ESL Composition Class: An in-class v. on-line comparison

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Abstract:

This qualitative study investigates student attitudes in university-level ESL composition classes in both an in-class and an asynchronous on-line setting. Student and teacher interviews, classroom observations, and writing samples are used to examine group work, peer feedback, attitudes about writing in English, and freewrite activities in the two contexts. Results from this exploration suggest that each context offers unique advantages and disadvantages. An in-class section may offer teachers greater pedagogical flexibilities for group tasks, and it may provide more support for most learners to develop their L2 language proficiencies by allowing them to work with sympathetic classmates who are undergoing a similar acculturation process. However, an on-line section may provide teachers greater monitoring abilities during group work, and it may provide a more nurturing environment for the most reticent learners to develop confidence in their L2 abilities. On-line groups, however, face unique challenges because they are reliant on timely member participation in order to complete assignments. Additionally, in-class sections may enhance writing fluency whereas on-line sections may help students to develop more formal academic writing styles. The study concludes by suggesting that composite writing courses that use a combination of in-class and on-line settings may be the most beneficial scenario.

1. Introduction

“Understanding and creating optimal language learning environments is the essential business of the language teacher.” (Egbert & Hanson-Smith, 1999, p. 3)

Language specialists have often suggested that, the language classroom is “an inherently face-threatening environment” (Dörnyei, 2001, p. 91; see also Krashen, 1984). According to Bell (2004):

The notion of face is made up of two facets: positive face, or the desire to be liked and approved of; and negative face, or the desire to act without imposition by others. A face-threatening act is one that causes threat to any aspect of another’s face. (p. 2)

My current ESL students enrolled in the English Language Institute (ELI) at the University of Hawai‘i-Manoa (UH), started me thinking further about this somewhat pessimistic view of the language classroom. With current developments in information
technology, it is possible to think about what if the word “classroom” was removed from Dörnyei’s statement. I began to think about the nature of this threat when the traditional classroom is replaced by an on-line one, a class composed of web pages, e-mail accounts, discussion boards, and chat rooms.

My students are enrolled in ELI 100, a three-credit, Advanced Writing for Undergraduates course. It is an on-line, WebCT-based course, and typically during the first week of a 16-week semester, my students complete a freewrite that explores the advantages and disadvantages of on-line learning. Over the last three semesters, three advantages of on-line learning have repeatedly pervaded many of their freewrite responses. First, they often mention that they feel less anxiety submitting written assignments on-line. Second, they frequently express their appreciation at having extra time to compose their papers. When students compose freewrites or participate in peer feedback activities in the classroom, they have a set time limit to complete their assignments. However, over the course of a week, on-line students decide how much time to dedicate to the completion of these writing tasks. Third, they occasionally mention that they feel a greater willingness to express themselves in an on-line venue. To develop my practice as an on-line teacher and possibly contribute to program development at the ELI, I have accordingly decided to explore student attitudes and emotions in an on-line English composition course, how those attitudes and emotions differ from those in a more traditional, in-class writing course, and if an on-line language learning environment would also be “inherently face-threatening.”

Therefore, in the study to be reported here, I will explore two worlds: the world of a traditional, in-class writing course, and the world of a non-traditional, on-line writing
course with a view towards illuminating any similarities or differences that exist in these areas.

2. Literature Review

2.1 An Overview

In the ELI, the locus of my current research, students from wide-ranging cultural backgrounds come together to meet in our classrooms in Hawaii. To set this study to be reported in context, I will focus on several things related to how these students interact and participate in ELI composition classes. Furthermore, the things I will discuss are based upon both my classroom and on-line teaching experience as well as my preliminary interviews with another current ELI 100 teacher and several students. I will discuss four things related to the second language classroom: group work, peer feedback, writing in English, and freewrite activities.

2.2 Group Work (on-line and in person)

Group work is a common feature of ELI classes in general and ESL/EAP writing classes in particular. Specialists suggest they may lessen language class anxiety over time in composition classes. Initially, students may have misgivings about group work, but as student- to- student communication and small-group work increase, students have a more supportive milieu and their apprehension decreases. “Writing is often more fun if students write collaboratively” (Diaz-Rico, 2004, p. 172). Furthermore, language teachers are advised to promote learner collaboration. According to Dornyei (2001), a leading authority on learner motivation in the classroom, it:

1. Fosters group cohesiveness: When students work together they tend to like each other regardless of ethnic, cultural, class, or ability differences.
2. If learners are allowed to cooperate with each other towards a certain goal, their expectancy of success…is likely to be higher than if they are to work individually because they know they can count on their peers.

3. Cooperative team work achieves a rare synthesis of academic and social goals

4. In cooperative situations there is a sense of obligation and moral responsibility to the fellow-cooperators.

5. Cooperation is also motivating because the knowledge that one’s unique contribution is required for the group to succeed increases one’s efforts.

6. Cooperative situations generally have a positive emotional tone, which means that they generate less anxiety and stress than other learning formats. (pp. 100-101)

However, findings by Arndt illuminate one limitation of group work. Arndt (1993) looked at group and peer feedback activities at a university in Hong Kong. The author found that in order for his students to hold positive perspectives on group work, they needed to retain group membership and not to rotate among different groups. This type of enduring membership appeared genuine to students and they would reluctantly rotate among different groups because they had no special interest in any other group’s work. For this reason, Arndt suggested emphasizing team writing over solo prose, and combining that with peer feedback. Noted L2 writing specialist Dana Ferris (2003) comments that staying in fixed groups mirrors actual university interaction where students offer peer feedback within their area of interest, which would imbue them with interest in the relevant topics. This authenticity ties in nicely with an important ELI goal of preparing students for regular academic classrooms at the University of Hawai‘i.
Several studies have also documented the benefits of group work in computer-assisted language study (CALL) classes (Hanson-Smith, 1999; Peyton, 1999; Neu and Scarcella, 1991). For example, e-mail and group discussions give students authentic reasons to compose using the target language (Healey, 1999). The on-line students involved in this research often had to use English to interact via e-mail or discussion board postings with classmates who spoke different L1s. Peyton (1999) points out that the writing process itself need not be a solitary endeavor as students may receive recurrent peer feedback simply through multiple postings and revisions on-line. Peyton’s research involved neither university students nor English learners, but her reasoning appears sound. I have observed frequent student revision frenzies in the on-line section of ELI 100 as group members exchanged numerous queries and replies prior to an impending paper’s due date. Kelm (1996) notes that in university language classes (involving students with an English L1), group work often passes through the teacher, and is not student focused. However, in on-line classes, Kelm (1996) mentions:

Students are not only allowed to converse with their peers, but since the comments are written, nobody is ever interrupted in the middle of a comment. In addition, slower students can work on their comments without the pressure of making the whole class wait while thoughts and vocabulary are collected. At the same time, no student can dominate the discussion because all participants are free to read or ignore the comments that the computer sends to each individual.

(p. 22)

In addition, for both in-class and on-line sections, the actual composition of each group affects their discourse dynamics. Gender, nationality, and the oral communicative
abilities in the target language (for in-class courses) all influence peer interaction. It is often found that men dominate group discussions in language classes (e.g. Peyton, 1999). Another study on conversation dominance in male-female pair work (Gass & Varonos, 1986) occurred in a setting very similar to that of ELI with 20 participants who were enrolled in an intensive English program in a university setting. They were grouped into four mixed gender, three all male, and three all female pairings. Then they were given general instructions to discuss “topics of interest” regarding picture-description tasks. The authors found that Japanese males usually dominated their female counterparts in the ESL classroom (regarding quantity and control of the conversation), but that women would commence meaning negotiation at a higher frequency than men. Moreover, in these male-female pairings, the men typically initiated the conversation and established the topic. Additionally, while both men and women utilized apologies in their discourse regarding English language limitations, only women apologized for: “giving incorrect information, giving insufficient information, self-correction, not understanding, taking a turn, or changing a topic.” (Gass and Varonis, 1986, p. 347) However, the authors noted that female-female pairing resulted in more equitable discourse and that Japanese cultural norms might have influenced their results.

Gender interactions associated across contexts have also been investigated in-class and on-line (Abraham and Hsien-Chin, 1991). This research looked at the quantity of oral communication in an on-line course, with students talking to each other through the use of special software and microphones. Six ESL learners with TOEFL scores of 490 to 543 were involved (note: ELI 100 students’ TOEFL range is typically 500 to 600) while participating in a college preparatory program at an American university. Abraham
and Hsien-Chin’s (1991) research showed that in this on-line course, males tended to dominate conversations with their female partners. In the only female-female pairing, the conversation distribution was 51% and 49%. In the second pair, an Egyptian male dominated his female partner from Brazil 57% to 43%. Startlingly, a Malaysian male dominated pair conversations over his Japanese female counterpart 79% to 21%. The authors strongly concluded that “males tend to dominate pair discussion.” (1991, p. 104)

Another group interaction issue revolves around the students’ cultural backgrounds, which may hinder their participation in group work (Johnston, 1999). Duff (1987) also investigated cultural influences on group dynamics in research at the ELI, and found that Chinese students tended to overshadow their Japanese classmates in group work. Other research has also concluded that Asian students seemed reluctant to join in on group discussions (Jackson, 2002; Johnson, 1999; Tsui, 1996). However, these conclusions have been challenged. One study by Liu and Littlewood (1997) found that Chinese students in a university setting in Hong Kong preferred student-centered classes, and suggested that the problem could reflect teacher talk time and teacher-fronted activities, which limited student opportunities to speak.

Lastly, one intriguing benefit of on-line writing classes is that students with strong oral communication skills will be unable to control group discussions on-line. Instead each student can control the time needed to compose e-mails and discussion postings (Hanson-Smith, 1999; Perez, 2003). Hanson-Smith (1999) observes:

Although at first blush networking the writing group seems unnecessary as students can sit in circle face-to-face in a classroom, in fact the electronic network enhances the group’s functions in surprising ways. The most verbally fluent
participants cannot dominate the group, because each member has plenty of time to compose and type questions and responses before they are posted. (p. 210)

More importantly, for present purposes, on-line e-mail and discussion board interaction promote writing fluency. Finally, there appears to be a dearth of studies that investigate the influence of gender, nationality, or language proficiency levels on group dynamics in a distance-learning setting.

2.3 Peer Feedback

Peer feedback dyads have a standard place in the ESL writing classroom in both traditional and on-line settings. First, as Dornyei (2001) sardonically points out “In my experience learners are very resourceful about finding ways to convey new materials to their peers, if only to show that they can do a better job than the teacher!” (p. 105) Ferris (2003) looked at multiple peer feedback studies and concludes that language learners find it useful and that they will use each other’s suggestions. Likewise, Leki (1990) arrives at the same conclusion. In a study on the usefulness of peer feedback among U.S. college students, 16 of 17 students positively commented on peer feedback. Moreover, 15 students found that reading their classmates’ papers to be beneficial. Five students negatively commented on the experience and two students offered mixed viewpoints. Another study reported that 93% of the first and second year ESL students (in Hong Kong and Taiwan) preferred to have peer feedback as one kind of feedback in addition to self- and teacher- supplied feedback. The participants stated that their peers provided new ideas as well as spotted problems that the writer might miss (Jacobs, Curtis, Braine & Huang, 1998).
Reid (1993) also concludes that peer work benefits L2 learners. “If students are to master writing as a communicative process, they must not only write regularly but also regularly try out their drafts and get feedback from a variety of readers.” (pp. 206-7) Peer work offers actual readers, so writers must focus on their audience. Reid suggested that this type of feedback creates a greater awareness in the students that they are accountable for their written product and how it is received by the audience. On the other hand, Mangelsdorf (1992) found less conclusive evidence of student appreciation for peer-based feedback activities. In this study, 55% of the students had positive views on such activities, 30% held mixed views and 15% had negative views. In addition, “The fact that learners are put into work groups or given a task, however, does not mean that they will interact, that they will interact in the target language, or that the interaction will facilitate language learning.” (Egbert, 1999, p. 27) Perhaps Ferris’ conclusion that the most advantageous situation for students is to use a variety of feedback approaches correctly identifies the most useful scenario (2003).

Complicating peer dynamic concerns further, Lockhart and Ng (1995) discovered that even homogenous groups can approach feedback tasks “in unique ways, depending on their perceptions, goals, and motivations” (p. 649). They investigated peer interaction and feedback in a university-level English writing class composed of 27 dyads of Cantonese students in Hong Kong. They found that L2 abilities and the understanding of the reasons and usefulness of the task influenced student approaches to these types of activities.

Furthermore, unlike a traditional classroom setting with peer review activities that often increase student levels of discomfort, instructors can easily arrange for student
anonymity in an on-line setting. In another study, Healey (1999) noted that anonymity allowed university students to “feel freer to ask questions and give a critical response.” (p.122) Likewise, it is possible that even while using a non-anonymous, WebCT-based platform (anonymity is possible), students will feel more comfortable because of the physical separation from their peers in an on-line medium.

Still, CALL research focuses on peer discussions or teacher feedback on student writing, and little research has been conducted explicitly on peer feedback in on-line learning, especially written feedback. Finally, most CALL research does not focus on actual distance learning. Rather, the locus is typically a computer lab with IT resources that are otherwise used by traditional language classes to enhance the language learning experience. However, in recent years, true distance learning has become an increasingly common language learning option at many American universities. In addition, little of the research on CALL investigates non-English speakers. Usually the student L1 has been English (Chenoweth & Murday, 2003; Cahill & Catanzaro, 1997).

2.4 Writing in English

Writing in English adds additional pressure to the classroom. (Healey, 1999; Phinney, 1991). In a college writing class setting, language learners must often produce text while under acute time constraints. Phinney (1991) declares:

Most second language writers, especially in university English as a second language (ESL) classes, are expected to compete with native speakers eventually. Many bring to a writing class prior experience of grammar-based instruction which can lead to anxiety about correctness and thus premature editing. Many feel
that their competence in the second language is inadequate and that no matter what they do, their writing will be lacking. (p. 191)

Moreover, writing anxiety intertwines with second language writers’ focus on minutes and seconds, the temporal requirements that amplify their anxiety even further. Students are expected to produce acceptable text within uniform time parameters even though language fluency will vary from student to student (Egbert & Hanson-Smith, 1999; Hadaway, Varnell & Young, 2002). Ferris states that “Student characteristics, experience, and motivations may vary dramatically from one setting to another.” (2003, p. 93)

However, technology in the composition classroom seems to offer one way to reduce apprehension in ESL writers. One study by Phinney (1991) looked at ESL freshmen enrolled in a composition course at an American university. Although most students had Spanish L1s, there were some Asian students as well. Furthermore, they all enrolled in the course via a similar selection process as that used for ELI 100. They either tested into the course or they had previously completed a lower-level class. The writing course was also process driven much like ELI 100. In the study, one group of students learned in a traditional classroom. The other group used word processors in computer labs (for one half of their classes) to compose their assignments over a 14-week period. The group that used computers to write experienced a significant decrease in writing apprehension regarding their overall attitudes, lateness stress, blocking (inability to write), and concern for complexity of their writing. They did show an increase in editing stress. The in-class section experienced no reduced apprehension in the factors above and an increase in lateness stress. The author concluded that “using a computer to write did
reduce writing apprehension, improve attitudes, help students deal with deadlines, and enhance their perception of their ability to deal with complex material.” (Phinney, 1991, p. 199) Although this study focuses on a computer-assisted writing instruction course, a reasonable analogy might be made to an on-line writing course, which would offer even greater freedom from time constraints. No research was found that directly supported or rebuffed this idea.

Language learners also have said “that they had more time to think and elaborate while writing their weekly e-mail message; consequently, average students felt more relaxed during this activity” (Perez, 2003, p. 94). However, Perez (2003) noted that 50% of the students (N-size, 24 students) favored computer-mediated instruction and 50% of the students favored the traditional classroom approach. None of the participants disliked either technique. Clearly a definitive answer was not proffered. In another CALL study (Neu and Scarcella, 1991), the subjects viewed CALL positively, which the students felt aided both their writing and their revision process. However, another study found that students were hesitant to post responses in discussion boards as they felt compelled to create perfect prose through an on-line medium (Chen, 2003). Thus, students can see both pros and cons of CALL, but these studies addressed CALL, which is not true distance-learning such as the WebCT-based ELI 100. In one on-line distance learning study, Warschauer (2001) notes that on-line distance learning writing courses allow students more time to contemplate and formulate their written replies.

2.5 Freewriting in English

A common technique in the process writing class specifically related to decreasing anxiety associated with writing is the “freewrite.” The purpose of freewriting
in the language class is “to encourage the writer to draw out what s/he has in the mind and to write as much as possible about the topic without stopping within a certain time,” and to encourage fluency (Shirai, 1995, p.13). In addition, ELI’s writing curriculum handbook declares that “Students learn to write by writing, not through practicing grammar or sentence completion activities.” (Ford, et al., 2003, p.2) Likewise, noted L1 writing specialist Peter Elbow (1998) enthusiastically states that “The goal of freewriting is in the process, not in the product,” (p.13) and that freewriting will improve a student’s ability to write.

2.6 Synopsis

To summarize, I decided to look at several things regarding both in-class and on-line sections of an ELI 100 composition class:

A. What occurs during group work? Research strongly supports group work in the language classroom as a way to enhance the learning environment. However, a group’s composition can interfere with this enhancement. When group interaction occurs verbally, men appear to inordinately dominate discussions. Likewise, nationality and second language competency may also diminish the quality of group work. However, a research gap appears to exist regarding group interaction in on-line courses that only utilize written interaction. Most studies have focused on CALL settings and not true distance learning situations. ELI 100 is a distance learning course that utilizes writing as the primary method of group communication.

B. What are student thoughts on peer feedback activities? Research likewise strongly supports peer feedback in the second language composition classroom.
Students find it beneficial. However, it appears that students may be somewhat reluctant to critically respond to each other. Thus, one thing I would like to explore, which has only been lightly touched upon in prior research is the attitude of students when giving and receiving peer feedback in an on-line setting.

C. What are student thoughts about writing in English? Research offers strong evidence that writing produces anxiety in the second language writer. However, some evidence suggests that CALL may be able to reduce that apprehension. However, few studies have looked at the affect of true distance learning on stress reduction in the composition classroom.

D. What do students think about freewrite activities? Most research on freewriting comes from L1 classrooms. However, freewriting in the language classroom appears to be one popular method to increase student fluency and to increase their comfort level in writing in the target language. No research was discovered regarding freewriting in an on-line setting.

3. The Study

3.1 Site

Two composition courses are currently being offered in the fall of 2004 in the ELI at the University of Hawai’i at Manoa. According to its website,” The primary purpose of the ELI is to provide English instruction for international and immigrant students who have been admitted to the university and who do not speak English as a native language, in order to facilitate their academic studies” (ELI, ¶2). In ELI 100, the in-class section has 21 registered students and is taught Tuesday and Thursday from 10:30-11:45 AM in Moore Hall, an architectural icon from the 1960s that is starting to show its age. The
second-floor classroom is generally well lit and has a motley collection of refurbished desks and chairs. The on-line section has 15 registered students, but it usually has no required meeting times. Instead, students use a WebCT-based instructional platform to receive assignments and to upload their coursework. Generally, on-line assignments must be submitted to the course’s WebCT platform by 5PM on Fridays. Atypically, one on-line student currently resides off of the island of Oahu in her homeland, South Korea.

3.2 Participants

Individuals in ELI 100 are undergraduate students who have matriculated into the University of Hawai’i at Manoa. They are all non-native speakers of English who have taken an ELI placement test and usually have TOEFL scores of less than 600 on the paper-based test or less than 250 on the computer based test. The majority of them are young adults from Asian countries such as Japan, China, Taiwan, and South Korea, with a small minority coming from Scandinavia, East Timor, Samoa and elsewhere. Students have either taken ELI 73, an intermediate writing class, and then continued to ELI 100, or they have tested into ELI 100. Additionally, students had the choice of either registering for an in-class or an on-line section of the course.

For the main part of this study, four student participants were involved (two in-class and two on-line students). They had replied to a call for volunteers for the study. Each participant received a gift certificate as well as the offer of a free proofreading of a non-ELI paper by the author. In addition, all freewriter (FW) leaders and participants\(^1\) from each class were approached in regards to taking part in this study.

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\(^1\) FW leaders were individuals who selected topics, presented them to their groups, and then provided written feedback to FW respondents; participants were individuals who wrote about the FW topics.
Two ELI instructors at the University of Hawaii-Manoa were also involved in the study: one in-class ELI 100 instructor and one on-line ELI 100 instructor (the author). Additionally, the Writing Lead Teacher was interviewed.

One student participant, May (all names are pseudonyms), was a South Korean female enrolled in the in-class section of ELI 100 who was a FW leader during week seven. Participant Two, Ann, was a Taiwanese female from the in-class section, and she was a FW participant during the same week. Participant Three, Keiko, was a Japanese female enrolled in the on-line section who was a FW leader during week seven. Finally, Participant Four, Satoko, was a Japanese female from the on-line section, and she was a FW participant during the concomitant time period.

Teacher Participant One, Warren, was an American male who instructed an in-class section of ELI 100 (first semester). The Lead Writing Teacher, Edward, was an American male who has overseen the writing curriculum for almost two semesters. I myself am the teacher of the involved on-line section of ELI 100 (one semester in-class, two semesters on-line). I have also developed and taught an on-line reading class.

3.3 Time Frame

Both sections of ELI 100 were on-going during the fall 2004 semester. Specifically, this research occurred during weeks five through eight of a sixteen-week semester. The pilot study occurred during weeks five and six; the participant interviews occurred during weeks seven through eight; the classroom observation occurred during week seven. The time frames were chosen because, starting in week five, students had begun to lead and participate in freewrites as well as engage in group work.
3.4 Class Descriptions

Both sections shared the same goals and objectives (see Appendix A), and participated in similar composition activities. Both sections used *Guidelines: A Cross-Cultural Reading/Writing Text* by Ruth Spack as their textbook, and they both required students to participate in weekly freewrite (FW) activities in which students served as FW leaders and FW respondents. The FW leaders provided topics and writing prompts as well as imparted feedback to their respective group members’ submissions. Respondents had a predetermined time to freewrite about the provided topics. In the classroom, once a semester, each student served as a FW leader for one session. All other students would reply to the provided FW prompt, and the leader would have to reply to their FWs (approximately 20). On-line FW leaders would do this twice a semester, but their groups had either three or four members, and each group had their own dedicated FW discussion board. In class FW activities took approximately 20 minutes. On-line FW activities occurred during the week with no predetermined time limit beyond each week’s Friday deadline. However, students were told to write between 300 and 500 words. Finally, extensive group work occurred in both sections. Students typically discussed major course assignments (such as field research projects and research essays), and they offered feedback on each other’s written product or ideas. In class, students gathered in desk lagers; On-line they gathered in discussion boards.²

3.5 Pilot Study

As the initial step towards my study, I gathered some preliminary information through a selective interviewing process (See Appendix B for complete details). Overall, the four

² WebCT provides the teacher with the ability to create specific discussion rooms, which the students then enter to create or read postings from their group members.
things mentioned above in the Literature Review Synopsis (2.6) caught my interest
during this pilot study, which I decided to investigate in greater detail.

3.6 Research Design

For this exploratory in-class versus on-line composition class comparison, a
qualitative approach was utilized. Data sources were interviews, observations, and the
collection of writing and peer feedback samples.

My intention in conducting interviews (which varied between 10-25 minutes) was
to juxtapose individual participation in freewrite, group and peer- feedback activities with
their personal observations about those same activities. The intention for observing the
in-class participants (which lasted 1 hour and 15 minutes each) was to try to discern any
incongruous differences or verify consistency between what the interviewees reported
and what actually transpired as they completed the above listed activities. On-line
students were “observed” via my monitoring of their discussion board postings, which I
normally did throughout the course. Finally, my intention for collecting writing and peer
feedback samples was to determine if freewrite leaders actually offered their peers the
same type of feedback that they themselves held to be the most beneficial, and which
they themselves expressed a desire in receiving from their classmates.

3.7 Data gathering

I conducted several rounds of semi-structured interviewing, which had interview
protocols. Initially, I piloted my interviewing questionnaire on an experienced ELI
writing instructor and modified it to incorporate that individual’s useful insights. I
modified my interviews slightly for in-class or on-line FW leaders or participants. I used
pre- and post-task interviews. I also followed a similar procedure interview the writing teachers.

During weeks five and six, I gathered preliminary data mentioned in the pilot study. Next, I compiled the data collected during the pilot interviews to help narrow the focus of my research in the other two sections of ELI 100. For my actual exploratory study, during week seven, I observed the students from the in-class section during two concurrent classes, when they would be participating in classroom-based group work, freewrite and peer feedback activities. The on-line participants would be completing similar activities. I “observed” them by monitoring their discussion board output for the same one-week period. The in-class activities were not recorded, but students were informed that as I observed, I would be taking field notes. During the group work segment, students held equal positions with no individual serving as a leader. Finally, all individual interviews with the four students and two teachers were recorded.

The individual interviews with in-class participants occurred approximately 20 minutes prior to the start of class; on-line students were interviewed one or two days prior to their participation in the discussion-board activities. The on-line activities could occur over a five day period. Next, each participant was again interviewed upon the completion of their activities: The in-class students were interviewed within minutes of their classes’ completion, the on-line students within one or two days of the tasks’ completion. Then, prior to the subsequent classroom meetings or discussion postings, copies of participant freewrites and the concomitant FW leader feedback (three from the in-class section, two from the on-line section) were collected (See Appendix C). Additionally, the FW leaders were interviewed prior to their rendering of the freewrites and feedback to the respective
students. Then, the aforementioned FW participants were interviewed after they had received their FWs with the dispensed feedback. This occurred immediately after the conclusion of the in-class section or within two days of the FW return for the on-line section.

I next interviewed the in-class teacher upon completion of the initial classroom observation (Week seven). I am the only on-line ELI 100 teacher. Moreover, I e-mail interviewed the ELI lead writing teacher. Finally, select students and teachers were contacted via e-mail with any final questions during weeks eight and thirteen if I had to clarify anything that they had previously communicated to me.

4. Findings:

4.1 Group Work

4.1.1 Comfort Levels When asked about their comfort levels during group work, both in-class participants felt that their classmates were very understanding and tolerant as they became more comfortable communicating in spoken English. May said, “I think ELI class students are more kind and understanding to each other so when you talk about something you don’t really feel embarrassed we understand each other’s responses somehow. They don’t want to make me embarrassed and we can just talk.” This appeared to be the opposite of their experiences in non-ELI UH classes, where native speakers dominated group work based on both their language mastery and an American proclivity towards expressing opinions. May asserted that “Americans love to strongly say their opinions and use too many idioms. In addition, Warren, the in-class teacher felt that students seemed to adopt a team-spirited “Get through the course” mentality, which dissipated any interactional issues that could have arisen amongst them due to their
diverse backgrounds and L2 levels. ” Conversely, unlike their in-class counterparts, neither on-line student mentioned benefits from working collaboratively with their classmates. In fact, Keiko expressed her view that discussion board group work was more serious than her in-class courses, which she did not care for. She could not say why she felt this way.

4.1.2 Participation For the on-line ELI participants, they felt that discussion board group work allowed them greater opportunities to reflect on what they wanted to say before they posted responses. Keiko observed: “On-line is better. Before I am kind of afraid or nervous to talk with local people since my English pronunciation is kind of Japanese and I rarely talked and I thought other people might laugh about my pronunciation, so even when I want to say my opinions I just afraid to talk in front of everyone, so I just be quiet and didn’t say anything. So even though I really want to participate I just didn’t say anything but when I took the on-line course I don’t have to speak up, I just type it out so you know I can say whatever I thought you know my opinions and you know on-line course makes me to have confidence so after I took the on-line courses, I don’t afraid to talk to local people.” This remark is consistent with my classroom observations. I noticed several students (neither May nor Ann among them) passively and silently engaged in group discourse. I think for some L2 learners, an on-line course may be a conduit to greater self-confidence in the use of the target language.

4.1.3 Pressure May explicitly stated that she preferred group work to all other in-class activities. She seemed to feel no pressure from working in groups and thought this activity allowed her to meet her classmates. Ann also found group work to be enjoyable as it reduced her level of boredom. However, the nature of asynchronous postings seemed
to create other pressures for on-line students. For example, in the classroom, only attending students participated in the group tasks, but on-line, there were no immediacy issues regarding attendance as the group tasks were spread out through the week. However, if an activity required everyone to participate (by posting replies to their discussion board), the group suddenly was placed at the mercy of any procrastinating member who did not become involved in a timely manner. Students overcame this obstacle in different ways. Keiko noted, “Sometimes easy to type it out what I am thinking compared to in class, but the one disadvantage is other students can’t do the assignment on time and we can’t communicate on time. I can’t do assignment what the teacher wants if they do not do their work.” Then, she would contact them via e-mail or the discussion board. One posting, was as follows: “Do you guys check my message?? I posted my message weekend about today.” She found these situations to be quite frustrating: “one disadvantage is other students can’t do the assignment on time and we can’t communicate on time…I can’t do assignment what the teacher wants if they do not do their work.” Satoko said “I ignore the other group members if they do not reply and I have to complete the assignment, and ‘I didn’t pay too much attention to [group work].’” Conversely, diligent students felt the added pressure of not letting down the group, which forced them to budget their time and complete the postings by the scheduled due dates. Still, I wonder about on-line students not having to meet group members in person and thus finding it easier to let classmates down in an on-line setting. I seldom observed in-class students who failed to complete an activity on time if they knew that their classmates would need their work to complete a task.
4.1.4 Management During my first classroom observation, I noticed that even an observant instructor such as Warren is unable to monitor everything that occurs in the classroom. For one task in the lesson I observed, students were to pilot questionnaires that they were to bring to class. Two individuals (out of 20) had forgotten to create them. This did not hinder their classmates from completing the task of piloting their own study, but the two offending individuals were unable to participate in the activity. Instead they seemed to use the time evading the teacher’s watchful gaze. Plus, two other students seemed to be monopolizing Warren’s time so that he was unable to move around the classroom. Because of the classroom conditions, this in-class teacher might not be able to fully monitor all 21 students to see if they are on task. The course took place in a noisy, crowded room, and it would be difficult to ascertain if individuals or groups far from the teacher were on task. Conversely, in an on-line setting, the teacher does not have to be everywhere at once. For example, I can open up each group’s discussion room at different times and still determine if and how much students are actively participating and completing assigned activities. Then, I am able to contact students prior to the due dates for assignments to motivate them into participating. I know students commented that they became frustrated with group member procrastination, but I would contact the non-participatory offenders as well as deduct points for their unresponsive performances.

4.1.5 Immediacy In the classroom section, students were assigned to groups by the teacher through a count-off system, which appeared quite familiar to them, but it should be noted that Ann did not care for this system as she preferred to remain in the same group during the semester instead of always relying on random assignments. This is consistent with prior research on group assignments in language classrooms (Arndt, 1993;
Ferris, 2003). The group task during the second observation was to share their thoughts on the progress of their individual field research papers. Warren provided an overhead slide with discussion questions. Several students seemed confused by the assignment, but Warren was immediately able to explain everything quite satisfactorily. This exemplifies one temporal advantage of in-class learning over asynchronous courses. Every week, I receive five or six requests for clarification from students regarding assignment requirements, but my students have to patiently wait for me to respond to their e-mail requests for information, which can take up to 24 hours. In-class students can get immediate clarification. However, one similarity between the two settings is that information dissemination can occur to all students. In the classroom, if a student asks a question, the teacher can respond to the entire room. On-line, a teacher can e-mail the entire group if the occasion warrants it.

4.1.6 Complaints I have noticed (during this and previous semesters as an on-line teacher) that on-line students often complained to each other about how busy they were (overall at school) on the discussion boards. They almost appeared to be in a game of one-upping each other regarding their overwhelming schedules. Neither Warren nor I have ever noticed this in the classroom before. Keiko actually mentioned this issue in her interview as well. Satoko once posted this: “I'm sorry for bothering you, but I have a lot of work from other classes so I don't have much free time.” I would think that this behavior diminishes the quality of group interaction on-line.

4.1.7 Task Completion In the classroom, I observed that most assigned groups immediately formed into smaller subgroups. In the first original group, one male and one female quietly conversed amongst themselves while the other three female members
worked individually. Group two was very gregarious, but they also were often off task. The two males seldom focused on the assigned task. One female, was often disengaged from the group work as well—by choice—except when the teacher would enter the group discussions. Two other members (females) paired up and initially stayed on task, but then they too were interrupted by the men’s distracting behavior. Eventually, it actually spread to group three, when their members noticed group two’s activities. This type of behavior, while not on task, might be important to overall group satisfaction in the classroom.

Regarding group experiences in ELI classes, Edward, the lead writing teacher for the ELI, expressed concern for the abilities of on-line students “to engage in writing as a social activity,” which is one goal of both the in-class and on-line sections of ELI 100. He specifically pointed out:

One important motivation for including group work in an ELI writing course is to allow students to co-create knowledge in the social-learning sense by sharing their ideas and opinions and wisdom with their peers. Of course, some students do not learn well in groups, and we have to keep that in mind when deciding what kind of group work to do and how frequently to do it. (E-mail communication, 2004)

He might be right in that on-line students might not be able to reach the same level of engagement as their in-class counterparts. During this study (and in my previous experience as an on-line writing teacher), I have never observed on-line academic discussion board postings that veered off task to attend to any social matter. Students always posted only matters relevant to the assigned task. This is a good thing in that the group stays focused on the completion of an assignment. Nevertheless, it is possible that on-line learning creates an instant aura of formality, which might minimize enjoyment in
the class, and impact students’ motivation to participate in on-line activities or to write in English. The in-class students really appeared eager to participate in Warren’s class. On the other hand, although Keiko appeared enthusiastic about on-line work, I have seldom felt that most on-line students looked forward to completing assignments or discussion board activities.

4.1.8 Participation During the classroom observation mentioned above, I noticed that the third group (all female) intently focused on the overhead guidelines, but this group was dominated by two “alpha” members (one participant was May). They appeared to monopolize the dialog with the other three members passively listening and nodding in agreement. Finally, the fourth group (all female) generally separated into two dyads. The first dyad engagingly focused on the assigned task (one participant was Ann). The other dyad appeared quite taciturn. Eventually, the gregarious Ann tried to engage the other members in her conversation, but she seemed to quickly tire as her attempts were rebuffed. When I asked her about this, she replied “I will usually ask them [quiet group members] what do you think? Then, if they are quiet, I ignore them.” In the classroom, group members can superficially participate by signaling through body language such as smiles or nods of the head without actually offering any L2 production. Conversely, if an on-line student does not write, nothing will be registered in the discussion room, and I would then contact the student regarding their “failure to communicate.” Therefore, if they want to be credited for participating in a mandatory activity, they must communicate in English, so that I am able to see their postings.
4.2 Peer Feedback

Peer feedback was commended by all participants as a useful writing strategy. Students got to know their classmates through this activity, and they gained a greater appreciation of their own writing by comparing it to their peers’ writing samples. One in-class student, Ann, mentioned that “My classmates and I get to know more about each other.” An on-line student, Satoko, said “I can share what is interesting and find out what others opinions on it.” However, all participants seemed to want more specific (including negative) feedback that could improve their writing skills, but they would actually offer only positive feedback. According to Satoko, “you know a lot of times when your classmates give you feedback, it’s only good parts, but any negative is important as it makes you improve and I would be happy to get it.” Overall, neither in-class nor on-line sections held any advantage over the other in regards to providing venues for useful peer feedback, but it is possible that in-class students may feel more comfortable providing honest feedback than their on-line counterparts. Although the two in-class participants did not directly address this issue, May mentioned that students were used to giving their actual opinions at UH as they “are used to the proceedings.” She went on to clarify that international students knew that this behavior was what was expected of them at an American university. Satoko, an on-line student, mentioned, “I think in class it would be easier [to give negative feedback] because I would know the person more and we could get more familiar to each other…we can talk more.” I had anticipated that the reverse would be true due to the spatial separation of the on-line students compared to the face-to-face nature of in-class feedback activities, but it appears that students might be more comfortable providing negative feedback to people with whom they have personal
relationships with than to remote individuals with whom they have little established rapport.

4.3 Writing in English

Differences between in-class and on-line writing assignments that I had assumed to be true never materialized during my data collection. I thought that in-class writing assignments had to place greater pressure on students than on-line ones because papers were timed and had to be completed in class. Also, I thought a familiar in-class teacher would instill strong loyalty, so students would feel added pressure not to let down their instructor in contrast to an on-line, more impersonal distance teacher. Instead, the reverse might actually be true. In-class students knew that they would only be doing many assignments for the set class time, and when class was finished, the assignment was finished. However, on-line students felt the weight of too much time on their keyboards. Satoko suggested “on-line are in a way it is easier you can spend as much time as you want to even write a page but at the same time it is harder to manage the time. You go to class, and then you are finished with the things in class.” They felt that they needed to put more time into assignments, and that there were higher expectations for a finished on-line product. Satoko said, “I think on-line is more formal than classroom.” Looking at the gathered writing samples also supports her belief (see 4.6 Freewriting below for a more detailed discussion). Also, only the on-line students mentioned the advantages of using their computers to compose as they always had spell check and multiple thesauruses and dictionaries at hand, which implies a greater concern for a more finished written product.
4.4 Freewriting

All student participants also praised the benefits of freewriting. They could see how it developed their writing skills and prepared them for the rigors of college writing. However, their opinions varied over the topic selection. Ann mentioned that as a G1.5 student “International student topic is kind of difficult for me.” One participant felt that all the topics were relevant and interesting, and another thought that forced topics were a typical university phenomenon that needed to be practiced, the other two felt that they should have been allowed to choose their own topics. Satoko felt “Sometimes with boring material, what should I write about is difficult, but still good experience as in class [non-ELI classes] you can’t always choose what to write about.” She believed that freewrites prepared her for college assignments, which seemed to correlate to the in-class teacher’s view that FWs assisted students in future writing endeavors at UH.

Continuing, their opinions varied over the fulfillment of the FW leader duties. Whereas one participant loved being able to see what others thought of her topic choice, Ann felt nervous trying to do the teacher’s job. “I feel like I am a teacher, and tiring, I have to read 20 papers.” In addition, the in-class students’ writing time never seemed to be maximized. From my observations, either they did not have enough time to write about FW topics of interest to them, or they had too much time because they felt dispassionate about a topic. Plus, I asked May, the in-class FW leader, about the students’ reactions to how much time they had. She laughed and noted that “It is too short but only we have ten to 15 minutes in writing, but it kind of went too short for some people.”

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3 G1.5 students are non-native speakers of English who have graduated from an English-speaking high school, or have completed two or more years at an English-speaking university.
Thus, in-class students might finish writing early and sit fidgeting in their chairs until the timed activity was complete. On the other hand, on-line freewrites allowed the participants a four-day period to complete the assignment at their own pace.

Moreover, although, both sections were told that neither grammar nor any particular writing style mattered during freewrites, an unexpected difference between in-class and on-line freewrites was discovered. The in-class writing samples and associated FW leader responses typically reflected a more casual style of writing than the on-line samples. Each in-class writing sample used contractions (i.e. “don’t” for “do not”), casual abbreviations (i.e. “b/c” for “because,” and “int’l” for “international”), and two of the three samples had three misspelled words each (i.e. “ocurse” for “course”). The on-line writing samples had no casual abbreviations or misspelled words, and only one of the three samples had contractions. This is despite the fact that on-line freewrites usually had twice as many words per freewrite as the in-class ones. This corresponds to one on-line student’s comment that she felt on-line writing was more formal than in-class writing.

However, it must be noted that both FW leaders used contractions in their feedback replies, and the on-line leader’s replies were rife with misspelled words. Finally, from my observations, in-class students appeared to care more about either the length or content of their neighbors’ freewrites. They could be seen discreetly glancing at the end product of those sitting next to them. On-line students, who easily could look at all of their classmates’ postings, did not seem to care about others’ freewrites. Satoko stated “I don’t look at others’ FWs. Not important.” It is probable that in-class students sit next to their friends and are inclined to see if there is consensus on the chosen topic. On-line students seldom become acquainted with one another beyond the WebCT domain.
4.5 Teacher Reaction

In-class teachers can more smoothly react and adapt assignments in real time. The in-class teacher observed how one student veered off task slightly, but the student’s idea had merit, so the teacher was able to share that idea with the entire class, which seemed to make the activity more rewarding to the students. As an on-line teacher, I am not monitoring the course 24 hours a day (although it sure seems like it sometimes) and students may not log in to the course for three days, so any altering of group work usually needs at least a one-week time period so that information can disseminate to the entire class. Moreover, in-class teachers can effortlessly wrap up one activity and segue easily into the next task. This allows students to receive closure on a task and prepare to complete the next assignment. I think that this clarifies things for student participants. However, on-line assignments are all released on one day and due on another day during a one-week time span. Students attack the various tasks at their leisure.

4.6 Community

In spite of my best attempts to build an on-line community of learners through various activities throughout the semester, students seldom establish much more than superficial links to each other during group and peer activities. Also, although I met students during the second week to establish some unanimity with them, and although I sent out frequent e-mails to let them know I was easily available for face-to-face conferences, I truly have never developed the same close relationship with any of my on-line classes as I have had with my previous in-class sections. In fact, I am often nervous that I will walk right by my students without recognizing them as I often only meet them two or three times a semester. Conversely, the warmth and comfort level felt by the observed, in-class teacher
and his 21 students was clearly evident. They seemed truly uninhibited in asking him any question about their writing assignments, the English language, or any other topic. My on-line students, on the other hand, usually appear quite apologetic (again, very formal) when they needed to send me an e-mail or knock on my door to discuss something in spite of my repeated assurances that they could e-mail me or stop by my office as often as they liked or needed. This may be attributed to some semi-unconscious practice of sounding more formal as I write e-mail replies instead of using the disarming humor that I normally wielded in the classroom. My students could simply be mirroring me!

However, in a follow-up e-mail, I asked Keiko about her thoughts on formality in our course and communicative interactions, and she said, “I think my e-mail to you sometimes formal than met face-to-face probably because I usually send you e-mail in order to ask you something such as "my favor." Other than that I think I e-mail you same as we talk face-to-face.” Satoko stated, “When you communicate with students by e-mail you are very casual. Which makes easier for students to ask you more questions and easier to talk to. I also think your e-mail is not as formal as when we meet face.”

Likewise, in a follow-up e-mail to Warren, the in-class teacher, he mentioned a similar viewpoint: “I get a wide variety of email from my 100 students. Most of them I would rate at about the same level of formality as the language they use with me in the class.”

Thus, it may be the writing in an on-line setting that creates a more formal writing mentality in the students, and not e-mail interactions with me.

5 Conclusion

First, my findings on group work correspond with the prevailing literature (Diaz-Rico, 2004; Kelm, 1996) It has a place in both the classroom and on-line. Cultural
differences within groups do not appear to be an issue, and the students’ desire to express themselves and share their opinions overrides any possible concerns that teachers might have about the newness of group activities to their international students. Secondly, ELI classes seem to be good greenhouses that provide a nurturing and encouraging climate for language learners to grow stronger and more confident in their English speaking abilities, ideas supported by Dornyei’s earlier comments (2001). Most importantly, these classes allow them to prepare for the challenges at an American university. Finally, both in-class and on-line teachers must be more cognizant of full compliance by the respective members of a group in completing assigned tasks. In the classroom, more manageable student-to-teacher ratios are needed. Also, on-line teachers must provide more explicit guidelines for discussion board participation and distinctly explain the negative ripple effect that occurs when some group members fail to comply with discussion board assignments.

Additionally, on-line teachers must continue to bring down the distance barrier and encourage more student to student interaction. On-line learning may provide more equitable communicative opportunities for reticent students (Hanson-Smith, 1999), but they seem more willing to offer feedback to people when they have some connection with them beyond being registered in the same course. It appears that peer feedback is more meaningful to students when they have more affinity towards each other.

Continuing, since it appears that students exert greater effort completing writing assignments and write more formally for the on-line section (as suggested by Chen, 2003), this approach might actually prepare them more effectively for their future academic writing assignments at UH. However, the time-pressure associated with the
classroom section might better prepare them for timed essays in college. Therefore, a composition course that utilizes both in-class and on-line aspects might be beneficial.

Freewrite assignments also appear to have their place in both ELI 100 settings. However, due to the varied opinions on FW topics, a negotiated arrangement with the students might be necessary. Perhaps, students could narrow down the FW choices to several broad categories that FW leaders could then select their topics from. In addition, if the actual purpose of FW activities is to encourage written fluency and confidence (see Elbow, 1998), then perhaps more time should be dedicated to actually responding to the prompts. If students are passionately engaged in writing about a topic, then perhaps additional time could be dedicated to the assignment instead of an artificial cut off time. Conversely, if effective freewrites have time limits, on-line FWs should incorporate maximum timeframes for the task completion. This can easily be accomplished via the WebCT-based platform. Finally, the number of papers that a FW leader has to collect and reply to should be limited. The in-class leader had to reply to 20 papers, and offered only brief comments averaging 26 words in length. The on-line leader had to reply to three papers and offered extended replies averaging 108 words in length. As mentioned by the in-class teacher Warren, “I hope they [FW Leaders, author] will begin to have a dialog with the writer.” If this goal is to be more fully achieved, I think that FW leaders need to receive and respond to manageable numbers of papers.
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An Introduction to Teaching Writing in the English Language Institute.

Honolulu, HI: ELI Handout.


### Appendix A

**ELI 100 Goals and Objectives**

*Drafted by Steven Talmy  
*Version 1.5  
*June 2003*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>1. Students will develop academic L2 English writing abilities.</th>
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<td>Students will write summaries, reviews, reaction/critiques and a research paper that incorporates secondary sources.</td>
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<td>Students will effectively approach, plan, and write a timed essay exam.</td>
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<td>Students will identify the writing situation in terms of topic, audience, and purpose.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Students will use the writing process (invention, composing, revision, editing, proofreading) and apply it to the writing situation.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Students will use register, style, and voice appropriate to the writing situation.</td>
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<td>Students will improve clarity of expression.</td>
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<td>Students will have opportunities to collaborate with peers in order to generate ideas and receive peer feedback on drafts of their writing.</td>
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<td>Students will develop criteria for what constitutes good or effective academic writing.</td>
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<td>Students will learn to interpret instructors’ expectations for writing assignments.</td>
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<th>2. Students will learn that academic writing is a social as well as a personal endeavor.</th>
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<td>Students will develop awareness that academic writing is extremely diverse; conventions or forms of writing that are “appropriate” in one field may not be in another.</td>
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<td>Students will learn that particular textual, rhetorical, and discursive conventions associated with various kinds of academic writing are not universal or absolute, but are social constructions that are valued by and within particular academic communities.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Students will develop awareness about the ways they can position themselves in their discourse (e.g., as competent members of an academic community) by analyzing and practicing how to use particular textual, rhetorical, and discursive conventions associated with various kinds of academic writing.</td>
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<td>Students will use basic textual conventions such as double-spacing, margins, titles, etc.</td>
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<th>3. Students will develop confidence in their ability to write academic L2 English.</th>
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<td>Students will demystify common misconceptions about academic writing.</td>
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<td>Students will learn that every writing task is manageable.</td>
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| 4. Students will learn how they can continue to improve their academic L2 English writing after completing the course. |  |
Students will recognize their strengths and their needs for improvement in academic L2 English writing.
Students will be able to formulate a plan for continuing to improve their academic L2 English writing.

5. **Students will learn about plagiarism, what the consequences of it are, and how to avoid it.**

   Students will identify plagiarism and understand why it is an unacceptable practice in US universities.
   Students will articulate the consequences of plagiarism at UH (through the Student Conduct Code).
   Students will practice how to avoid plagiarism by using direct quotes, paraphrases, and summaries, with appropriate referencing.
   Students will become familiar with at least one citation style (e.g., MLA, APA, Chicago).

6. **Students will learn of some of the research resources available at the University of Hawai‘i.**

   Students will become familiar with the collections housed at Hamilton Library, Sinclair Library, and the Wong AV Center.
   Students will use Voyager.
   Students will use the internet to find source material.
   Students will evaluate the quality and trustworthiness of internet source material.
   Students will use electronic indexes and databases.

7. **Students will develop accuracy in written L2 English grammar.**

   Students will receive instruction and feedback on grammar in the context of their assignments.

8. **Students will develop L2 English vocabulary.**

   Students will develop vocabulary in the context of their assignments through the use of vocabulary notebooks, logs, or other means, as the teacher and/or students deem necessary.

**Outcome:** Per the UH system-wide requirements for ENG 100 and ELI 100, students are expected to produce 5000 words of completed (revised) writing.

**ELI 100 Course Description**
Drafted by Steven Talmy May 2003
Revised by Mark Messer (with input from
Kenton Harsch and Priscilla Faucette)
Version 3 March 2004

Course Description
ELI 100 is designed for undergraduate students at the University of Hawai‘i at Manoa who need to develop their academic writing abilities in English as an additional language. It is equivalent to ENG 100. Students in this course will compose several common academic forms of writing, develop clarity of written expression, and improve command over textual, rhetorical, and discursive conventions common in academic writing. Students will apply the different tasks that are associated with the writing process to various writing situations. By the end of this course, students should be prepared for independent academic writing at the undergraduate level.
Appendix B

Pilot Study

Initially, I interviewed two students from a different in-class section of an ELI 100 course, which was concurrently offered in the fall 2004 semester at UH. I also interviewed their ELI instructor. These three individuals have no involvement with the two other targeted ELI 100 sections. Additionally, I also interviewed one student from the on-line section involved in the study. She was the lone respondent from one freewrite circle (on-line class) who responded to my request for assistance regarding this research (of four students contacted). This FW group (one of four) was not approached to participate in the subsequent part of the research. The other on-line students were not approached for these preliminary studies nor were students in the targeted in-class section.

Overall four things caught my interest during the pilot study, which I decided to investigate in greater detail: Small group interactions, peer feedback, writing in English, and participating in freewrite activities. Note: P=Pilot study participants

A. Small group interactions: All three students mentioned the new experience of working in small groups at UH and their ELI 100 class. The first student that I interviewed, a 22-year-old Norwegian female, Agnes, stated that small group discussions and peer feedback activities were not typically done at either high school or college in Norway. She seemed ambivalent towards group work. She mentioned “I don’t really care what my classmates think, but we usually have to do group, but that’s OK.” The second student, Lee, a 21-year-old Taiwanese male also claimed that small group activities were a new experience to him. Additionally, he pointed out that generally group discussions and peer feedback
activities varied greatly depending on the gender or national makeup of the group. He concluded that Japanese and Indonesian students needed more explicit instructions than other nationalities. He also believed that if a group consisted only of male members, that the group would feel looser and be less focused. Conversely, he felt that if the groups were mixed (males and females), that males would be less prone to conviviality and tend more towards focusing on trying to impress the females with their knowledge. However, he claimed that the females in the groups were usually introverted. Continuing, he believed that this type of group work had greater meaning than back in his homeland Taiwan, that it offered a chance to practice communication in English, and that the activities seemed more relevant to the real world. The third student, Hiroko, an approximately 20-year-old Japanese female, talked extensively about group work in her on-line class. She mentioned that in Japan students seldom worked in groups, and that the topics were more serious here. She also felt an increase in her stress levels when students had to work collaboratively to complete group papers. She stated that when she had to participate in a collaborative paper during weeks two and three, other group members sometimes failed to promptly reply to her e-mails and discussion board postings. However, she found it interesting to read her classmates’ opinions about selected topics on the discussion boards. Additionally, this type of activity made her feel more confident in her own writing abilities as her classmates could understand her postings. One additional note, although Hiroko’s class is on-line, she met the other group members in person during third week to facilitate the completion of their group paper. Finally, the one teacher,
Mary, interviewed an approximately 25-year old female native speaker of English, mentioned that group work often involved individual differences and suggested that gender played a role in group dynamics in the language classroom.

B. Feedback: Agnes felt that the teacher thought of students as kindergarten students because of the nature of her feedback using expressions like “Wow!” on her paper, and she felt no need to interact with her classmates nor did she appreciate peer feedback activities. Lee found peer feedback to be quite constructive on occasion but then too vague and less than useful at other times. Hiroko enjoyed interacting with her classmates on-line during peer feedback activities. When she provided peer feedback, she wanted her feedback to be kind because she was not an English teacher. Concluding, the teacher, Mary, mentioned that group work is taken for granted as an integral component of the writing classroom. Moreover, she felt that students benefited from multiple readers with each offering their own unique perspective. She modeled peer feedback activities using an article not written by any of the students, so there would be no risk involved with the initial feedback activity. She stated that student involvement in the feedback activities varied with some students taking the process quite seriously while others appeared indifferent. Also, she felt that students became anxious about sharing their writing, especially drafts, and it was intimidating to get feedback, especially negative feedback. She mentioned that students seemed concerned with hurting each other’s feelings when they participate in feedback activities.
C. **Writing in English**: Agnes asserted that she felt increasing stress levels as assignment due dates approached. It seemed quite overwhelming to her at times to complete writing assignments in English. However, Lee felt quite at ease writing in English and stated that he expressed himself more comfortably in English than in his native language Mandarin. He could be more direct in English, a style that he preferred. Hiroko believed that on-line writing was more formal than classroom writing, but she could not elaborate on that issue. She did enjoy writing letters and e-mails as well as participating in on-line chat room discussions in English. Conversely, she thought about grammatical mistakes and her limited vocabulary as she wrote in English. Moreover, in her other college course, she expressed concern for the length of time it took her to write compared to native speakers. Finally, Mary discussed L2 learners’ previous writing classes as being quite demoralizing to their confidence because of teacher insensitivity when providing feedback. Previous instructors typically accentuated the negatives such as grammatical errors instead of positives such as analytical thinking.

Things to explore:

D. **Freewrites (FW)**: Agnes claimed that, as a chemistry major, she felt a need to have the right answers to assignments. Typical chemistry writing tasks include lab reports and summaries of findings. Thus, she did not enjoy the unstructured nature of freewrites activities. However, Lee believed that freewrites helped him to better prepare for his homework assignments. He was initially skeptical of their usefulness, but after applying the technique in class, he became an ardent believer in their applicability. Hiroko mentioned that she liked the freedom associated with
freewrites and that she did not have to worry about grammar or spelling mistakes. Plus, she mentioned that it was interesting to see what her classmates had to say about the chosen topics. She said it helped her become more confident in her own writing skills. However, when she served as the FW leader, she felt anxious with regard to the topic selection, which was almost totally within her control. She wanted to select a topic that was interesting. Finally, Mary believed that students struggled when writing about varied topics and held no confidence in their writing.
Appendix C

Three In-class Student Freewrite Samples and Freewrite Leader Feedback

Prompt: In-class FW Leaders are expected to provide a topic suitable for all the students in class: What difficulties have you experienced as an international student?

Freewrite leaders were told to collect the papers and take some time to write their feedback as they only had be the FW leader once during the semester. They offered feedback on approximately 20 freewrites. They were to think carefully and write a response. No recommended lengths were given.

Note: all handwritten freewrites were copied as written.

**P2 In-class Freewrite One: 148 words**
Well...Before I came to Hawaii, I studied in Japan for four years. I am pretty much used to adjust in a new place. So far, in Hawaii, I don’t have any big difficulty. However, when I first went to Japan to study I had a really hard time. As you know, I went to an international school in Okinawa, and I didn’t know any English nor Japanese. I think the most difficulty is that I didn’t have any friend. And it was difficult to make friends when you don’t know their language. originally, I am not a shy person, But without knowing the language, I could not express my thoughts or my feelings well. When you can’t communicate people well, it is hard to make friends. Also, the school works were hard for me. I couldn’t do my HW or project w/o spending long time or helps from others.

**P1 Feedback for above FW: 44 words**
It must have been a challenge for you! Reading your comments I remember having problems in speaking English. When I was 10, I stayed in England for 2 years and at first, I spoke Korean accidentally in front of my classmates. It was embarrassing.

**In-Class Extra Freewrite Two: 175 words**
Living as an international student in US has some difficulties. First thing is getting job. An int’l student in US cannot get a job basically unless the class requires. And if we can get, it’s limits on on-campus. Also the process to get on-campus job is not easy. First we need to go to int’l student service center and request a letter for social security number. few days later, when we get letter, we should go to SSN office and make a request docs. Then few weeks later, SSN’s mailed. It’s a kind of irritating way to get a job.

Second thing is about friends. It’s really not easy to make “US” friends not same int’l friends. Third one is about language. Of course we’re not a native person in here. it’s not strange that we cannot speak English as good as natives. But sometimes it makes us depressed or shame. Fourth one is about culture shock. Again, we’re not a native, we should face lots of differences between out of original count and US.
P1 Feedback for above FW: 25 words
I think I told you about getting job and I was really frustrated about the process too. Also, making friends is hard for me too.

In-Class Extra Freewrite Three: 187 words
I came here in 2001. In Korea I was a freshman in high school. I really really didn’t want to leave. Well, in Korea as you know an education is not good I mean the system is not good as America or other countries such as England, Germany, Australia, etc It’s really hard to go to college, and also even though we graduate from a top college, it’s hard to get a job. Most people want to immigrate to other countries b/c of Korea’s education system. That’s the reason I come here. I wanted to get a better education, and also wanted to learn English.

Well, first 3 months, after I moved here, it was such a sad, depressed, and difficult life. I always cried when I got home from school. I missed my family, friends, and Korea. it’s good that I had some really kind and friendly friends. They helped me a lot. It was difficult to understand about my classes, but they let me to copy notes, etc. I think the hardest thing was to adapt to a new and totally different environments from Korea.

P1 Feedback for above FW: 30 words
It’s hard for me to adopt to new surroundings too. I think I often complain about it to you. I hoe I could adapt more easily, but it seems hard.

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Three On-line Student Freewrite Samples and Freewrite Leader Feedback

Prompt: On-line FW Leaders are expected to post a short article as well as three FW prompts.
Date: Sunday, September 26, 2004 10:24pm
FREEWRITE WEEK 6: Japan’s Whale Research: What’s it all about?
Instruction
*Look at the freewrite material below, Japan’s Whale Research: What’s it all about?
*Write a 300-500 word essay based upon the supplied freewrite prompt and submit it Lightning discussion board.

The address of our material: http://www.icrwhale.org/WhatsResearchAbout.htm

QUESTIONS
*Do you agree with whaling, or Japan’s scientific research whaling?
*Are whales special being for you, or your culture?
*Do you think catching abundant whales, like Minke whales, is acceptable morally?
*Any other related topics
SUMMARY
Scientific research is an essential part of the conservation and management of all marine resources, including whales. Since Japan established a scientific whale research, they have been trying to identify whale stocks, estimate abundance and population structure, reproductive data and general health data, etc. Then, they found that there is a large and increasing number of young Minke whales. Also, they found Minke whales consume up to six times fish resources than human consumption. The competition between whales and fishery actually does exist.

Freewrite leaders are given these instructions regarding FW feedback: “You will read the posted articles and give appropriate feedback to each classmate.” No recommended lengths were given.

Note: all on-line FW postings were copied and pasted.

P4 In-class Freewrite One: 304 words
I do not believe that whaling is morally acceptable but in order for human beings to consume enough food resources, I would have to accept whaling as part of our lives survival. Comparing to the crops in the field, marine food resources are abundant but what if one day it comes the time of extinct for marine productivity. Whaling is the only solution or probably the most effective way for us to save our resources. We would not want to worry later. I mean they feed six times more than us, that's pretty amazing and that is a lot for us to loose. There may be many fishes but if the whale take away so many of them we would have hard time looking for them. If we have hard time we would start depending on the crops. If we do depend on crops it will eventually run out. But before it runs out, probably the government will propose a law to limit our consumption. We would starve until they find the fishes. I'm probably exaggerating but probably in the long run if we do not do anything about overpopulated whale, you never know. I would not want that to happen. I would feel sorry for the whales since we are all living things trying to live our life. But we are all so competitors, we must fight for our resources for us to live too. Before I was against whaling since I thought that whales are decreasing but now that I know that it's overpopulated we must do something about it before it leads to something worse. We all need food and food resources are not abundant, it could disappear so easily that we must sacred them. We can not take any advantages, so we must make a right decision and act on it.

P3 Feedback for above FW: 119 words
You got what I tried to tell you guys through the article. We have to do something as soon as possible, because the balance of nature is already unstable. As you read some whales are quite abundant. But, actually, because of these whales some whales have difficulty to get enough food, for example Blue whale that is biggest whale. It is true that there are competition not only between whale and human being but also between whales.
So, that means whaling would be able to save whale. As food resource is not infinite, we must find out any way to get natural resource continually. Whaling might be able to be one solution. That's why Japan is doing research whaling

**On-line Extra Freewrite Two: 419 words**

What is more important? Human being or whales? That is no doubt. When I read this article, it was really a shock to me. I have never thought that whales can threaten human being’s existence. I have been always thinking that whales are the animals which people have to protect them to prevent their extinction. However the whales that I thought human’s best friends are no more friends of us.

According to the article, “whales consume some 500 million tones of fish resources per year (up to six times total human consumption). The bulk of this is consumed by non-endangered whale species”. The study found that they consume six times more than human. Then, why do people should think about whales? They are threatening people’s lives. There are millions of people, who do not have something to eat at all, and suffering from starve, but whales are eating fully from under the ocean. Is it making sense? No! People do not need to think about it. Everybody knows humans are far worth than whales. Then what can people do to protect people’s lives? The answer is really simple. We have to capture the whales which eat a lot of fishery resources, and non-endangered. From the whales, we can get a lot of things to use. We can use their skins for bags, their meats for foods, their bodies for oils, and their tendons for tennis racquets also. People do not need to feel sorry for them, because they are just animals that is same with pigs, cows, or chickens. Furthermore they are consuming people’s food. Somebody might say that killing whales is slaughter, and they have precious life same as us. However we have no more choice. If we did not take off them from fishery resources, we will be in danger due to lack of food.

There is no time to think about what is right, and what is wrong. People tend to think that whales are very friendly, and they are not harmful for human. Furthermore people sometimes go to trip to see some whales. However now we all know that some whales are harmful for human and there are really a lot of harmful whales for human. We have to distinguish the kinds of whale, and we have to protect ourselves. There are not a lot of food for us, and the population of the world is getting higher and higher. The most important thing among the world is human being. There is no doubt.

**P3 Feedback for above FW: 107 words**

You don't have to be get languishing about whaling. the worth of human being and whales is indistinguishable. It might be same. Originally, nature balance was working right. The cause that it was collapsed was human being. We overtook whale and fish. They are rather victims than harmfull to us. Then some abandant whales seem like "harmfull" not only for us but also for other endangered whales. There actually are some competition between whales and human being, and also between whales. That's too ironic. Now, whaling is being focused on as one solution that could solve this problem. We have to reap the harvest of our fault.
On-line Extra Freewrite Three: 274 words

First, I am one of those extreme humanists. I do not have that much pity for the animal nor consider the killing whale as moral issue. Many people make this issue as the moral issue because of the various backgrounds that peoples posses. However, I do not believe in such fact that human being could be judged as moral or immoral act. Moreover, who judge whom? It is just non-sense. I really want to say this to those animal-lovers, if it is wrong to kill abundant mink whale, then also it is wrong to kill the chickens or cattle for the meat. Then be the vegetarian!

The reason I am saying this in strong tone is that it is directly related our ecosystem, not only to the human nor moral issue. Most peoples who argue about the moral issue, they almost never think about that even humans are part of the food chain and food pyramids. Since I look at this issue as the biological issue, there is good suggestion to ease this issue, which is the food pyramid. I believe that human is taking the top place of the pyramid, the major predator, and whale is placed in lower level. If we human do not control the number of the whale, this pyramid would not stay stable because abundant whale would wipe out the lower level of the pyramid, which will cause total destruction. Therefore, what I am trying to say is, let us think about the big one. Arguing the moral issue would not be late to do it later, however, preventing the damage of the food pyramid should be done first.

P3 Feedback for above FW: 99 words

I totally agree with you. Most anti-whaling countries, like US, NZ, Australia, don't understand that, despite they are big strong countries. That's ridiculous. They just force their thinking on other countries. No one can do that. Whales, actually, are in trouble because of us before we talk about moral things. So we must do something for us and also whales. We sometimes must be cruel although that's sad. To understand the law of nature is something hard to accept. Whale's gesture or appearance make it harder. Wild animal can not be a pet. We have to think that objectively