

## **Student Vs. Teacher Feedback in L2 Writing**

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### **Introduction**

Teachers need to give feedback on students' writing as it helps students improve their writing (Hyland, 2016) and students want teachers to recognize and monitor their writing. The role and effectiveness of peer feedback is generally less understood by students. While students may view feedback from their peers as inferior to teacher feedback, peer feedback can serve to not only increase the amount of feedback students receive but also improve students' sense of agency as writers and increase interaction among students.

This paper documents a one-term research project on two second-year writing classes at a university in Japan. Each class consisted of 17 second-year English majors who wrote three papers over the course of a 15-week term. Each paper went through a three-draft cycle with the teacher giving feedback on the first and third (final) draft, while the students provided feedback to their partners on the first and second drafts. Students were given peer review worksheets with questions and checklists to aid them in providing feedback. Teacher feedback consisted of minimal, coded feedback (circling errors, "SP" for spelling errors, "GR" for grammar errors, etc.).

This project attempts to examine differences between teacher and student feedback as well as gauge students' perceptions of both forms of feedback. In addition to the peer review worksheets, students were also asked to complete a 6-point Likert scale questionnaire regarding their perceptions of teacher and student feedback.

### **Beliefs About Feedback**

The general advantage of peer feedback is that it creates a more active learning environment (Hyland, 2014) while also providing a more private exchange between language learners. On the other hand, peer feedback may suffer from L2 students' abilities and willingness to correct another L2 learner's work (Bitchener & Ferris, 2012). Hyland (2014) noted that peer feedback may focus mainly on surface errors (spelling and grammar, for example).

Teacher feedback generally has the advantage of being perceived as more "authentic", owing to the "superior" language proficiency of the teacher. In addition, teacher feedback is more likely to address structural errors in students' writing, thus perhaps complementing the tendency towards correction of surface forms mentioned previously.

The cultural context of the students may also shape their perceptions of both teacher and peer feedback. In the Confucian East Asian societies, students may be more likely to perceive the teacher or "sensei" as the final authority of students' performance and thus may not see the value in giving or receiving peer feedback (Gobel, Thang and Mori in Apple, Da Silva and Fellner, 2017).

### **Methodology**

The second-year students in this study had previously completed two terms of writing at the first-year level. Their previous assignments included two paragraphs and four full-length essays (three in which the topic was provided and a fourth which gave students a choice of three topics).

Drafts were assigned to students as homework, with class time being devoted partially to peer review. Students chose their peer review partners and, barring absences, kept their partners throughout the term in order to maintain some consistency during the term.

Initially, the students were given a peer editing sheet that contained a checklist of errors and their frequency. An excerpt is shown below:

	Always	Often	Sometimes	Never
Article problem				
Missing word				
Wrong word				
Spelling error				
Word order error				

The editing sheet taught students what errors to look for and provided scaffolding as they improved their reviewing skills and independently marked errors and provided feedback to their peers.

At the end of the peer review session, students would return the review sheets and the marked drafts to their review partners. A second print of the drafts would be given to the teacher who would provide feedback the following week. In this fashion, each student would receive feedback from both peer and teacher. The students were encouraged to compare and contrast peer and teacher feedback and then incorporate it into their next drafts.

In order to track student progress, the teacher gave a hypothetical grade on the first draft, which was not shown to the student. This grade was then examined alongside the final grade to show progression (if any) in the students' performance after rounds of feedback. Student feedback was not measured by any quantitative method but perceptions of peer feedback were gauged on a 6-point scale that will be described in the next section.

## Results

Regarding teacher feedback, the results were mixed and ambiguous. Most students exhibited some improvement over a three-draft cycle, but this can be attributed to a number of factors including teacher feedback, peer feedback and even student self-correction. Due to limitations of this project, there was no attempt to separate the effects of teacher and peer feedback.

Results are displayed below:

Class 1 (n=17)	Unit 1 Draft 1	Unit 1 Draft 3	DIF	Unit 2 Draft 1	Unit 2 Draft 3	DIF	Unit 3 Draft 1	Unit 3 Draft 3	DIF
AVE	70	70	0.77	76	79	3.1	69	80	11
STD	5.8	4.7	4	5.4	7	4.1	10.8	6.7	8.6

Class 2 (n=17)	Unit 1 Draft 1	Unit 1 Draft 3	DIF	Unit 2 Draft 1	Unit 2 Draft 3	DIF	Unit 3 Draft 1	Unit 3 Draft 3	DIF
AVE	68.6	75	6.45	71.8	75	3.2	70	80.3	10.3
STD	4.2	5.6	5.2	6.1	5.3	3	4.7	4.5	5.9

The second class exhibited greater variation (mainly improvement) between drafts and even over the course of the term. No research was conducted to examine this discrepancy but speculative explanations can include: student motivation, quality of peer review and teacher performance.

As for perception of feedback, the responses to the questionnaire were also mixed, with the majority of students expressing a desire to receive feedback from the teacher, but milder support for giving and receiving peer feedback.

Question	Strongly agree-----Strongly disagree					
1. I like receiving feedback on my writing..	57%	20%	22%			
2. Feedback helps me improve my writing.	66%	16%	8%	8%		
3. Teacher feedback is the best.	77%	11%	3%	3%		

4. I like feedback from other students.	30%	19%	35%	3%	8%	3%
5. I like giving feedback to others.	17%	24%	34%	4%	9%	4%
6. Giving feedback helps me become a better writer.	50%	6%	34%		6%	
7. Giving feedback to others is difficult.	36%	36%	12%	9%		
8. Giving feedback to others is pointless.	6%	13%	28%	28%	19%	6%
9. I use feedback to improve my writing.	63%	31%		6%		
10. Getting feedback is pointless.		9%	25%	19%	34%	13%

The majority of students (66%) strongly agreed that feedback helps them become better writers, yet only a slight majority said they liked receiving feedback. This is perhaps similar to the attitude a sick individual would have to taking a necessary medicine with an unpleasant taste. Questions 2 and 9 have similar values with slightly altered wording yet they received strong approval ratings (66% and 63%, respectively), indicating that students understood the value of feedback and were conscious of its intended purpose. Indeed, as mentioned previously, students' performance did improve over the course of the three-draft cycle and the entire term, demonstrating a noticeable correlation between receiving feedback and improvement of writing skills.

Student belief that feedback from the teacher is preferable to peer feedback was the majority (97%) opinion with 77% strongly agreeing. This correlates to previously mentioned attitudes that L2 students think the native-level teacher is more qualified to give feedback and a cultural attitude that the teacher is the final authority. This attitude may be further enforced with Japanese students who come from an educational background in which peer review is not the norm, leading some to view the process with doubt (Apple & Da Silva in Apple, Da Silva & Fellner, 2017).

However, student attitudes towards giving and receiving peer feedback received mostly positive (if mild) support, so perhaps many students view peer feedback as valuable but teacher feedback to be superior. Interestingly, more students said they liked getting feedback than giving feedback. Although the pair groupings were designed to create a mutually beneficial feedback cycle, perhaps some students doubted their ability to give peers suitable or useful feedback.

It is also important to note that, while in the minority, a significant number of students expressed negative views of giving and receiving feedback. Questions 8 and 10, with their negative (“pointless”) wording, received 47% and 34% agreement respectively. No further information is available but speculative explanations could include students’ lack of peer reviewing experience or lack of confidence in their ability to provide peer review.

The final, optional section of the questionnaire (shown below) contained three incomplete sentence stems that gave students the opportunity to express their attitudes towards feedback.

1. I like feedback from my teacher because:
2. I like feedback from other students because:
3. I like giving feedback to other students because:

Responses to all three stems were generally positive. Typical responses to #1: “I can notice my mistakes” and “my essay is improving [sic]”. Responses to #2 included statements such as: “they can give me good advice” and “friends give me some suggestions to make my writing better [sic]”. Likewise, responses to #3 were also positive overall: “I can learn many things from their drafts” and “my ability to find mistakes will [improve]”. These responses indicate that the majority of students desire feedback and understand the purpose of both teacher and peer feedback.

## Conclusions

The data gathered for this project indicate that feedback is desired and utilized by students. The students' papers improved gradually over the term, with a particularly sharp improvement seen in the third assignment. In addition, the students generally expressed approval of receiving feedback from both teacher and peers. This appears to be evidence that feedback is both wanted and effective.

There are limitations to this study that could become areas for future research. Although it can be concluded that feedback is necessary and effective, the difference in effectiveness between teacher and peer feedback is unclear. Students' papers were examined over a three-draft cycle, with no separate analysis of teacher and peer feedback. Further studies could include independent analyses of the two sources of feedback. Future research could also examine students' role as peer reviewer, with increased in-class training on the peer review process. Such training could help students who lack confidence as peer reviewers and increase the quality of feedback given.

Even the cultural context of this project reveals issues to be examined. The teacher is from an Anglosphere society and the majority of the students are East Asian. While these two categories are by no means absolute or closed systems, there are general patterns of behavior in these cultures which may shape or possibly interfere with the teacher/student relationship, specifically expectations of both parties in the writing classroom. Further examination of these cultural beliefs may reveal (to both parties) how to improve their writing and feedback techniques.

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