3

- ✓ **OUTLINE:** Is simply the list of information students will put on their essays but in an organized way, using different types of numbers and letters to show the organization of the ideas.
- ✓ **OUTLINING:** This allows developing an overall plan; it can be a very effective way to help a person to categorize ideas into major categories and supporting details.
- ✓ **PARAGRAPH:** Is a group of five to ten sentences that give information about a single topic.
- ✓ **PEER-EDITING:** Is when someone revises others work in order to help the other person to correct all the possible mistakes he or she have in his/her composition.
- ✓ **QUALITATIVE ANALYSIS:** Is information about the social world that is not usually coded as a number, this type of analysis often focuses on the meaning of information or of relationships among variables, it has four common phases: defining, classifying, connecting and conveying.
- ✓ **STRATEGY:** A method or plan chosen to bring about a desired future, such as achievement of a goal or solution to a problem.
- ✓ **STYLISTICS:** Study of style in text.
- ✓ **SUPPORTING SENTENCES:** These are the sentences that talk about or explain the topic sentence.
- ✓ **SYNTAX:** The study of the rules whereby words or other elements of sentence structure are combined to form grammatical sentences.
- ✓ **TECHNIQUE:** A systematic procedure. Formula or routine by which a task is accomplished.
- ✓ **THESIS STATEMENT:** Is the sentence that tells the main idea of the whole essay.
- ✓ **TOPIC SENTENCE:** This is the main idea of the paragraph; it is usually the first sentence and the most general of the paragraph.
- ✓ **TOPICAL STRUCTURE ANALYSIS:** Is a method of analyzing global coherence of texts, whose tasks is for the teacher to be made.