Teaching EFL Writing in the University: Related Issues, Insights, and Implications

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ABSTRACT

This paper attempts to summarize the findings of three consecutive studies, with each study progressing on variables investigated and research methodology applied. It is hoped that these findings could lead to the rethinking of the factors concerned on EFL writing, and stimulate more insightful ideas for implications in teaching. I also expect that these findings may provide more thorough interpretations of the cognitive and affective dimensions of EFL writing.   There has been plentiful research on EFL writing, but few took both the cognitive and affective aspects into one comprehensive picture of students' difficulties in writing in a foreign language.   This field is also rich in teaching strategies, but few consider the root of the writing problems.   My studies indicated that extensive free reading and a good composing process help reduce the cognitive and affective difficulties facing EFL students at the university level.   My studies also revealed that error correction and grammar instruction are not effective in teaching EFL writing as people anticipated.   This paper also discusses some related issues that are inspired by previous work in writing that helps us see the whole picture of EFL writing.   These discussions are expected to help us determine what is more urgently in need when considering a writing curriculum at the university level.

Key words: writing apprehension, writer's block, cognitive and affective dimensions, EFL writing

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INTRODUCTION

It is likely that most business and technical writing in the world is done in a second language. All sorts of difficulties facing the second language writer can be imagined. In the field of second language acquisition, researchers, teachers, program designers, text writers all devote themselves to the effort on making the learner write better—or materials to sell better. However, most of the effort is aimed at skill building and grammar instruction. More and more teaching strategies have evolved in the recent decade, such as portfolio assessment, peer evaluation, conferencing with instructors, communicative approaches, computer writing software, mail exchange, etc. All have been supported by studies that show their effectiveness on teaching and learning. It is reasonable to suppose that every method that has been researched is effective in someway. However, a great number of writing teachers still cannot give up traditional grammatical error correction and cannot effectively apply the new approaches mentioned above. The gap between research findings and the practice in real classrooms never seems to be filled. The problem might be that the *root* of our students' difficulties has not yet been found. What is the "root" of the problem then?

Few studies of writing take a global view of EFL writing. As Daly notes (1985, p.44), "how one writes, indeed, whether one writes—is dependent on more than just skill and competence."

Daly & Miller's (1975a & b) results indicated the existence of writing apprehension among students at the university level in the United States. They concluded that writing apprehension is "a characteristic different from but related to

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actual writing behavior or competence" (1985, p. 54). It is a pattern of anxiety (an affective dimension) that is developed via 1) students' traumatic past experiences in writing, 2) lower expectations and negative responses from teachers, and 3) the lack of writing competence (Daly, 1979 & 1985; Daly & Wilson, 1983; Duke, 1980; Harvley-Felder, 1978; Miller, 1975). The first and second causes result from the learning experience, thanks to our devoted teachers who do not seem to be aware of the harmful effect of grammar correction (Truscutt, 1996). The existence of writing apprehension explains why some people don't perform their competence (Lee, 1998). The third is no doubt a consequence of ineffective instruction.

Aldrich (1982) surveyed and interviewed adults with a variety of occupations; many had college degrees or above and had years of executive experience. Results indicated that about half of the subjects (49 of 89) were not in good command of writing in terms of preparation and organization. Power, Cook and Myer (1979) even found that writing class might contribute to increased writing apprehension. Truscott (1996) identified one potential source of increased apprehension, arguing that grammar correction is not only ineffective but also is harmful. He concluded that "learning is most successful when it involves a limited amount of stress, when students are relaxed and confident and enjoying their learning; but the use of correction encourages exactly the opposite condition" (p. 354).

The effect of writing apprehension is reflected in the individual's composing process. Selfe (1981) found that highly apprehensive writers engaged in less planning and did less prewriting than lower apprehensives. During actual writing, high apprehensives spent less time composing individual sentences and were less concerned with overall structure. Finally, high apprehensives spent less time editing and revising. Bloom (1980) also found that less anxious writers were more purposeful; they were better able to control both how and what they wrote.

Rose (1984 & 1985) was the first who used a writer's block questionnaire to survey a large group of subjects and validate the composing obstacles confronted by student writers. According to Rose, writer's block is different from writing apprehension, which might be a cause or reaction to blocking. It is "an inability to begin or continue writing for reasons other than a lack of basic skill or commitment. [It is measured] by the passage of time with limited productive involvement in the

writing task" (p. 3).   The behaviors that characterize blocking include the previously mentioned, as well as the six cognitive variables that his questionnaire items were designed to probe: (1) the rules that writers follow are rigid, inappropriate, or even incorrect; (2) writers' assumptions about the composing process are misleading; (3) the process of editing in the middle of writing impedes fluency and interferes with thinking; (4) planning strategies are inflexible or inappropriate; (5) the rules, assumptions, plans and strategies writers use are conflicting; and (6) the criteria writers invoke to evaluate their own writing are inadequately understood. Rose hypothesized that

> "apprehensiveness can lead to blocking (the anxiety being caused by prior negative evaluations or by more complex psychodynamics) or can result from the fix blockers find themselves in.   But blocking and apprehensiveness are not synonyms, not necessarily coexistent, and not necessarily causally linked" (p. 4)

According to the case studies summarized above, writer's block and writing apprehension, however, are more likely to coexist, with a moderate association, as they are two different constructs representing the affective and cognitive dimensions of writing, respectively. Moreover, Rose did not explain the relationship between blocking problems and students' writing achievement.   Besides Rose's work, there is little empirical research on writer's block. A few others have done case studies, workshops, and guidelines, and mostly laid the blame for blocking on the over-emphasis on grammar from teachers. The shortcoming of these works is that they did not systematically investigate the composing process in detail.

The three studies I conducted were inter-related in terms of (1) the exploration of the theories underlying the two constructs, writing apprehension and blocking; (2) the progression of the research methodology, and (3) new suggestions for practice. The purpose of this paper, therefore, is to emphasize the importance of seeing EFL writing from a broader overview: from previous work, the three consecutive studies to be summarized, and other related issues to be brought into the discussion, to bring us finally to a state where we can draw a deeper conclusion as to the root of writing problems, as well as providing some pedagogical suggestions to solve the problems.

SUMMARY OF THE THREE STUDIES

Study 1: The Revision Process among Students with Different Levels of Apprehension (Lee, 2001a)

Observing 66 university students who took a one-academic-year writing course as an elective, I used relative frequency analysis and found a pattern of the revision process among high, mid, and low apprehensive students. The question asked was, "What changes do you make the most when revising your writing?" Subjects could circle more than one of the four categories (e.g. grammar, word choice, content, and organization). Results, consistent with Gunge and Taylor's study (1989), suggested that high apprehensives did more revision on word choice and grammar; while those with lower apprehension were more concerned with content and organization. Table 1 shows the percentages of each group in revision.

Table 1. The Revision Process of the Three Levels of WA

	LEVELS		
	1 (low)	2 (medium)	3 (high)
Grammar	11	12	15
	61.1%	63.2%	93.8%
Word Choice	5	7	8
	27.8%	36.8%	50.8%
Organization	9	12	6
	50%	63.2%	37.5%
Content	6	4	3
	33.3%	21.1%	18.8%

A simple correlational analysis between subjects' writing proficiency measured by the grade for the course and the four revision categories clearly showed that Grade

was significantly and negatively correlated with Grammar and Word Choice, and positively with Content and Organization, as shown in Table 2.

Table 2. Correlations of Grade and the 4 Revision Categories

	Grammar	Word Choice	Content	Organization
Word Choice	.06			
Content	-.20	*-.33		
Organization	*-.23	**-.44	.12	
Grade	**-.31	*-.22	**.33	**.33

** p < .01; *p < .05

This study also found that those who were higher in apprehension were more likely to "play it safe," and select topics that were more familiar to them. Low apprehensives thus were more willing to try more challenging topics and were involved in significantly more self-motivated reading. It was suggested that there might be a hierarchical pattern in students' revision process, which in turn may influence how they deal with the writing materials, e.g. the topic or issue discussed in the writing task. That is, high apprehensives, due to their psychological constraints, were limited in their capacity to deal with more complicated materials and were more inclined to engage in premature editing (Rose, 1984) and a greater focus on form in general. This result may also suggest that apprehension produces monitor over-users (Krashen, 1982), an inappropriate composing process applied by writers with blocking problems (Rose, 1984 & 1985). Not reported in tables 1 and 2 is the finding that the amount of free reading subjects did was a significant predictor of their grades (r = .38). The amount of writing done was not (r = -.10).

The results of this study led to the investigations of writer's block in my next study, with an emphasis on its relationship to the composing process, writing apprehension and other variables.

Study 2: If the Cognitive and Affective Factors Transfer? (Lee, 2002)

Borrowing from the hypothesis that literacy competence transfers across languages (Cummins, 1991), this study tested the hypothesis that cognitive/affective factors also transfer. Rose's measure of blocking was herein included to indicate the cognitive aspect of writing, the composing process. Subjects were 98 university students with various academic majors. Results showed that subjects' past experience in their first language impacted their foreign language writing. These past experiences were mostly negative; subjects mentioned teachers' negative comments, low grading, and their lower confidence in writing as compared with their peers. This influence passed onto their foreign language experience and led to their difficulties in both the affective and cognitive aspects of writing in English, e.g. apprehension and blocking.

This study also found that these aspects affected the subjects' willingness to be involved in English reading and writing. However, the multivariate analysis revealed that the final and only significant predictor of writing performance was free reading, consistent with many other published empirical studies showing that comprehensible input from free voluntary reading benefits writing proficiency and other aspects of language and literacy acquisition (Krashen, 1993; Lee, 1996; Lee & Krashen, 1997). The insignificant relationship between apprehension/blocking and writing performance found in this study was inconsistent with the studies conducted by Daly and Miller (1975a & b). This result led to the reconsideration of the two constructs, which had been used only on their monolingual subjects. Further research with subjects with other language backgrounds is necessary.

Even though free reading was consistently the winner in predicting writing performance and the cognitive/affective difficulties in writing, it would not be proper to conclude that free reading is "the cure" for all writing difficulties in performance and mental strains when writing. First, the statistical analyses (path analysis using multiple regression) still cannot promise to confirm the causal relationship among factors; therefore, the interpretations were always suggestive. Second, the constructs were applied without detailed item analyses and confirmatory factor analysis that possesses the capability to correct measurement errors. Third, free reading needed to be tested with other related factors concerned so that a more comprehensive view and a

more convincing explanation of EFL writing could be obtained.   The next study aimed at this goal.

Study 3: How Are WB, WA, Instruction, Free Reading, And Free Writing Interrelated? (Lee, 2001b)

This study applied Structural Equation Modeling with the software EQS to determine how these five factors (WB, WA, Instruction, Free Reading, Free Writing) interrelate with one another—causal or reciprocal?   The inclusion of Instruction into the analysis was to test an intuitive hypothesis: Instruction—including conferences with teachers, analyses of readings, direct comments and error correction—should be able to help our students improve their English writing and thus reduce their difficulties in apprehension and blocking.   A total of 297 university students, with different academic subject backgrounds, in three different universities in Northern Taiwan took part in this project.   Results showed that instruction did not significantly predict any other factors.   What needs to be noticed was that a very high percentage of subjects (75% to 90%) highly valued instruction in their learning of English writing (perceived importance of instruction), a conventional idea that instruction should make the greatest contribution to our learning.   It could also imply that most of the students in Taiwan depend heavily on instruction, rather than engaging in self-motivated learning.   Because of this, these subjects rarely wrote on their own, and certainly rarely wrote in order to improve their writing.

This analysis also confirmed that subjects' perceived anxiety (WA) and their mastery of the composing process (less WB) did not significantly predict their writing performance, a result consistent with study 2. Reasons for this result include the possibility that the writing task used might have been too easy for these subjects,[1] as

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[1] The writing task used in Studies 2 and 3 might have been too easy for these two groups of subjects; recall that these students took the writing class as an elective with a higher motivation to learn English writing.   The studies asked the subjects to argue for TV's positive and negative impacts on the communication, social, and family aspects of our life.   Although this topic might be suitable for college students as an essay assignment; it is quite typical in many writing classrooms.   Second, this topic is more likely to require an argumentative composition, which, according to Faigley, Daly, and Witte (1981), did not distinguish between high and low apprehensive writers.   Richardson (1980) also failed to find any significant difference in quality ratings of essays composed by high- and low-apprehensives on a topic that could be

well as the possibility that perceived anxiety might have not affected their actual writing performance because of subjects' ability to control their anxiety (Cheng, 1998[2]; Madsen, Brown, & Jones, 1991; Young, 1986). Further studies might also need to be cautious in selecting the instrument or topic to test writing ability. The factor that significantly predicted writing performance was still free reading, consistent with the results of study 2.

Finally, this study found an interesting yet substantively interpretable relationship among writing apprehension, writer's block, and free reading. It was found that the more one reads, the less one feels anxious about writing, and the less one experiences blocking. Also, those who read more possess a better composing process (less blocking) and thus feel less apprehensive about writing. Therefore, writing apprehension and writer's block are reciprocally related.

SOME RELATED ISSUES

On reviewing the findings of the three studies, some other related issues that I believe to have a vital link to this inquiry need to share a space here to make the discussion about EFL writing more thorough.

The Role of Error Correction and Grammar Instruction

The first is the controversial issue of whether error correction and grammar instruction are effective? It would be offensive to many professionals to conclude that grammar correction and instruction are not only ineffective, but also harmful (Truscott, 1996). Researchers on the side of correction and grammar instruction would join the battle of debating and arguing to defend what they believe to be true and

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construed as argumentative (writing to a television station to explain why a particular program should be taken off or kept on the air). As was the case of apprehension, the task may have been too easy to invoke a noticeable amount of blocking.

[2] Cheng (1998) conducted a study to examine the relationship among actually the "perceived anxiety," "observed anxiety," and subjects' oral performance. The result showed that it was the "observed anxiety," instead of the "perceived" one, that directly affected their performance on an oral test because of students' ability to control their anxiety. It was found that students' "perceived anxiety" was not necessarily associated with the difficulty of the target task.

sacred.   From my findings, however, and other studies that examine the effectiveness of grammar instruction and error correction, I have to join sides with those who conclude that grammar instruction and correction are not as effective as many believe they are.

While critical of Truscott's position, Ferris (1999) could not provide clear evidence for the value of correction, especially over a long term.   Ferris notes, however, that "teachers are inconsistent in their ability and willingness to recognize and correct errors and to provide adequate grammar explanation to their students;" therefore, "ESL teachers need a thorough grounding in linguistic/syntactic theory and in how to teach grammar to L2 learners…[and] need ample opportunities for practice with error analysis of student texts and in providing feedback, grammatical information and strategies training…"(p. 6).   This is clearly a hopeless task: I have never reviewed any article or study that provides us with a clear-cut and comprehensive instructional design demonstrating how to teach every grammar rule in a systematic way.

Ferris also admitted that her suggestions are only applicable when students' errors occur in a patterned, rule-governed way.   Around 50% of errors she found were not "treatable."   What makes matters even hopeless is Krashen's argument (in Jones, 1985) that

> the rules that linguists know are only a subset of all the rules of English; experienced teachers do not know all the rules linguists have formulated and are able to teach only part of the rules they do know; students learn only some of the rules that they are taught; and finally, students can actively use only some of the rules they have managed to learn.   Reliance on the monitor is not even an effective means to achieve the goal of grammaticality, because the second language learner simply cannot learn enough rules (p. 113).

Moreover, Ferris argues that students' opinions consistently tell us that error correction is important.   However, my study using empirical analysis shows that students' *perceived importance* of error correction and teachers' response did not significantly account for how they performed in actual writing, i.e., their writing performance does not reflect the effectiveness of teachers' comments and error correction, if there is any.

The Monitor Hypothesis, Writing Apprehension, And Writer's Block

What Ferris found is actually consistent with what Krashen's Monitor Hypothesis describes (1982). According to Krashen, L2 learners can use their consciously learned knowledge only to monitor and check for errors in their language production. Its application is possible only when the three necessary (but not sufficient) conditions are met: (a) sufficient time, (b) focus on form, and (c) know the grammar rule. If any one condition is not provided, the monitor can not function as well as expected. The most obvious evidence showing the limits of the use of consciously learned grammar is that "we know that even the best students do not learn every rule they are exposed to" (Krashen, 1985, p, 16). Therefore, learned knowledge has only a limited effect on second language acquisition. Consistent with Truscott's argument, the time inefficiently spent in correcting grammar could be well spent on other more productive activities. Studies have found that uncorrected students wrote more, produced sentences with more complexity, were more motivated, and had more positive attitudes toward writing (Hillocks, 1986; Knoblauch & Brannon, 1981; Semke, 1984; Sheppard, 1992).

My study on writing apprehension and the revision process of EFL writers also suggests that the self-editing task proposed by Ferris is hard to execute. As hypothesized and demonstrated in Study 1, writing apprehension produces "monitor over-users," who focus on form and tend to constantly check their output in the middle of utterances or while writing, i.e. they focus more on form than on content. This high awareness of grammar correction impedes fluent production and, ironically, does not improve their accuracy. In the research on the cognitive and affective dimensions of writing, findings suggest that writing apprehension lead to fragmented production, a lower level of meaning, blocking, and poorer performance. Rose (1985) noted that both his "blocked" and "unblocked" writers did some editing while composing, but the blocked writers did much more of it. His high blockers averaged 2.17 instances of premature editing while composing, and the low blockers averaged only one instance.

Moreover, research evidence found that the impact of grammar instruction and correction is very limited, and that the effect of conscious grammar learning fades with time (Krashen, 1999, 2001, & 2002). In addition to the fact that only 50% of the rules

are treatable or learnable, individual variation in ability and interest in learning rules also helps to make rule instruction and error correction much less effective as expected. Krashen (2002) maintains that direct instruction and error correction have a greater impact to those who are sophisticated learners and who have an interest in studying grammar. The current school environment, however, is forcing every student to consciously learn the rules without paying attention to those who are not very good at memorizing rules.

The Reading Hypothesis

The Reading Hypothesis delivers what grammar instruction and correction cannot deliver. The focus of this section is how we can benefit from free voluntary reading.

As Smith (1994) notes, "to learn to write for newspapers, you must read newspapers; textbooks about them will not suffice. For magazines, browse through magazines rather than through correspondence courses on magazine writing. To write poetry, read it" (p. 560). That is to say that our writing competence develops through reading. As Chomsky (1972) reported, children who grew up in a richer print environment displayed more grammatical competence in writing (see also Hafiz & Tudor, 1989; Krashen, 1989; Polak & Krashen, 1988). A study conducted by Gradman and Hanania (1991) provided evidence by showing that international students' "extracurricular reading" significantly correlated with their subscores for structure and written expression in TOEFL, as well as two other sections and overall TOEFL scores. Janopoulos (1986) found that second language acquirers who were heavy pleasure readers in English tended to be more proficient writers in English. Thus, the amount of English free reading done by a foreign student is a reliable predictor of his/her writing proficiency and grammar ability.

EFL students have always complained about their lack of vocabulary and are frustrated by their inability to express what they want to say in writing. Research studies on foreign language acquisition provide evidence for incidental vocabulary learning from context while reading. Day, Omura and Hiramatsu's (1991) Japanese university students were able to acquire measurable amounts of new vocabulary by reading after only one encounter with a new word. Dupuy and Krashen (1993) also found their experimental group—22 intermediate and advanced learners of French as a

foreign language—significantly outperformed the control group on a vocabulary test. Other studies on learning ESL (Cho & Krashen, 1994; Pitts, White & Krahsen, 1989; Saragi, Nation, & Meister, 1978) also predict that a substantial amount of vocabulary can be acquired in an extensive reading program and confirm that this is indeed the case.

From all these studies and many more that are not cited in this section, free reading indisputably contributes to second language acquisition in a comprehensive and effective form. It is definitely not correct to replace all instruction with free reading; but it is necessary to point out the different quality of acquisition that reading can bring in to make second/foreign language acquisition more successful. It also reflects the necessity of including self-selected reading as part of writing instruction in order to make the instruction more complete and more effective.

How Does Writing Help?

The results of my studies 2 and 3 show that the amount of free writing is not related to writing performance, does not help alleviate writing apprehension, and does not help develop a better composing process. Can we then conclude that writing itself is of no value at all? Certainly not. It is possible that these results only reflect the fact that we do not write enough to alleviate all these difficulties. It was suspected that those who claimed that they did more free writing than others still did not write enough to experience and discover what writing can bring to us, especially writing in another language. As Smith (1983) notes, "No one [in school] writes enough to learn more than a small part of what writers have to know…" (p. 560).

However, writing helps thinking and makes us smarter when we are involved in a problem solving task that requires writing (Krashen, 1993). Also noted by Boice (1982), writing itself stimulates inspiration that allows more ideas to emerge. Writing appears to have its most profound effect on thinking when the problem is difficult (Langer & Applebee, 1987). As Smith (1988) points out, we write to clarify and stimulate our thinking. Elbow (1973) also contends that our vague and abstract mess of thoughts becomes clear and concrete when we try to write our ideas down. Further, revision in the composing process can help a writer to come up with new ideas as he or

she moves from draft to draft (Sommers, 1980). During the revision process, "meaning is not what you start out with but what you end up with" (Elbow, 1973, p.15).

With the awareness of the virtues of writing, we would not abruptly conclude that writing is not helpful, just because of the statistical results presented here. What we, teachers and program designers, should devote ourselves to is helping our students become less afraid of writing, and even helping our students to enjoy writing, and to use writing as a means of discovering meanings and a way to intellectual growth.

Elbow encourages free writing and explains why free writing helps alleviate the difficulty of blocking (quoted in Boice, 1985):

> Free writing makes writing easier by helping you with the root psychological or existential difficulty in writing: finding words in your head and putting them down on a blank piece of paper.   So much writing time and energy is spent on not writing...   Frequent free writing exercises help you learn simply to get on with it and not be held back by worries about whether these words are good words or the right words.   Thus, free writing is the best way to learn—in practice, not just in theory—to separate the producing process from the revising process (p. 194).

This suggestion not only explains that free writing helps with generating ideas, but also implies that the editing process should be delayed to the very end of the composing process in order not to interfere with the fluency of production.

INSIGHTS FOR INSTRUCTION

Problems with Current Instruction

" ... The evidence indicates that students plagued by writer's block are often the victims of the inappropriate instruction they received from teachers and books that adhere to the traditional model of teaching writing" (Oliver, 1982, p. 164).   With years of research in this field, we believe that progress has been made.   Yet, we also suspect that a number of teachers still follow the "traditional mode" of writing instruction.

In Taiwan, writing instruction has been making enormous efforts to try to solve our students' writing problems; more and newer methods keep emerging, as named in Instruction.   Most of these approaches were examined in study 3 using Structural Equation Modeling, which was able to examine multiple variables in one analysis. Results showed no significant relationship between these approaches and students' writing performance, even though nearly all the subjects valued them highly.   As pointed out in the introduction, there is always a gap between published research and the practice in the classroom.   What should be discussed while conferencing with students?   What is to be commented on when reading students' texts?   How many drafts should be required?   And what are the guidelines for peer evaluation that are sensitive to students' feelings?   Finally, how much does error correction benefit students in learning writing?   These problems surely cannot be ignored, but they should come after we know how to equip our students with an efficient composing process that can help reduce blocking and thus diminish writing apprehension.

The Awareness of the Composing Process

Research shows that a misapplication or ignorance of the composing process results in blocking and anxiety, as previously discussed.   Thus, the ultimate goal for instruction is to raise students' awareness of efficient composing processes that can help them discover new ideas, new meanings, and a new vision of what writing is.

An effective composing process should begin with a thinking process that enables students to plan, to prefigure, and to brainstorm for initial ideas.   This process is even more crucial for EFL students who are faced with the daunting task: to express complex ideas into another literacy system.   Time will be needed for ***preparation, incubation, and illumination***, a three step thinking process proposed by Wallas (1926) nearly eight decades ago.   This process seems as old as the first writing lesson in history, but its importance has rarely been mentioned in the classroom.

The Thinking Process (Wallas, 1926)

The term "Incubation" was introduced by Wallas (1926) for the process by which the mind goes about solving a problem, subconsciously and automatically.   Elbow (1973 & 1981) hypothesized that new ideas emerge from the subconscious mind in the following way.   Writers must first *prepare* their subconscious mind by presenting it with a problem.   Wallas (1926) states that "our mind is not likely to give us a clear answer to any particular problem unless we set it a clear question" (p.44).   Preparation can be done by talking (discussing), but writing is an extremely powerful way of presenting ideas to the subconscious mind.   When we write, we attempt to represent our current thoughts on the page.   The act of doing this is a powerful stimulus for the next stage, *incubation*, the stage at which the thinker's (writer's) subconscious mind actually comes up with the new idea.

Incubation seems to happen best when we take a break from creative work, when the mind is relaxed, and not focused on the problem.   Wallas suggests that

"in the case of the more difficult forms of creative thought…it is desirable that not only that there should be an interval free from conscious thought on the particular problem concerned, but also that that interval should be so spent that nothing should interfere with the free working of the unconscious processes of the mind.   In those cases, the stage of incubation should include a large amount of actual relaxation" (p. 95).

The conventional writing class in school requiring time-limit writing definitely deprives the students of the incubation process for generating new ideas.

This is not to say, or course, that hard work is unnecessary.   Quite the opposite is true.   Many studies confirm that high achievers put in a tremendous amount of work, far more than less accomplished colleagues.   They engage in the "preliminary period of conscious work which also precedes all fruitful unconscious labor" (Poincare, 1924).   This preliminary work is the "preparation" stage discussed above.   Wallas notes that the educated person "can 'put his mind on' to a chosen subjects, and 'turn his mind off'…" (p. 92).   In other words, the educated person knows how to prepare and then incubate.

The result of incubation is ***illumination***, the emergence of the new idea.   The idea or insight appears to simply spontaneously appear.   At this stage, new ideas are "fragile" and very easy to forget.   Good thinkers realize this and record the ideas immediately. This is a second function for writing in the thinking or problem-solving process.   Wallas (1926) suggests that we write our ideas down right away.   He notes that "in modern life, the range of observations and memory which may start a new thought-train is so vast that it is almost incredibly easy to forget some thought and never again pick up the train that led to it." (p. 86).

The illumination that is the result of incubation needs to be followed by more conscious work.   Ideas that arise as a result of incubation need to be evaluated (Smith, 1994); our new insight may not be right.   By way of consciously planning, rescanning, revising, the writing process by now steps into a recursive cycle.   Krashen (1984) notes that good writers oftentimes follow a "non-linear approach" with a great deal of recycling to earlier stages.

The Actual Writing Process

Have a flexible plan before writing.   Researchers confirm that before writing, good writers make plans.   They do not, however, over-plan.   While writing, good writers are willing to change their plans, as they come up with new ideas.   Their plans, in other words, are flexible.   Rose's subject, Liz, a writer who was classified as a "high blocker," "did not map out her discourse".   According to Rose, Liz "made decisions about the direction and shape of her discourse incrementally as she proceeded.   This approach led to discoveries as well as dead ends…" (Rose, 1985, p. 48)

Therefore, spending an optimal amount of time planning is the answer.   In Rose's study, "high blockers" spent either very little time planning or a great deal of time planning before writing.   Also, good writers are willing to revise and change their plans during writing.

Reread, review, and revise during writing.   As mentioned above, the plan needs to be flexible, as incubation takes place and new ideas emerge.   Good writers know that the necessity of changing a plan is good news, a clear sign that learning has

taken place, that real progress is being made.   Poor writers regard the realization that their plans should be changed with frustration.

Sommers (1980) found that the student writers she studied did not come up with new ideas as they wrote, but limited their revisions to vocabulary changes.   This was partly because the students began with a rigid model they had been taught and stuck to it: "…they write their introductions and their thesis statements even before they have really discovered what they want to say…" (p. 382).   This practice functions "to restrict and circumscribe not only the development of their ideas, but also their ability to change the direction of these ideas" (p. 383).   Experienced writers, in contrast, are willing to make changes on all levels of their text at any time; they are willing to make fundamental changes in their argument.

Second, even if writers are willing to change their plans, they need to review them regularly, seeing where they are with respect to their original map of the text they are writing.   This could mean reviewing the outline or original plan, and/or rereading the most recent draft.   There is consistent evidence that good writers pause more during writing and reread what they have written more than poor writers (Pianko, 1979; Stallard, 1974).   Such rereading appears to help good writers maintain a sense of the whole composition or "conceptual blueprint" (Beach, 1979).   Less accomplished writers are not aware of the problem all writers have, the problem of " losing their place," and losing a sense of their whole essay while in the act of writing.

Revision strategies.   Some studies show that good writers revise more than poor writers (Stallard, 1974).   More widely reported is the finding that writers revise differently, with better writers focusing on content and less able writers on surface form, as indicated by the study results in Study 1 and of Gunge and Taylor (1989). Faigley, Daly, and Witte (1981) also reported that while revising, professional writers made far more changes in content than inexperienced writers, and made fewer mechanical changes.   In addition, the advanced writers delayed mechanical and word choice changes until the second draft, "cleaning up their manuscripts after they had satisfactorily dealt with their subjects.   By this point, inexperienced writers had largely quit revising" (p. 409).   Poor writers, in other words, consider revision to be editing, simply making a neater version of the previous draft.   For experienced writers, revision strategies "are part of the process of discovering meaning."   It is in revision

that writers discover problems and solve them.   "The heart of revision is the process by which writers recognize and resolve the dissonance they sense in their writing" (Sommers, 1980, p. 385).

CONCLUSION

This paper presents three different but related studies on both cognitive and affective aspects of EFL writing to provide a view on EFL writing that is as comprehensive as possible.   Also, findings clearly and consistently show that free voluntary reading makes the greatest contribution to one's writing performance and to the reduction of writing apprehension and blocking problems.   This article also tries to offer implications for instruction that pertains to the problems of apprehension, blocking, and the composing and revising process of our EFL students at the university level.

With the awareness of the thinking process contained in Wallas' three stages, our students should realize why they always "don't know what to write."   Or why are they often bothered by writer's block, which in turn leads to their anxiety in writing?   It is because our students are not ready yet for the assigned topics, or they don't know how to prepare.   It is because many teachers are not consciously aware of these thinking stages, a result of the belief that students should be trained to be able to write under time limits and with the pressure of deadlines.   But this is a sure way of depriving students of the right to enjoy the discovery of meaning, and their right to learn.   I believe the goal of instruction shouldn't be to put pressure on students and thereby deprive them of learning.   On the contrary, it is to deliver the message that learning can be enjoyable, natural, and rewarding if the way of learning is effective and efficient, such as the realization and development of a good composing process.

I believe that a good composing process, as suggested above, will facilitate the use of the thinking process.   Writers who have mastered the composing process use writing to prepare their ideas for incubation, allow incubation to occur, and use writing to capture their new ideas before they are forgotten.   They use writing in harmony

with the way the brain learns naturally (Smith, 1994).   For them writing is a pleasant experience.

To conclude this article, I would like to say that research helps to illustrate a current phenomenon that can lead us to a better vision of teaching and learning. However, with only one focus at a time, what research can tell us is always limited; in other words, there are always mysteries and black holes waiting to be discovered, to be revealed.   As Larson (1985) points out,

"…too often we think of cognition as separate from emotion, as if cognitive processes could be understood independently of affective ones, and vice versa. But this is clearly not the case.   What people think is affected by what they feel, and what they feel is affected by what they think.   The perception of goals, constraints, feedback, challenges, and skills shapes a person's engagement" (p. 33).

Rose (1985) also notes that "a fear of taking chances with one's writing, for example, might well stem from the way one assesses one's skills; and rigid planning strategies could be tied to feelings of inadequacy as a writer" (p. 234)

As suggested in the previous section, time is needed for incubation to occur, pauses are required for better ideas to generate, and "hesitations" happen when a problem is found.   These are seemingly the signs of blocking; however, they might also be the signs for you to calm down, take a break, and patiently pass through the essential thinking stages again.   Finally, EFL/ESL instructors need to shoulder the responsibility of demonstrating the thinking stages a writer normally experiences to discover ideas and meanings; they need to help students develop an efficient composing process, involve them in the learning activities, and eventually raise student confidence to write and then enjoy writing.

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大學英文寫作教學之
相關議題、構思、與應用

李思穎[*]

摘　　要

　　本論文概述三個寫作研究。每一研究在變因及研究方法皆不同於前，旨在試圖找出最能完整闡述大學英文寫作教學與學生學習上之困難，並期望這些研究結果與探討能激發學者重新思索 EFL 寫作之教學方法。這些研究之目的在探討英文寫作時所關係之認知與情感層面及其所造成之困擾。這些困擾長久以來在眾多寫作研究及教學新法中被忽略；這些困擾也可解釋為何教學實效常不如預期。因為這些困擾很可能即是英語寫作問題之根源。本文所述之研究皆發現廣泛的閱讀及良好的寫作程序才能幫助減輕大學生英文寫作時所經驗之認知與情感上的困難與阻礙。這些研究也發現錯誤改正與文法課程並不如期望的能有效實行於寫作教學上。此外，本論文討論其他相關議題如閱讀、錯誤改正與文法於寫作學習上所伴演之角色、寫作之必經過程、及實際寫作對於學習寫作之益處為何。這些討論皆旨向一套更能有效實行於大學英語教學之寫作課程。

關鍵字: 寫作焦慮、寫作障礙、認知與情感層面

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