

Aligned assessment in support of high-level learning: A critical appraisal of an assignment for a distance-teaching context

A B S T R A C T This paper takes the form of a critical appraisal of a formative assessment task given to students in an entry-level English for Specific Purposes (ESP) course in an Open and Distance Learning (ODL) context at the University of South Africa (UNISA). The article describes a specific formative assessment task in an ODL learning context and touches on issues of self-regulated learning and appropriation of student writing. Biggs' theory of constructive alignment, which underpins the assignment, requires an evaluation of the degree to which students construct meaning from learning tasks and the extent to which the assessment is synchronised with learning outcomes and learning activities of the course. The assignment described in this article was an outcome of doctoral research (Spencer 1999) which proved empirically the value of requiring both revision and self-assessment in a writing assignment in a distance-teaching context. These statistically significant findings provided empirical support for self-regulated learning and prompted the design of the assignment described in this article.

Keywords: assessment, Biggs' constructive alignment, formative assessment, assessment criteria, writing research, appropriation, ODL

1. Background information

This article is founded on an empirical doctoral study (Spencer, 1999) and is a product of the Joint Research Project set up in 2006 in the then English for Specific Purposes section of the English Studies Department at the University of South Africa (UNISA). The assessment task evaluated resulted from the author's doctoral thesis entitled 'Responding to student writing: Strategies for a distance-teaching context' (Spencer, 1999) and data from the project and the thesis are used with UNISA's permission. The assignment which resulted from the doctoral thesis focuses on self-regulated learning and formative assessment. For the purpose

of the article assessment-as-learning is defined as integral to learning, involving “observation, analysis/interpretation, and judgement of each student’s performance on the basis of explicit, public criteria, with self-assessment and resulting feedback to the student [which] serves to confirm student achievement and to provide feedback to the student for the improvement of learning and to the instructor for the improvement of teaching” (Mentkowski, 2006:48).

The aim of this article is to reflect on the degree to which a formative assessment task given in 2007 in a first-level English for Academic Purposes module (ENN103F) offered at UNISA, an open and distance learning (ODL) institution, conforms to Mentkowski’s criteria and Biggs’ theory of constructive alignment, which demand not only that teaching and assessment are ‘systematically’ aligned (Biggs, 1996:347) but also that learner activity is vital if a constructivist approach to learning is adopted. The English for Academic Purposes (ENN103F) course, for which the assessment task was designed, is offered at NQF level 5 and the purpose of the module is to develop critical reading, linguistic competence and writing skills. The paper evaluates a formative assessment task (hereafter Assignment 01) designed to assess student output with respect to the writing section of the course, specifically the second learning outcome of the course. This prescribes a process approach to writing and involves the students in planning, drafting and editing activities. Students are involved in self-assessment tasks using an adapted version of the ESP Marking Profile (Jacobs *et al.*, 1981) as a basis for their judgement. The Marking Profile is an analytical instrument using a content and form division and four proficiency levels with detailed level descriptors. This instrument has been comprehensively tested for reliability (Astika, 1993). The ESP Marking Profile is used for all assessment in the course, including the final examination. Assignment 01 empowers students through its demand for self-evaluation using this assessment instrument. Students were also required to re-submit their improved draft as a further assignment task (hereafter Assignment 03). Sadly, with the subsequent introduction of semester modules rather than year courses, there is no longer adequate turn-around time in this distance teaching context to require a resubmission assignment.

Like the Open University in the United Kingdom, UNISA is founded on a ‘commitment to social equality’ and an ‘ethos of inclusion’ (Solé & Hopkins, 2007:354) with its over-arching vision expressed in the phrase ‘towards the African university in the service of humanity’. In this context, a constructivist approach is unavoidable. Instruction generally takes place via distance learning, primarily in the form of self-study of ‘in-house-produced self-study language materials [designed so that the] materials act as a surrogate teacher’ (Solé & Hopkins, 2007:355). Feedback is provided by means of lecturers and, in the case of courses with high registration figures, such as ENN103F, by external marking panels, whose work is quality controlled by the full-time lecturing staff. Contact sessions are offered at the regional centres but these remain voluntary. In this context ‘providing opportunities for peer learning, one of the main tenets of socio-constructivism, is ... a challenge’ (Solé & Hopkins 2007:355). Ironically, the increased enrolments and staff to student ratios, so characteristic of higher educational institutions world-wide, have a more negative impact in residential institutions than they do in their ODL counterparts. Gibbs explains that increased class sizes at contact-teaching institutions, such as the Oxford Polytechnic, have resulted in ‘radical surgery to the volume of assessment and, in particular, to the volume of feedback’ (Gibbs, 2006:12) because, unlike contact tutorials where economies of scale are possible, assessment costs increase in direct proportion to the number

of students. At ODL institutions, where enrolments for single courses are in the thousands, assessment is not, in theory at least, affected by increased registrations as the university 'simply hires more tutors in direct proportion to the number of students' (Gibbs, 2006:13). In the UNISA context, the external marking panel expands in proportion to the numbers of assignments submitted.

In the South African educational context with diminishing financial resources and an emphasis on research, it is not surprising that the 'dominant [assessment] culture is conservative and defensive rather than bold' (Gibbs, 2006:20). UNISA's requirement in 2009 that all staff members undergo compulsory assessor training is evidence of the institution's concern in this regard. The assignment described in this article (Assignment 01) was intended to represent innovation and experimentation within the confines of a largely paper-based ODL teaching context. The purpose of this article is to expose the theoretical underpinnings of this formative assessment task and to explain the empirical research which underpins the assignment. The assignment is founded in Biggs' theory of constructive alignment.

2. Biggs' theory of constructive alignment

The centrality of Biggs' theory of constructive alignment cannot be understated in the South African educational context where so often an 'inappropriate assessment tail has wagged a curriculum dog' (Murphy, 2006:44). Constructive alignment is 'student-centred and outcomes focused, and ... very influential' (Walsh, 2007:79). This point is emphasised by Houghton who describes Biggs' theory as 'the underpinning concept behind the current requirements for programme specification, declarations of Intended Learning Outcomes... and assessment criteria, and the use of criterion based assessment' (2004:1). Biggs' theory questions the value of objectivist traditions and quantitative measurement which he believes lead to 'assessment policies and practices that often distort the quality of teaching and learning, and do violence to assumptions about the nature of knowledge' (1996:348). There is often a discrepancy between students' and teachers' perceptions: 'Students see the core activity of teaching as assessment, while teachers see it as teaching activity, culminating in assessment. ... Students will define learning outcomes according to the types of assessment tasks they complete. If there is a match between assessment tasks, learning activities and objectives, the students will learn what is intended and we have *constructive alignment*' (McLoughlin, 2001:19). In Solé and Hopkins' words, 'assessment must be congruent with and closely reflect the course materials and skills taught during the course' (2007:353). The focus should thus fall on the criterion-referenced criteria rather than representing an *ad hoc* response elicited by virtue of an arbitrary characteristic exhibited in the student's writing that is being assessed. The upfront identification of assessment criteria required represents a move towards greater professionalism and accountability.

Biggs' theory of constructive alignment regards 'learning in qualitative not quantitative terms' (1996:348) and is based on the theory of Constructivism, which sees meaning as negotiated by learners in their active engagement in learning activities. The learner assumes central place and the role of an all-knowing instructor is deliberately undermined. All teaching/learning activities are designed to develop deep learning. This orientation requires teaching and learning that are 'active, constructive, collaborative, intentional, conversational, contextual

and reflective' (McLoughlin, 2001:14). The aim, thus, is to move away from a 'deficit-driven' pedagogy towards an inclusive curriculum that 'promotes reciprocity, the development of a two-way flow of ideas and values' (McLoughlin, 2001:12).

Biggs explains that although Constructivism is 'becoming the dominant espoused theory in education; it remains, however, to see it as a common theory-in-use in higher education' (1996:348). This paper attempts to redress this imbalance, described by Biggs as the 'hiatus between espoused theory and theory-in-use', by describing an assignment deliberately designed in accordance with Biggs' theory in a higher education learning context. By aligning both the formative and summative assessment tasks so closely with the course outcomes, the course content and the assessment tools, the aim is to avoid a situation 'driven by backwash from testing, not from the curriculum' (Biggs, 1996:350). Backwash can 'make or break good educational learning opportunities' (Murphy, 2006:39) as 'students learn what they think they will be tested on' (Walsh, 2007:84). Gibbs regards students as 'increasingly strategic in the way they allocate their time and effort ... [They] may study only what is assessed' (2006:20) and graded (Gibbs, 2006b:23). A high degree of alignment means that any backwash effect from the assessment brings the learner squarely back to the main learning outcomes of the course, confirming the value of Biggs' theory of constructive alignment, which has been reported to have a "four-times greater [effect size] than in non-aligned instruction" (Biggs, 1996:350).

The emphasis needs to fall on active behaviour founded in reflection and on a desire to counter the instructor-dominated situation, Bennett describes: 'To the extent that ... teachers ... decide what their students are to learn, how they are to learn it and who will judge whether or not they have done so, their learners are "taught" (unintentionally) to depend on experts for learning' (in Walsh, 2007:83). There needs to be a shift away from dependency and lecturer appropriation of student writing (Spencer, 2007) towards student empowerment. This involves fostering a more collaborative relationship where the lecturer's power is deliberately undermined and the students empowered by being required to take responsibility to monitor their own progress. Exemplars foster modelling and if these are used and are of a high standard, the benchmark will be set at an appropriate level. As Gibbs (2006b:33) so aptly states: 'ultimately the fastest and most frequent feedback available is that provided by students to themselves from moment to moment as they study or write assignments. Investing effort in developing such self supervision may be much the most cost-effective use of tutors' time.' Training needs to take place so that students can internalise standards and independently judge their work against the listed criteria. Such self-monitoring frees the instructor and benefits the student educationally. It also requires a movement towards personalised, individualised learning, a challenge in an ODL context where scripts arrive in the thousands, identified only by a student name, number and address.

3. Description of Assignment 01

Five tasks make up the assignment. The topic given is argumentative and deliberately selected for its relevance to student life. One such topic is 'students are entitled to free education'. Task 1 is designed to promote critical thinking. It requires that students design a topic sentence in favour and against the statement and that they provide supporting ideas in both cases. The task is designed to scaffold cognition and is based on one of the planning strategies taught in the guide, thus integrating tuition and assessment.

Task 2 requires students to write a rough draft of the essay. Students are given a lengthy self-assessment and revision sheet that they will need to work through in order to revise their own rough drafts. The instructions for the self-assessment and revision of the first draft include sections designed to assist students to:

1. understand the way the lecturers mark their work; in effect this is an explanation of the assessment grid, which is especially valuable in the interests of transparency and also as this grid is used for evaluation in both the assignments and the examination;
2. revise the content of the essay, which is vital since research has shown (Mutsuhashi & Gordon, 1985; Fathman & Whalley, 1990 and Spencer, 1999) that students are able to improve the quality of their writing by simply re-writing even in cases where no feedback is given. Students are given comprehensible input in the form of instructions, leading questions and checklists and are referred back to appropriate sections in the guide;
3. revise the language: all aspects of language taught in the guide need to be re-examined critically by the student and they are again referred back to the appropriate sections in the guide.

This rough draft with corrections has to be submitted as Task 2. The time the student spends on the task far exceeds that of the marker who is quickly able to determine how diligently the student has attempted the revision and if attention has been given to both content and form.

Task 3 requires students to write the essay. This is normally the only task required in essay assignments.

Task 4 requires students to use the marking grid to evaluate their own work. This self-assessment task means that the student has to internalise the assessment criteria and level descriptors and helps the lecturer to identify the students' evaluation of their work. This is valuable as it ensures that students do a great deal of work and it also serves as a corrective strategy when students exhibit an unrealistic evaluation of their proficiency. It opens two-way communication and facilitates marking as no comment is needed in the case of agreement with the student evaluation but explanations are essential when there is a discrepancy between the evaluations. This is also vital in terms of empowering students as they have the first say and the lecturers have to substantiate their opinions in the event of a discrepancy in the evaluations. This is a deliberate strategy to counter dependency, empower the student and reduce 'appropriation' of student writing.

Task 5 further empowers the students as it requires them to evaluate how effective they found the assignment.

This is followed by a checklist to ensure that students submit all the tasks and then an example of a marked assignment to the topic 'advertising can be misleading', which takes the students through all the five tasks. An example was specifically selected as a model and to illustrate accurate student self-evaluation and one where the student was positive about the task. *[Assignment 01 is presented in full in Addendum 1, complete with commentary delivered by means of Microsoft Word's 'track changes' facility. Please refer to this section before you continue reading.]*

4. Constructive alignment in evidence in Assignment 01

The formative assignment task under evaluation was specifically designed to meet the writing requirements of *Learning Outcome 2* for the course, which requires that learners are able to write effectively for different purposes and to implement planning strategies, writing a draft, editing the draft and producing a final text.

The Assessment Criteria are listed below. Students are required to submit a plan, an edited rough draft and a final revised product. The revised final product will be assessed according to the following criteria:

- content (ideas are clear, related and fully developed)
- organisation (introductory and concluding sentences/paragraphs, arrangement of ideas, main ideas, supporting sentences)
- vocabulary (range and effectiveness of vocabulary used, appropriate register)
- language usage (grammatical control for example: tense, articles, word order, word form, prepositions)
- mechanics (spelling, punctuation, capitalisation, paragraphing, handwriting).

In the process of meeting the requirements of the essay, students would also have to demonstrate mastery in terms of *Learning Outcome 3*, which requires that learners can use language that is grammatically correct and socially appropriate in different contexts.

Thus the aim is to demonstrate academic literacy (specific outcome) but also to show evidence of the following *Critical Cross-field Outcomes* of the course:

- Communicating effectively using language skills in a written medium.
- Analysing, organising and critically evaluating information.
- Organising and managing oneself and one's activity responsibly and effectively.

This formative essay assignment is such an integral part of the course that the assignment tasks are incorporated in an Appendix at the end of the student's Study Guide rather than in the first tutorial letter, which changes on an annual basis. The five tasks that make up the assignment and the detailed explanations are given in the guide. The coursework and assessment for this module are totally integrated. Thus students are referred to specific lectures in the guide (9, 10, 11, 12, 14, 15, 16 and 17) and these chapters cover the writing process, audience and purpose, writing to convince, gathering ideas, organising ideas, writing the introduction, writing the essay and revising the essay. The guide is task-based and designed to maximise student activity and involvement. No special teaching is required to prepare the students for the assignment task as the entire guide is designed to teach the skills tested. This is a formative assessment task and it is mirrored by an argumentative essay in the exam which serves as summative assessment, thereby assuring that any wash-back effect is productive and intentional.

5. The empirical support underpinning the assignment

The assignment described in this article was an outcome of doctoral research (Spencer, 1999) which proved empirically the value of requiring both revision and self-assessment in a writing assignment in a distance-teaching context. It provided empirical support for the student activity which is at the heart of a constructivist approach to learning. In the doctoral

research a process approach to writing was adopted for the module for the first time. This required students to revise a marked writing task for a subsequent assignment. The research was meticulously conducted (Spencer, 1999:130-178) to determine the effectiveness of four marking strategies (marking code, minimal marking, taped response and self-assessment). The research sample consisted of 1 750 randomly selected scripts, which resulted in 350 samples of writing for each of the four groups and a control group. In all of these instances, four marks were obtained which comprised two from the original marking of both assignments and two from the re-marking of all the assignments. At each marking session inter-rater reliability tests were conducted (Spencer, 1999:138, 140-141). This process enabled statistical comparison between the original and the revised work.

Both content-related and form-related improvements in the revised paragraphs were achieved in all five categories. The average percentage content improvement levels are listed below:

- Marking code: 6,6%
- Minimal marking: 4,0%
- Control: 3,6%
- Taped response: 5,5%
- Self-assessment: 5,1 (Spencer, 1999:146)

The average percentage form-related improvement levels are listed below:

- Marking code: 9,4%
- Minimal marking: 6,4%
- Control: 4,2%
- Taped response: 7,8%
- Self-assessment: 5,7% (Spencer,1999:148)

Although the focus of the doctoral research is on the relative effectiveness of divergent response strategies, aspects of the study are directly relevant to the assignment described in this article and the research itself prompted the development of the assignment in its present form. The research demonstrates empirically the value of requiring independent revision as an intrinsic part of an assignment task. The control group statistics show that with no teacher intervention or feedback at all, simply requiring students to revise resulted in a content-level improvement of 3,6% and an improvement in terms of form of 4,2%. This endorses the findings of Matsuhashi and Gordon (1985) and Fathman and Whalley (1990) whose work demonstrates the value of independent revision, particularly in terms of content, and endorses the fact that 'rewriting is worthwhile and that teacher intervention is not always necessary' (1990:186). Thus the independent revision requirement in the assignment described in this article is one that is firmly endorsed by empirical research.

The self-assessment task tested in the doctorate, which prompted the improvement levels in the self-assessment group, was included in Task 2 in the assignment. The doctoral study demonstrated the value of self-assessment, which could be determined by comparing the improvement levels generated by the control group with those of the self-assessment group. The self-assessment brochure resulted in improvement levels in terms of content from an average of 3,6% to 5,1% and from 4,2% to 5,7% in terms of form, simply by adding a self-assessment requirement to the task. A t-test, an independent sample of methods to determine

equality of means, revealed that the self-assessment differed from the control in terms of content improvement at a significance level of 0,016 (Spencer, 1999:147) and at a significance level of 0,012 in terms of form-related improvement (Spencer, 1999:149). The self-assessment task that generated these statistically significant results has been incorporated into the assignment described in this article as Task 2. Thus the assignment described in this article is founded on empirical research.

The research that underpins this assignment demonstrates that learners in a distance-teaching context can improve both the content and the formal aspects of their writing without tutorial intervention; by simply being required to re-write and by being given a comprehensive guide to self-assess their work. If the benefits of these independent learning strategies are combined by requiring both revision and guided self-assessment input, then the benefits to the learners are compounded. The benefits of self-regulated learning cannot be overemphasised in a distance-teaching context where lecturer feedback is challenging as a result of the high registration figures, the delay between submission of the assignment and tutorial feedback, and the difficulty of maintaining inter-rater reliability when an extended marking panel is employed. Lephalala and Pienaar's (2008) research on the same assignment highlights these challenges and concludes that markers in this teaching context paid inadequate attention to the criteria, adopted a form-focused approach to their assessment and that there is a need for more intensive quality control of the external marking panel. In this ODL context an assessment task that can use self-evaluation and constructive engagement to promote high-level learning, simultaneously reducing the level of teacher response required, is to be welcomed.

While the theoretical underpinning of Assignment 01 is sound, in that it meets Biggs' criteria for alignment and constructive engagement, there is a need for a more extensive list of evaluative criteria when judging the effectiveness of an assessment task. Assignment 01 has elements that can be classified under the heading 'traditional' as the learner operates in isolation as an individual who forms part of a pedagogic community; the assignment includes a focus on the product and uses objective assessment (McLoughlin, 2001:10). However, the assignment has moved away from an exclusive focus on the product to the exclusion of process, on fixed content and a behaviourist orientation with the teacher as 'sage on stage'. Assignment 01 actively counters student dependency, promotes self supervision, internalisation of assessment criteria and empowers students to evaluate their work in terms of these criteria. The latter requirement discourages appropriation of student writing and promotes a two-way flow of communication by requiring students first to give their evaluation of their work. In terms of McLoughlin's criteria for culturally responsive assessment, the assignment is progressive in terms of its focus on process, flexibility of content and in the coaching and mentoring role of the lecturer. Its greatest value lies in that it promotes independent learning. However, there is a need to incorporate on-line assessment in order to meet the socio-linguistic needs and the learners' demand for a communal, on-line, 'social and networked' learning (McLoughlin, 2001:10). These challenges all require urgent attention and creative solutions. All assignment tasks form part of a much larger learning context. In conclusion, no matter how carefully constructed any single assessment task is, it represents only one aspect in a broader educational context and it is the whole educational environment, rather than a single part, which needs to be optimised.

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Addendum 1

APPENDIX 1: WRITTEN WORK: ESSAY

This is a writing exercise and it forms part of the work you need to do for this course. The assignment number and submission date for this writing exercise are in Tutorial Letter 101.

Essay Topic: You will find a list of essay topics for this assignment in Tutorial Letter 101. Choose **ONE** of the topics for your essay.

Academic writing often requires you to take a point of view and to defend it by constructing an argument to support it. In order to make a convincing and persuasive argument, you should always keep in mind that there are counter-arguments to your point of view.

To make the best possible argument you need to consider points for and against the issue you have decided to discuss. This will help you discover the weak points in your argument. You might even find that you cannot make a convincing argument for your point of view. Arguing with yourself about a subject is an excellent way of ensuring that you have a sound grasp of the issues, and that you will not be making sweeping generalisations or vague statements.

Please revise the following lectures: 9, 11, 12, 14, 15, 16 and 17 in preparation for this task.

TASK 1

Write out the following table and fill in the details. This table must be included in your assignment.

Write down the topic that you chose from the list in Tutorial Letter 101.

Topic:

ARGUMENT FOR

Topic sentence:

Supporting ideas:

- 1
- 2
- 3

ARGUMENT AGAINST

Topic sentence:

Supporting ideas

- 1
- 2
- 3

TASK 2

2.1 Having considered the points for and against the topic you wish to discuss, you are now ready to write a rough draft.

Write a 3 paragraph essay arguing in favour of **OR** against the topic of your choice. Your essay should **NOT** be more than **ONE** page in length.

Do not change the title. Your introductory paragraph should reflect your point of view. All arguments should be developed in the second paragraph. Your concluding paragraph should tie up all parts of your argument.

2.2 In an experiment conducted with our English for Specific Purposes students, we found that students who made use of a self-assessment sheet were able to improve their work as much as those whose work was marked by their tutors. This is proof of the value of revising your work carefully and of the benefit of using a self-assessment sheet.

Read the **self-assessment and revision instructions** that follow the instructions for Task 5 in this Appendix. Now revise your rough draft and make the changes that you feel are necessary. These changes should be made in pencil on your rough draft. You should not only edit your language, but should also consider how you can improve the content and organisation of your essay.

The rough draft with its corrections made in pencil, must be included in your assignment.

TASK 3

Write your **revised 3 paragraph essay**. Remember to include the title of your essay.

TASK 4

It is important for students to evaluate their own work and to identify for themselves what their strong points are. When you have written your revised essay, you should **evaluate** your own work, using the **marking grid** that appears after the self assessment and revision instructions. This is the marking grid your tutors will use when they mark your work.

Fill in the table below by identifying the level (1, 2, 3 or 4) you feel you deserve for content, organisation, vocabulary, language and mechanics. These levels are explained in the marking grid in this Appendix. Then copy the completed table onto your assignment answer sheet.

Content:	level ...
Organisation	level ...
Vocabulary	level ...
Language	level ...
Mechanics	level ...

TASK 5

Did you find this writing exercise helpful? Write **ONE** of the following sentences at the end of your assignment:

I found this writing exercise helpful because

OR

I did not find this writing exercise helpful because

CHECKLIST

HAVE YOU INCLUDED THE FOLLOWING?

1. **THE COMPLETED TABLE** (Task 1)
2. **THE ROUGH DRAFT WITH ITS CORRECTIONS IN PENCIL** (Task 2)
3. **THE REVISED ESSAY** (Task 3)
4. **YOUR EVALUATION** (Task 4)
5. **YOUR COMMENT ABOUT THE WRITING EXERCISE** (Task 5)

APPENDIX 2: Information needed to complete task 2: SELF-ASSESSMENT AND REVISION

To help you to evaluate your own work we have included a list of the factors which your markers use to identify effective writing. There are 3 steps to follow:

Step 1: Understanding the way your lecturers will mark your work

Step 2: Revising the content of your essay

Step 3: Revising your vocabulary and language

By following these steps, which we have explained more fully below, you will be able to revise your essay on your own.

Step 1: Understanding the way your lecturers will mark your work

Your **first mark** represents your lecturer's rating of the content and organisation of your essay.

CONTENT: Ideas, information or message

You have stated your point of view; all arguments are clear and fully developed; all ideas are related to each other and to the argument; your point of view is substantiated; the reader is left with a feeling of being convinced about your argument.

ORGANISATION: The arrangement of ideas in order ...

Your **second mark** represents your lecturer's rating of your vocabulary, language usage and mechanics.

VOCABULARY: The words you use

Words are used effectively, there is a range of vocabulary and the register (level of formality) is appropriate.

LANGUAGE USAGE: Grammatical control ...

MECHANICS: Presentation — the way the writing looks ...

Step 2: Revising the content of your essay

Effective revision is more than simply playing with surface grammatical structure. You need to examine your content (what you say) carefully first.

WHAT HAVE YOU WRITTEN?

You will be able to examine the content of your writing by answering the following questions:

HAVE YOU FOLLOWED INSTRUCTIONS BY:

writing a three-paragraph essay of not more than one page?

arguing in favour of or against the topic of your choice?

CAN YOU IMPROVE YOUR STRUCTURE?

Read Lecture 17 (Revising the essay)

Does your opening paragraph state your point of view? Revise Lecture 15.

Do your ideas follow a logical order?

Does your final paragraph conclude or sum up your point of view?

Do your paragraphs have a topic sentence and do all your other sentences support it? If you are unsure what the term 'topic sentence' means please revise Lectures 7, 14 and 16.

Does each main idea have at least one supporting idea?

Have you sign posted your writing? Revise Lecture 7.

Would the inclusion of any logical connectives help to make your paragraph more clear for your reader?

These questions and checklists should have helped you to identify weaknesses in your original essay. When you are happy with the content of your essay, you can begin to examine your language and vocabulary.

Step 3: Revising your vocabulary and language

First look at your vocabulary very carefully. Have you used the most effective words you know? Can you use words that express your ideas better?

Re-read the essay you have written.

Check your punctuation. Read Appendix 1 again.

Is your spelling correct? Revise Lecture 2 and Appendix 1.

Check your verbs and tenses. Read Lecture 4 and Appendix 1 again.

Have you used the appropriate register? Revise point no. 5 (Audience, Purpose and Register) in Lecture 5.

Make any language corrections that you feel are necessary.

Once you are satisfied that this is the very best you can do in terms of what you say and how you say it, then you are ready to write your revised essay.

Step 4: Evaluating your own work using the prescribed marking grid

Please use the following criteria as a guideline to assist you in the allocation of marks. It has been adapted from Jacobson *et al.*'s 'ESL Composition Profile', which was described by Liz Hamp-Lyons (a leading figure in the field of ESL Testing) as the best known scoring procedure for ESL writing at the present time.

MARK OUT OF 25 FOR CONTENT/ORGANISATION

LEVEL 1	25—20 (100%—80%)	EXCELLENT TO VERY GOOD
Content:	knowledgeable, thorough development, relevant to assigned topic	
Organisation:	ideas clearly stated, succinct, well organised, logically sequenced, cohesive, well supported	
LEVEL 2 ...	19—14 (72%—56%)	GOOD TO AVERAGE ...
LEVEL 3	13—8 (48%—32%)	FAIR TO POOR ...
LEVEL 4	7—0 (24%—0%)	VERY POOR ...

MARK OUT OF 25 FOR FORM (VOCABULARY, LANGUAGE USE, MECHANICS)

LEVEL 1	25—20 (100%—80%)	EXCELLENT TO VERY GOOD
Vocabulary:	sophisticated range, effective word/idiom choice, word form mastery, appropriate register	
Language usage:	effective complex constructions, few language errors (agreement, tense, number, word order, articles, pronouns, prepositions)	
Mechanics:	Mechanics (spelling, punctuation, capitalisation), demonstrates mastery of conventions	
LEVEL 2	19—14 (72%—56%)	GOOD TO AVERAGE ...
LEVEL 3	13—8 (48%—32%)	FAIR TO POOR ...
LEVEL 4	7—0 (24%—0%)	VERY POOR ...

EXAMPLE OF A REVISED PARAGRAPH

Here is an example of a writing exercise that was done by a student. The student had to write and revise a paragraph using the same self-assessment and revision instructions that we have given you. (Here an entire marked assignment was provided to serve as a model of a completed task.) ...