

Strategies for Improving English Essay Writing Skill

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Abstract

The present study aimed to strategies for improving English essay writing skill. Writing is an essential skill for students; however, writing skill tends to be the most difficult and complicated skill for both native speakers and second-language students. The students face the problems of grammar, vocabulary, ideas, and organization, with writing. The students should have writing strategies or techniques to assist them in their writings. Besides, teachers need to realize the weakness of the students in order to solve the problem directly. To help solve these problems, the present study intends to explore what writing strategies EFL high school students use as well as to investigate the similarity and difference of writing strategies used by the high and the low English ability students. The obtained findings will be beneficial and valuable in assisting learners themselves in writing and will help teachers to better understand writing strategies that the students used in order to help develop students' writing skills.

Keywords: Strategies; English Essay; Writing Skill

Introduction

The ability to write essays well is one of the determinants of academic success. In many university departments both graduate and undergraduate students are required to organize ideas pertinent to a specific topic into coherent and competently written forms. Thus, the acquisition of appropriate essay writing techniques becomes essential for students, particularly when essays are part of their coursework and contribute to their final assessment. Yet, since the art of essay writing is assumed to be part of a repertoire of advanced skills students bring to university from school, extensive instruction in essay writing skills is rare at the tertiary level in Thailand. (David J. Philips, 1979: 1)

Students are faced with a dilemma: realizing that their essay writing performance could perhaps be improved by adopting better techniques, they may be unaware of the precise means available to them of effecting improvement. They may be unsure whether their essay writing practices are adequate and which, if any, need to be changed. On the other hand, since the precise expectations of their markers are often unknown to them, and may become clearer only as more essays are written, whether due to increasing familiarity with individual markers' techniques or as the result of continued practice and self-evaluation, students stand to gain or lose marks in a relatively haphazard fashion. There is therefore a need for studies which



attempt to describe current student essay writing techniques and to delineate those features of essays regarded by markers as acceptable or unacceptable. Clarification of these aspects of essay writing may provide students with knowledge which will assist the development of their essay writing skills.

Essays are used either as teaching/learning instruments or as a means of assessment, though with the increasing predominance of in-term assessment these distinct functions are becoming more blurred.

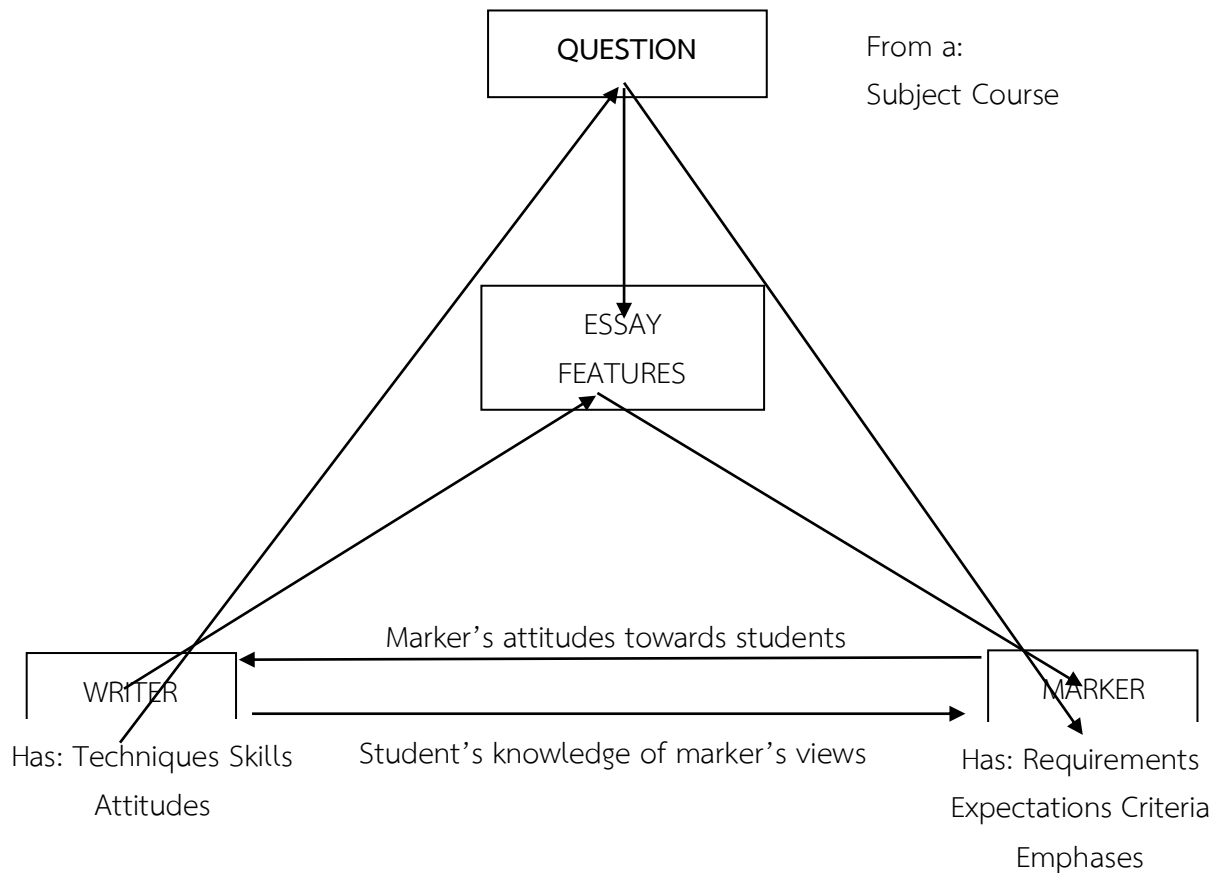
1. Elements of the model

In simple terms, the university essay writing undertaking can be viewed as a unified process which consists of an interaction among four elements: the essay writer, the essay marker, the essay topic, and the essay itself. For the purposes of the present enquiry, the essay writer is the undergraduate student who is required to write essays as part of his normal coursework; the essay marker is the staff member responsible for the marking of the student's work. The skills required in order to write essays, and the kinds of features markers use as the basis for essay evaluation, are discussed in more detail in sections two and three of this chapter.

The essay question is derived from a particular subject area or discipline being studied by the writer and taught by the staff member. It provides a stimulus for the student's thought within a specified area. It is possible that different disciplines tend to use different types of essay questions, the key words of a question acting as a signal for a specific kind of structure required in the student's answer. (See, for example, H.E.R.O. Report, March 1979:6-31) If students fail to interpret the implications of a key word in an essay question correctly, it is possible that the grades awarded will be considerably lower. Further, different subject areas could well require different approaches by the students to the use of particular essay skills.

Finally, the essay itself is an embodiment of the student's thinking in response to the essay question. The form of the essay will be determined by the student's use of different techniques or skills, while the use of such skills will be discerned by the marker as essay features.

Elements of the Essay Writing/Marking Undertaking



Finally, the essay itself is an embodiment of the student's thinking in response to the essay question. The form of the essay will be determined by the student's use of different techniques or skills, while the use of such skills will be discerned by the marker as essay features. From the research perspective, it would be possible to focus on anyone of the four elements, but in practice it is perhaps more productive to consider the elements in relation to each other. Thus a student required to write an essay has to have mastered, as a reasonable minimum, certain aspects of essay writing: he needs to be able to interpret the question accurately (and supply appropriate subject-matter or content), to adopt appropriate techniques (such as sound planning and coherent organization), to be aware of the marker's expectations and requirements regarding the desired level of performance in handling the question, and to put his understanding into a satisfactory written form. In the present enquiry, the main foci are techniques adopted by students in writing essays, and features assessed by markers when evaluating essays. No account has been taken of different kinds of essay question and their effects on student writing practices, nor have various linguistic indices (Poole, 1976:72) used to describe and analyze individual essays been considered. Instead, essay writers, i.e., undergraduate students in two Arts departments, and essay markers, i.e., staff members in the same two departments, are investigated in terms of the skills adopted by students and the features required by markers.



2. Skills associated with essay writing

Essay writers vary in both their performance and capabilities. Some students attain a high level of performance in essay writing, while others consistently perform badly. Each student is likely to have acquired a range of skills or techniques which are used in essay writing, but some employ their skills more productively. One of the aims of the present investigation is to distinguish sound essay writing techniques from unsound ones, and to establish whether certain groups of students differ from other groups in the employment of specific skills. The nature and extent of feedback obtained by the student from the marker may determine whether the student improves his performance; alternatively, knowledge of 'good' as distinct from 'bad' techniques may assist improvement.

In addition, the student's commitment (interest, aims and motivation) to the essay writing task may affect his level of achievement. What, then, are some of the essay techniques or skills which might differentiate students? In broad terms, it is possible to distinguish several types of skill which appear to be associated with essay writing, e.g., logical skills, linguistic skills, planning skills and presentation skills. Bloom's (1956:162) discussion, for example, of "skill in writing, using an excellent organization of ideas and statements" (an example of the fifth level of the taxonomy of educational objectives in the cognitive domain) is an indication of the importance of logical skills in essay writing. This level, labelled 'synthesis', suggests "the putting together of elements and parts so as to form a whole. This is a process of working with elements, parts, etc., and combining them in such a way as to constitute a pattern or structure not clearly there before". Clearly, the ability to organize ideas in relation to one another is one of the important skills involved in essay writing. But effective organization is dependent on correct interpretation of the purpose or nature of a problem, as well as the nature of important elements and their interrelations. These activities require judgements about the usefulness of material, and an ability to handle ideas in a coherent fashion. Further, the essay writer needs to introduce structural clues for would-be markers which, according to Palmer (1961:200), are "the over-all pattern of an essay, ... the order of development of the ideas ... [and] various cues which indicate what point the discussion has reached". These 'clues' appear to involve the use of logical skills.

In terms of their broad structural characteristics, essays can be viewed as tripartite structures, i.e., containing an introduction (or beginning), a development (or middle) and a conclusion (or end). This simple 'spatial' view implies a function for each part, which is set out in 'A Guide to the Writing of Essays' produced by the English department of the University of Canterbury.

"An essay should have a beginning, a middle and an end The beginning should outline what you intend to do in the essay. The middle contains the evidence on which you base your opinions, together with your argument. The end is a summary of the argument, a modified restatement of it, and should not introduce new material. The reader should be able

to see from the beginning what you are aiming at, and the end should convince him that you knew in the beginning exactly what direction your argument would take".

Adherence to such a scheme could well represent the use of logical skills involving essay techniques which are differentially adopted by students. Linguistic skills are important for effective essay writing. Students who do not express themselves in adequate English may well be candidates for eventual failure. Thus spelling correctly, using accurate grammar and appropriate punctuation, and checking essays for errors of a 'mechanical' type, may involve specific skills which students need to have acquired in order to put their ideas into an appropriate form. Poor grammar and punctuation may create ambiguities and confuse sense. An indication of the importance of linguistic skills is Taylor's (1978:10) comment that

"the language deviations of undergraduates ...are as fit a subject for disciplined study as any other apparently significant upset in nature or in human behaviour ... [as] they constitute an invaluable and irreplaceable source of data on how students learn and how they cope with the difficulties of understanding their work ...".

While the present enquiry is not concerned with 'language deviations' it is, in general terms, concerned with the emphasis placed on language errors by different markers and departments.

Another important group of essay writing skills are those concerned with planning various stages of essay writing, i.e., the ability to follow a series of procedures without omitting any essential steps. The essay writing undertaking can be viewed as requiring initial planning, relevant reading, taking notes, ordering the notes and ideas, making a rough draft, writing a final draft, revising, and so on. How a student budgets his time could well affect eventual success. Omitting any of the stages could result in a poorer essay than would have been the case otherwise. It is likely, however, that each stage of the I planning I sequence involves various combinations of skills such as logical skills, for example, when notes for a specific essay topic are being organized.

Further essay writing techniques might entail following departmental conventions with regard to word length, layout of page, bibliographic and footnote references, etc. Skills of this kind could be called I presentation I skills.

Skills associated with essay writing could be divided into groups, depending on their complexity. Thus basic skills could consist of budgeting essay writing tasks (e.g., allowing time for each stage of preparation or writing), correct expression (i.e., accurate punctuation, grammar and spelling), orderliness (e.g., legibility, setting out, general presentation) and adherence to conventions, such as correct referencing. On the other hand, interpreting the essay question, including appropriate content, the actual structure of the essay, and style (e.g., fluency, a sense of flow), appear to be more complex. Cognitive operations, such as determining the relevance of a particular piece of information, may well figure strongly in the development of essay writing techniques and skills. It is possible that students can be differentiated according to the



extent to which they adopt sound or unsound essay writing approaches with regard to both basic and more complex skills of these types.

3. Essay features

If the assumption that essay writing can be interpreted as a composite of appropriate skills is accepted, a natural corollary is that the ideal essay writer adheres to particular skills closely approximating markers' views of desirable essay features. For the purposes of the present enquiry, therefore, essay features are considered to be evidence of the use of particular essay writing techniques or skills. From the writer's point of view an essay can be interpreted as an embodiment of certain skills, while for the marker an essay consists of a series of specific features.

Markers, however, may have varying standards depending on the importance attached to different essay features. Their perceptions of the students' levels of performance, their interpretation of the essay question and views of appropriate content, their requirements regarding appropriate essay features and consistency in the application of criteria are likely to affect their award of grades. Also, it is possible that markers in different departments tend to value certain essay features more than others. However, the following features of essays are used in the staff study as a basis for determining the nature and extent of differences among markers in the two departments selected.

A good expository essay at the tertiary level is considered to be based on sufficient reading connected with the essay topic and adherence to a particular stance on the problem involved. Preferably it contains material considered important by the intended audience (i.e., usually, but not necessarily, a marker known to the student) as well as some of the student writer's own ideas. It has a clear structure with a discernible introduction, where the author clearly states his intentions, logical steps in the overall argument with smooth transitions between paragraphs and one major idea in each paragraph, and a fitting conclusion with a punchline or observation of interest. The writer uses sound reasoning, defines important terms from the question, writes consistently on the topic, and presents appropriately detailed evidence for controversial statements. Stylistically, there is a clear style of writing with concise expression and a sense of flow unimpeded by mechanical errors or faulty grammar.

Essays with sufficient features antithetical to those above could be considered poor or unsatisfactory in terms of the 'ideal' essay's features. Such aspects could well include, for example, inadequate reasoning or obscure meaning, poorly connected or rambling paragraphs, confused interpretation of the topic set, and spelling or grammatical errors.

Just as students may differ in the frequency with which they adhere to specific essay writing techniques, so markers (i.e., staff members) may differ in the emphasis they give to different essay features. It is the purpose of the essay writing model described above to suggest where some of these differences could lie. Thus some groups of students may adopt, for example, various planning or logical skills more, or less, often than other groups of students. On

the other hand, the extent to which staff require specific essay features or regard particular features as appropriate or inappropriate may well vary from marker to marker, or from department to department. It remains to establish the principal assumptions underlying the studies conducted as part of the present enquiry, and to describe the research questions.

4. Characteristics of an effective essay writing

Essay writing has become an integral part of our academic life. Essay writing plays a vital role to examine knowledge and ability of students. It is supposed that students will explain their thoughts effectively on a given topic. Essay writing also gives students an opportunity to think outside the course materials. These days, student writes poor essay because they don't know the main characteristics of effective essay writing.

4.1 Descriptive

A description does not mean that you are free to write anything about the topic. It should be related to the particular persons, things and places. Students should explain about them. Students must add some background information to give a smart description about the essay topic. You should write to the point when you are writing about any topic. Nobody will praise you for filling the answer sheets. As I have told you that examiner have to save his precious time so don't try to pull the essay like a rubber. Always write unambiguously about the main content of the essay.

4.2 Subjected

Students start writing essay with a great tone but they don't let their tone same till the end of essay. They forget their subject of writing and start making their own assumptions for filling the sheets. Of course, student's assumptions are needed but never go so far from the subject of the topic. Try to be subjected in the whole essay writing.

4.3 Argumentative

Good news become well when there is some spicy content added into them. It is human nature that we like spicy content or content in which there are lots of arguments. Same case is with essay writing, try to put arguments and disagreement in the essay. Students should write about both the aspects where agreement and disagreement are carried. And at the end they need to tell what aspect is right.

4.4 Narrative

An essay should be like one that explains any event. These events can be biographical, incidental, accidental, journey and historical. Try to pick a narrow topic instead of picking a broader topic. A narrow topic is easy to narrate or one can cover its all parts easily in a descriptive manner.

4.5 Organized

There should be a particular order to represent an essay. It is not a good idea to structure the essay as it goes along. The structure of the essay should be predefined by the students. Decide the order of the essay before you start writing it.

4.6 No error

Last but not the least characteristic is that there should be no grammatical error in the essay. Students make this Himalayan blunder mistake is their essay. This mistake can just make all your hard work useless. English grammar should be appropriate in the whole essay.

So it was all about characteristics of an effective essay writing. I hope you all enjoyed reading this article. If you feel any problem regarding this topic then please comment below. We would like to help you.

Knowledge from the Study

What is an essay? It is a text that states thoughts on a given topic in a specific sequence. Only a good argument, an accurate reflection of one’s thoughts, and their distribution in a strict sequence allow you to write a good essay. In many educational institutions, an essay is perceived as a means of control. Many students don’t like to write essays. They do not know how and don’t want to do it. Still, an essay is a beneficial exercise that develops written language, spelling, and punctuation literacy if it is written correctly.



1. Essay contributes to the development of cognitive activity

Today, essays are written on various subjects. When writing an essay, students not only memorize facts but also understand the information acquired, learn to critically evaluate it, and use it in practice.

2. It is an additional way to test knowledge

This kind of assignment encourages the student to delve more seriously into the issue. After all, you need to conduct a mini-research to write a good essay. Getting an A grade is impossible if you don’t study the information related to the topic of the essay. The body of the

essay is the presence of specifics. Facts come to the fore. The writer has to determine effective ways of argumentation based on reliable information. General ideas and reasoning about everything at once and at the same time about nothing are not welcome.

3. It teaches students to think

Thinking on paper, writing, a student stimulates the thought process. It is often difficult for us to say something out loud or formulate a thought. Writing an essay helps us focus: fixing all the ideas that appear in the head, you can highlight the main thing and formulate the essence and the main idea. Oral thinking and communication also develop our brains.

4. It teaches to integrate details of disparate data into one whole

The essay develops the mastery of research and formulation of conclusions: it helps see the separate parts and the picture as a whole. It is the ability to see individual details, little things, the whole environment, and have a broad outlook and vision of the problem. This quality develops best when you work with many details and determine the main thing, writing all the important information down on paper. So, writing is one of the most useful ways to develop analytical talents.

5. It develops logic

Writing an essay develops our logic. Along with other subjects (for example, algebra and geometry), literature and text creation form logical thinking. The ability to skillfully, consistently, and logically state an idea is the basis of the skill of influence. It is a quality required for a successful expert: people with the skill of persuasion are more successful than others and are always in the lead.

3. Structuring information

When there is a lot of information, thoughts scatter, and opinions differ, the easiest way is to specify everything in writing. Writing everything down on paper emphasizes the essential thing. In addition, when writing an essay, you try to follow a certain order: either according to a once-created plan or intuitively. In this way, writing a text teaches you to structure any details.

Conclusion

There are different steps you can take before, during, and after writing an essay to ensure that your thoughts are well organized and your work is clear.

1. Before

Before writing an essay, it can be very helpful to write down your initial ideas to help you plan out what you want to focus on in your writing. Planning for an essay can be done in various ways. You could organize your thoughts by creating a mind map like the one shown above, for example, or you could write a list.

Whichever way is best for you, you should begin by focusing on your essay brief or question. It is important to have a good understanding of the main purpose of your essay or the question



you will be answering. This will make it easier to plan out the rest of the writing. It may be useful to highlight any keywords in the brief/question so that you know what to focus on when writing.

2. During

Now you've finished your plan, it's time to look at each section of your essay in more detail and start writing. When stating the brief in your introduction, consider the following questions:

What is my essay about?

What is the purpose of this essay?

When outlining the main points and/or argument you will make in your introduction, consider the following questions:

Am I arguing for or against something?

What am I trying to prove to the reader?

What key points will I further expand on in the body of my essay?

Am I going to be discussing/analyzing any theories?

During the writing of the main body of your essay, you should ensure that your ideas are clear and flow well. A good way to do this is to link your writing back to the brief. Linking back to the brief is important to show that you understand it fully and your argument clearly relates to it.

3. After

After you have finished writing, you should allow yourself time to proofread your work to ensure that you have not made any obvious mistakes such as spelling or grammar errors.

Put your proofreading abilities to the test! Can you spot the errors in the following essay writing example?

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