

Student Journals for Writing Fluency

学生日記を用いた英作文

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概 要

学生は『英作文 I』で日記をつけるよう求められる。本論では、第一回目の授業の課題の目的とその形式について述べ、こうした授業の結果、起こった授業内容の変化について述べる：さらに日記をつけることについての学生の意見と、これからの課題を紹介する。

ABSTRACT

This is the third year I have required students to keep a journal in Composition 1. In this article I will describe the purpose and format of the initial assignment and how it has evolved, discuss student feedback on keeping journals, and introduce some changes I plan to make from next year.

This is the third year I have required students to keep a journal in Composition 1. Initially I decided to require journals because I believed that students first needed to increase their output if they were going to see any significant improvement in their writing ability. Fluency needs to come before accuracy, not vice versa. I also wanted students to learn the enjoyment of expressing themselves in English without worrying about mistakes and, therefore, decided not to correct mistakes unless a student specifically asks about spelling or word choice. In this article I will describe the purpose and format of the initial assignment and how it has evolved, discuss student feedback on keeping journals, and introduce some changes I plan to make from next year.

At the beginning of the school year students are instructed to buy a B-5 notebook, to be kept separately from their class notes and textbook work. Their first assignment is to write a one-page self introduction, due in class the following week. Although journals are not collected in the second class, assigning a writing task from the very first day gets students started in the habit of writing in English every week. A quick check of notebooks indicates who has or has not understood the assignment. In the second class students receive a list of topics for the semester (see Appendix 1) from which they choose a different one each week as the basis of a one-page journal entry. The topics range in difficulty but

since there are two or three more topics than weeks in the semester, students can avoid topics they see as either too difficult or uninteresting. Students are reminded every week that one page in their journal is part of their homework for that week. Journals are collected twice a semester and students are told how many pages they are expected to have written by the due date. Although students are encouraged to write one page every week, there are always some who wait until the night before the journal is due to write three or four entries. Three years ago, with around fifty students in the class, half of the journals were collected one week and the other half the following week. Now, with a class size of 25, all journals are collected on the same day.

During the first two years of this journal writing requirement I transcribed examples of good-quality, insightful, or simply humorous writing and published them anonymously in a report to the class. (Riley, 84) This "Journal Report," (see Appendix 2) which was read together in class, had several goals. First, it was intended to simplify the feedback process, because, instead of writing individual comments in each journal, I included my own short, general response to what the students had written. Secondly, it gave students some idea of what their classmates were thinking and writing about and provided peer role models. Finally, by bracketing corrected errors, students could see correct English when they read the report, and, "[t]hey will also be aware that their (or their classmates') words had mistakes but mistakes do not affect the importance of the writer's ideas." (Riley, 84) Unfortunately, though I chose excerpts from different students each time, it was not possible, in a class of 50, to include a sample from each student.

Student feedback received at the end of last year (in answer to the questions "What did you learn in this course?" and "What advice can you give me for next year?") indicated that students understood the value of writing in their journals every week. As one student wrote,

"First I didn't like this course because I can't write well and I didn't know grammar ...Journals were very big homework for me. But you read them all and [gave] me some comments, so I was happy to write them. Writing is an accustomed thing. So to write some topics every day or every week is good for us to [develop] our writing ability."

Another student wrote about a different benefit of the journals, "...through writing many journal topics and essays I could find my personal opinions toward many things and I could reflect on myself." A few students wrote that they would try to continue keeping English journals after the course finished. Several other students asked for more of my personal comments in their journals, while others indicated that they would have liked me to correct the errors in their journals. Apparently they were not satisfied with simple fluency, being able to communicate their ideas, and felt the need to work on their accuracy as well.

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Despite the reduced class size I was unable to provide "Journal Reports" for my composition students this past year due to time constraints. Instead I responded to each student individually in her journal with brief comments. Corrections were made only if a student specifically asked about a certain word or expression. At the time of this writing the school year is almost finished. It will be interesting if student feedback shows an attitude towards journal writing similar to the year before.

In next year's class my composition students will once again be required to keep an English journal and I will produce Journal Reports based on students' journal writing. With 25 students in the class it should be possible to publish each student at least once over the course of the year. I plan to use next year's Journal Reports as a basis of communication between students, as well as between the students and myself. After reading the Journal Report students will choose one of the excerpts and write a short, anonymous response to it which will be given to the student whose writing inspired the comments. This activity provides the potential for deepening the learning of writing by helping students develop an awareness of the power of their own words to communicate, not only with their native English speaking teacher, but with their classmates and friends.

Keeping English journals has many potential benefits, not the least of which is the sense of accomplishment students feel at the end of the year as they look through their full B-5 notebook, see just how much they have written about a variety of topics and realize how much their fluency has increased because they wrote a page a week in English.

Appendix 1: First Semester Journal Topics

Here are some topics to write about in your journals during the first semester. Choose a different topic each week and write at least one page about the topic you chose. The most important things are to be honest and to have fun!

Describe your earliest childhood memory.

Can you remember the happiest day you ever had in school? Describe it.

What are some differences between high school and college life that you have experienced?

What's your favourite movie? Why did it impress you?

What, do you think, are five differences between you and me (Wilma)? What are five similarities? Why do you think so?

If you could change one thing about your life to make it better, what would it be?

What's the toughest decision you ever had to make? What made this decision so difficult?

A proverb from Uganda states: "Words are easy, friendship hard." What do you think this proverb means?

Did you ever have a day when everything went wrong? Describe the day from start to finish.

If you could close your eyes and see yourself ten years from now, what do you think you'd see? What would you be doing? Would you have a job? If so, what is it?

What else besides money is important to consider when choosing a career?

If you were magically granted three wishes to make your mother's or father's life better, what would you wish for her or him?

If you could wish yourself to be transported (like in Star Trek) anywhere in the world right now, where would you go?

Mother Teresa once said: "The biggest disease today is not leprosy or tuberculosis, but rather the feeling of being unwanted." Do you agree or disagree?

Appendix 2: Journal Report June 17, 1998

Once again, thank you for sharing your journals with me and letting me know about your lives. Everyone is unique and different, but we also have many things in common. We are all learning about the difficulties of life but also about its joys and the good things. Here are some examples of interesting and honest writing about some of the topics.

Here are three different answers to this question: If you could change one thing about your life to make it better, what would it be?

I think a thing I can change is to live without looking round....It is not good to remember a bad thing which happened. It [will] never change....I am endeavoring not to regret bad things these days. So I think my life [will] become better than before. That is why I think it is good to [have] a positive view of life to change my life.

If I could change one thing about my life to make it better, I would like to [have been] born in a castle in Europe. I always...wish I were a princess. I long [to be a] beautiful, intelligent princess....If I lived in [a] castle, I would like to [hold a] party everyday, wear noble dresses, eat French food, and dance merrily.

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...I have many things to complain about [in] my life, but I cannot say exactly what I [would] change right now. I think it is very contradictory, for example, I want to be taller, slimmer, more beautiful, more intelligent, and [have] more money so that I could lead a better life. But if so am I really happy? I don't think so. Then what is the best thing for me? I need [a] dream [for] the future. My life is pretty boring....If I could find [out] what is the best thing for me, I could lead a full life.

Here is one student's thoughts on a proverb from Uganda that states: "Words are easy, friendship hard."

I think that only a surface association is easy, but real friendship is very difficult. Real friendship is [to be] trust-worthy and [to understand] each other. However to find a friend like this is not very easy. A surface association is easy, but [when I can't trust the other person] I [get] tired [talking] with [them]. I think that we need real friends for [our life].

And another student's thoughts about Mother Teresa's words: The biggest disease today is not leprosy or tuberculosis, but rather the feeling of being unwanted."

I agree with Teresa's words. I [have] watched a documentary film about Mother Teresa. She said, "Man is born in order to love and be loved." I thought she is absolutely right. If I wasn't loved and wanted by anybody, [there] would be no sense in my living. I think nobody can live alone. There are many people who live a lonely life, especially old [people]. This is a very serious problem. My grandmother lives alone, so I go to meet her very often. Mother Teresa [died] last year. She left us a lot of things. I think we must take them over.

Many of you wrote about three wishes that you would give to your parents. I could see that you love your parents very much and want to thank them for all that they have done for you. Here's one example of three wishes:

First, my mother likes money. She especially likes much money, because she went through many hardships [because of] money. So I want to [give her] a winning ticket of [the] public lottery. Second, I want to make her healthy. Now she has anemia and [has problems with] her womb, so she is not healthy now. I think health is more important than wealth, so I [would] make her completely healthy. Third, I want to be happy. I am a valuable thing [to] my mother. She loves me very much. She hopes that I will become a worthy person and live a happy life. I think that is her happiness. So I want to be the happiest person [I can be]. The above [are] not impossible things. So I want to do [them] and I want to be good to my mother.

The last example is of a happy childhood memory—learning how to ride a bicycle:

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I remember when I could ride a bicycle for the first time. I was in the first grade at that time. All my friends could ride bicycles, but I couldn't. So I felt vexed and practiced riding [my] bicycle on the road which was near my house...I fell down over and over...but suddenly, I could ride [the] bicycle. [At] that time I was very happy [and] I immediately went to my friend's house and rode bicycles with my friend for a long time. It was very exciting. I enjoy this memory very much.

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