

Exemplar 5: Process Writing and Regular Writing in the ELT Curriculum

Overview



The English panel at [Carmel Secondary School](#) (hereafter CSS) started to develop its writing curriculum in 1995/96, when Process Writing was piloted. Thereafter the curriculum was constantly reviewed and revised.

CSS's writing curriculum consists of three components. These components were introduced in parallel in the school year.



Type of Writing	Key features
Product Writing	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Students produce one draft within a set time limit.• Teacher marks it for content and grammatical accuracy, and returns it for correction of grammatical mistakes.
Process Writing	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Students produce multiple drafts.• Students revise their drafts in light of comments from their teacher and peers, focusing on content.• Teacher marks the penultimate draft for grammatical accuracy and students produce the final draft.• The writing process is an iterative process of drafting and revising drafts in response to feedback.
Regular Writing	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• It complements Product and Process Writing.• Students write outside class time.• It is less stringently marked by the teacher.

We consider CSS's Process and Regular Writing to be distinctive, as both practices are well developed and lead to positive learning outcomes. During the course of our research, we observed [Process Writing in an S.2 class](#) and [Regular Writing in S.4](#).

This exemplar shows the complementary roles of Process Writing and Regular Writing on composition, and their positive impacts on the standard of students' writing

Conception

Process Writing was introduced in 1995/96 for the following reasons:

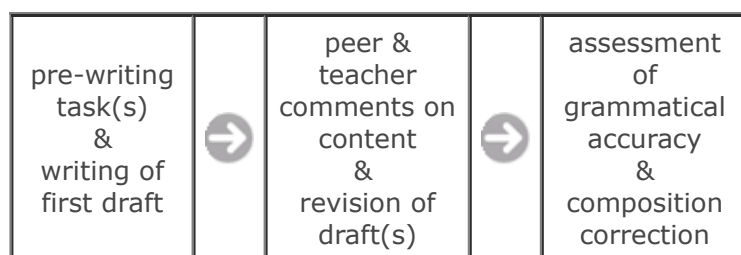
- Teachers at CSS were dissatisfied with the results of Product Writing.
- They felt that they were mere "proofreaders", and were mainly responsible for helping students spot language mistakes in their compositions.
- They also felt that Product Writing did not help students develop their own ideas, even though teachers commented on organisation and content in students' compositions.
- Students did not take comments seriously, as revision of ideas was not required in composition correction.

When Process Writing was first introduced, there were few guiding principles for teachers as nobody on the panel had had experience of implementing Process Writing. These principles were as follows:

- Students should write drafts and revise them.
- They would receive peer and teacher feedback on ideas and organisation.
- Grammatical accuracy would be assessed at the final stage.



Below is a representation of the procedure:



Process Writing was piloted for one year. In the panel's evaluation meeting, teachers' response to Process Writing was overwhelmingly positive. They reported that students' written work had improved and said they enjoyed marking more. They also said that their marking load had not increased because students' revised drafts were much easier to mark. Students' writing was also much more interesting to read.

The panel agreed to adopt this practice. It also agreed on the following:

- There should be learner training for giving peer comments. One way would be to select a student's draft, make enough copies for students and draw their attention to the strengths and weaknesses of the work.
- A reader's peer comment form, tailor-made for each writing task, would facilitate effective evaluation of peers' writing.

A Process Writing Cycle in S.2 – Imaginative Writing

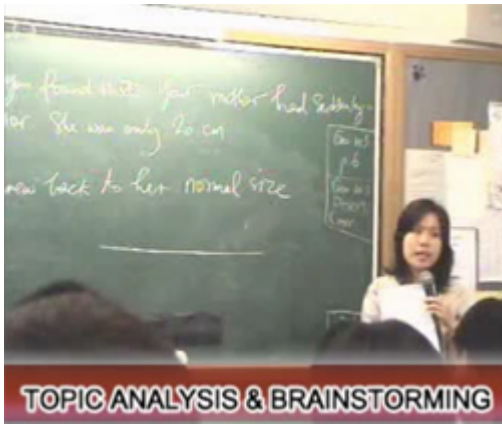
Detailed below is a series of Process Writing lessons that were conducted in an S.2 class of 32 students. According to Miss Lee, the English teacher, all these students have below-average English-language writing and verbal skills and hence the class size is reduced.

	
<u>Brainstorming</u>	<u>Peer comments</u>
	
<u>Teacher comments</u>	<u>Grammar correction</u>

The task was a piece of imaginative writing, and the topic was from a past HKCEE English Writing paper:

When you woke up last Sunday, you found that your mother had suddenly changed size and become much smaller. She was only 20 cm tall! You had to take care of her all day until she grew back to her normal size that evening. (200 words)

Lesson 1: Brainstorming



The video subtitles in this exemplar have been slightly edited for easier comprehension.

Like most pre-writing lessons, this lesson was aimed at helping students analyse their writing topic and brainstorm ideas. A summary of the first part of the lesson:

- Miss Lee began the lesson by asking students what time they woke up last Sunday and whether anything strange happened when they woke up.
- She then wrote the following on the blackboard: "When you woke up last Sunday, you found that your mother had suddenly _____", and she asked students to discuss in pairs how to complete the sentence.
- Following this, she elicited three suggestions and supplied "changed size and became much smaller". She was only _____.
- Again she invited guesses from students and told them the answer was "20 cm tall".

She did the same for the rest of the topic and asked students to think of what the narrator of the story would need to do until Mother was her normal size again.

In the second part of the lesson, Miss Lee divided the class into eight groups and assigned a topic to each. Each group was given a handout specifying their task.

A summary of the activity:

- Students brainstormed ideas in groups, and put their ideas onto a transparency.
- Each group then explained their ideas to the class.
- The teacher, Miss Lee, responded to the ideas and invited students to comment on them.



She encouraged students to make the story interesting and reminded them that they should write about how they took care of Mother.

When students had a clear idea of the topic, Miss Lee drew their attention to the main elements of a story. These consisted of:



- when (time)
- where (place)
- who (people)
- why (reasons)
- what (events)
- how (feelings)
- mood and messages
- language

The lesson ended with Miss Lee assigning the topic as homework.

Why

Why had mother changed her size? Suggest 3 possible reasons:

1.

2.

3.

Why did mother grow back to her normal size? Suggest 3 possible reasons:

1.

2.

3.

Why

Why had mother changed her size?

1. She had drank a special drink last night.
The drink come from supermarket.
2. My father was a scientist. He had invented a drink which could change the body size. Unfortunate she drank.
3. A fairy let she became smaller.


Why did mother grow back to her normal size?

1. The special drink has dead line.
2. My father invented the drink which can let the body grew into normal size
3. the fairy let she became normal.

Lesson 2: Peer Comments



Miss Lee asked the class to read their first draft once more and make changes if they wished. She then did the following:

1. Gave out  [a peer comment form](#) and explained the note at the top. She told students that their work would be read by their neighbour.
2. Asked students to write their neighbour's name beside "Dear" and their own name below "Yours".
3. Had students exchange their forms.
4. Went over each item on the form and suggested that students give their neighbour a mark for their writing.
5. Told students to exchange their books, read quietly and complete the peer comment form. When most students finished Miss Lee asked them to comment orally on their peer's writing.
6. Asked for feedback on the activity towards the end of the lesson. Over half the class responded positively.

Told students to revise their work at home in light of their peers' comments.

The peer comment form is tailor-made for the writing topic, and relates to the eight elements of a story introduced in Lesson One. Students choose from the options that best describe characterisation, events, pace, message, feelings of characters and language of their peers' work.

The following features of the lesson are worth noting:

a) Use of a peer comment form

The peer comment form has been personalised to reinforce an interactive writer-reader relationship by inserting a note at the top.

Dear _____,

I would love to know what you think about my story. Please feel free to comment using the form below. I promise I'll read your comments and improve my work. Thank you very much!

Yours,

The writer

The purpose of this note, as explained by Miss Lee, is to enhance a sense of audience:



b) Verbal peer feedback

In the lesson students wrote comments on the peer comment form after reading their peers' writing, and discussed each other's writing orally. We observed the educational value in this exercise. It provided students with an opportunity to clarify and elaborate on ideas.

An S.2 student, Yuk Ying, described giving feedback orally as "very important":



S2 English Imaginative Writing

Dear _____,

I would love to know what you think about my story. Please feel free to comment using the form below. I promise I'll read your comments and improve my work. Thank you very much!

Yours,

The writer

Comment Form

I feel that

1. the characters are vivid/just OK/not vivid and _____.
2. the pace of the story is too fast/just right/too slow and _____.
3. the events are logical/illogical/funny/boring and _____.
4. the reason why mother had become smaller is clear/unclear and _____.
5. the reason why mother returned normal is clear/unclear and _____.
6. the feelings of the characters are well described/OK/badly described and _____.
7. the message of the story is good/ acceptable/ bad and _____.
8. the language used is good/ acceptable/ bad and _____.

☺ What I like most about your story and why:

(E.g.: the introduction, the characters, an event, a paragraph, the language, etc.)

☹ What I think you should improve and how:

(E.g.: point out a problem, correct something, make a suggestion, etc.)

As a reader, I'll give your work _____.

By: _____

S2 English Imaginative Writing

Dear Heidi,

I would love to know what you think about my story. Please feel free to comment using the form below. I promise I'll read your comments and improve my work. Thank you very much!

Yours,

Rita

The writer

Comment Form

I feel that

1. the characters are vivid/just OK/not vivid and quite teach.
2. the pace of the story is too fast/just right/too slow and it hasn't say how to she take of her mother.
3. the events are logical/illogical/funny/boring and _____.
4. the reason why mother had become smaller is clear/unclear and _____.
5. the reason why mother returned normal is clear/unclear and _____.
6. the feelings of the characters are well described/OK/badly described and _____.
7. the message of the story is good/acceptable/bad and _____.
8. the language used is good/acceptable/bad and _____.

☺ What I like most about your story and why:

(E.g.: the introduction, the characters, an event, a paragraph, the language, etc.)

I like your story's feeling because you usually add some feeling on it.
And I like the language too, because you usually use past
tense.

☹ What I think you should improve and how:

(E.g.: point out a problem, correct something, make a suggestion, etc.)

I think that you should write down why your mother became
normal size at the back.

As a reader, I'll give your work 70.

By: Heidi

Lesson 3: Teacher Comments

This was a lesson a week after Lesson Two. Today Miss Lee wanted the students to respond to her written comments. She began with the following:

1. Returned students' work on which she had made comments.
2. Asked the class to read her comments, and then note down their responses to her comments by:
 - Placing a tick next to comments they agreed with;
 - Writing a question mark next to a comment they did not understand;
 - Answering the questions the teacher raised; and
 - Writing "Thanks" next to a positive remark by the teacher.
3. Explained why she asked students to do so: she wanted to know if they had understood her comments.
4. Talked to individual students who needed help while the class was writing.



In the second half of the lesson, the teacher did the following:



1. Explained to the class why revising one's writing is important.
2. Highlighted the focuses of revision — polish the language and expand ideas.
3. Referred to a handout consisting of four examples of [students' work](#).
4. Asked students to improve the items in the examples based on the comments she had given.
5. Put students into groups of four and assigned one item to each group.
6. Invited representatives from groups to report their suggestions.
7. Ended the revision activity by drawing students' attention to common language problems such as tenses and verb forms.
8. Asked students to revise the content and language of their own work at home.

Analysis

a) Students' feedback on the teacher's comments

Miss Lee's lesson began with students responding to her comments. She reminded students that she wanted their feedback on her comments. We observed that students were conscientious and some responded in considerable detail. They saw it as a vehicle for

communication and a means to express agreement and disagreement with the teacher's comments:



For Miss Lee, seeking students' views on her comments enables her to improve the quality of her comments. When asked to suggest how teachers can give quality feedback, she emphasised that teachers learn by reflecting on the comments they give and by soliciting students' views:



b) Learner training

One important element identified in CSS's process writing experience is learner training, which ensures that students understand and can respond to teacher's comments. Miss Lee made use of four examples from students' writing to raise awareness of coherence, idea expansion and the focus of the story. She explained her choice of items, which are typical problems in students' work:



In the lesson, each group discussed one problem and revised the original writing. One of the four problems selected was as follows:

Someone wrote:	Miss Lee wrote:	Someone should write:
I went out to the library to look for some information about this.	If you went out, you could not take care of your mother and this should be the focus of the story. Do you think you can look for information without going out?	

In the story, the narrator's mother suddenly changed size and was 20 cm tall. The narrator had to take care of her until she grew back to her normal size. This student wrote that he went to the library, and the teacher commented that he should rethink his ideas because he was leaving Mother alone. Instead of taking the teacher's advice, the group improved on the original idea. They decided to put Mother into a bag and bring her along so that they could still take care of her.



As illustrated in this discussion, the purpose of learner training is not to dictate the teacher's will to students, but to encourage them to improve on their ideas. Rita, an S.2 student, thought this lesson helped her "think carefully whether each point made sense", and Carmen, another S.2 student, learned to see things from a different perspective:



Lesson 4: Grammar Correction

This lesson was conducted a week after Lesson Three to provide feedback on grammatical mistakes in students' compositions. Miss Lee did the following:

- Prepared a handout consisting of 20 ungrammatical sentences taken from students' work.
- Put students in pairs to spot and correct those mistakes.
- Put hints on the blackboard to help students identify the errors.

Went over the answers with the class.

- Gave out a sample composition for the class to read at the end of the lesson.
- Asked each student to read the work of three of their classmates, and assigned composition correction as homework.



A Process Writing cycle is completed after students correct their writing and the teacher has marked their corrections.

Someone wrote	Miss Lee wrote	Someone should write
I woke up at 12 and felt hungry. I discovered my mum, she stood on the table and cried.	What was your natural response if you felt hungry after you woke up? A better link is needed between feeling hungry and discovering your mum.	
She said that she had drunk some colourless liquid. I thought it must be made by my dad.	Why and when did she drink it? She wanted to? A mistake? Where did she get it?	
I went out to the library to look for some information about this.	If you went out, you could not take care of your mother but his should be the focus of the story. Do you think you can look for information without going out?	
About 12 o'clock, suddenly mother grew back to her normal size.	Could this come earlier to fit the question?	

S2 English Imaginative Writing Teacher comments on language

You made fewer mistakes in the second draft. Well done! Let's correct the mistakes in the following sentences. Can you also tell what kind of mistake each is? (E.g. Tense, Verb form, SV, Voice, Article, Punctuation, Wrong use of word, PS, Sentence structure, Run-on sentences, Spelling, Preposition)

1. I heard my mother screamed~~d~~.
2. I went to kitchen to look for some food~~s~~.
3. I asked her, "Why ^{do} did you become so small?"
4. God wanted to ^{give} gave me some punishment.
5. She drank some orange juice that ^{was} invented by my father.
6. ^{Taking} Took care of someone ^{that} was not easy.
7. She ^{who} looked after me was very hard.
8. I did not like mother and rude ^{for} to her.
9. My mother and I ^{were} was very happy.
10. We are very ^{lucky} luck and we should love our mother.
11. I must ^{help} helped her to do all the housework.
12. Last Sunday, when I woke up, the time was 12 o'clock. ^{then/so} I felt very hungry. I
looked for mum to see if she had prepared the lunch.
13. I need ^{to} solve the problem.
14. Now I know how important my mother ^{is} is.
15. I told my father what ^{had} happened.
16. She could not do anythings~~s~~.
17. My father invented some liquid that made people ^{grow} grew smaller.
18. ^{In} At the evening, I was very tired.
19. I was very ^{surprised} suprise.
20. We added some medicine to the orange juice that she bought it the day before.

Impact on Students' Learning



Process Writing has had a positive impact on learning in CSS. Students' writing has improved and their motivation, confidence and satisfaction have grown.

In short, Process Writing has:

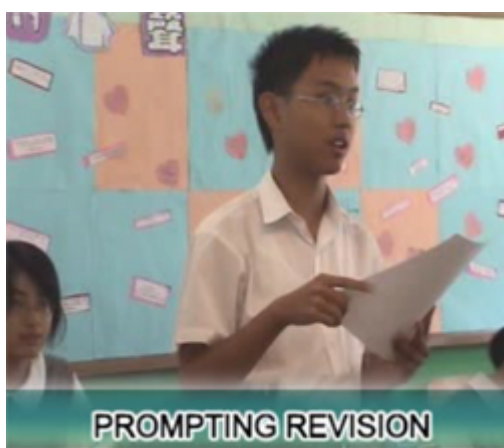
- Prompted revision
- Fostered a sense of ownership of text
- Created a sense of audience
- Facilitated evaluation of writing

Changed students' attitudes towards writing

Improving Content and Organisation

1. Logical development of the plot
2. Clarity of ideas

Comments from their teachers and peers prompt students to revise their work, but they are more likely to consider their teachers' comments. In the S.2 writing we examined, less than 20% of peer comments were acted upon in revision as compared with over 70% of teacher comments. Albert, an S.2 student, remarked that he values his teacher's comments more than those of his peers:



Despite what he said, Albert revised his work based on a comment his peer put on his peer comment form. In the last paragraph of his first draft, he wrote that his mother drank orange juice and became bigger, but he did not explain why the orange juice changed his mother's size. His first draft read:

After 10 days, the breakfast was orange juice, when my mum drank it, she became bigger!! I am very afraid but happy at that time. It is because "MUM BECAME THE NORMAL SIZE".

In response to this a peer wrote:

How can mum get the orange juice. Why the mum drink the orange juice will change the size.

Albert said that he saw the peer comment and realised that he had to clarify things in his revised draft, he filled the gap in the story by adding a reason.

The next day, we add some magazine (medicine) to the orange juice that we find it in the internet. It say can make the people change the normal size. When my mum drank it, she became bigger!! I was very afraid but happy at that time. It is because "MUM BECAME THE NORMAL SIZE".

Students in our interviews pointed out that their peers focus on grammatical mistakes, while their teacher focuses on logical organisation and clarity of ideas when writing comments.

1. Logical development of the plot

The writing topic requires students to write about how they took care of Mother until she returned to her normal size that evening. Some students, like Rita, wrote as if they knew their mother would return to her normal size. Here is the first paragraph of Rita's first draft:

Last Sunday, when I woke up, I was very fascinating. It is because my mother had suddenly changed size and become much smaller. She was only 20 cm tall! She couldn't take care of me, so I had to take care of her until she grew back to her normal size.

This last sentence robs the story of all its suspense and does not sound logical, so Miss Lee wrote:

Hey! Did you know she was going to grow bigger? No! Don't put everything in the question into this first paragraph.

In Rita's revised draft she removed the clause "until she grew back to her normal size" and she waited until the second-last paragraph to mention that her mother was back to normal.

Another problem with Rita's writing was her tone of voice. In the second paragraph of her first draft, when the narrator asked Mother why she changed size, mother answered with certainty:

I asked my mother, 'Why do you changed size and become smaller?' She said, 'It is because I drunk an orange juice. I think that it was a magic drink!'

A tentative tone would have sounded more logical, so Miss Lee wrote:

She knew why? I don't think she was so certain.

When Rita revised this she wrote:

I asked mum, 'Why did you change size and become smaller?' She said, 'I don't knew. When I finished an orange juice, after, I had become much smaller. May be it was a magic juice!'

Here Rita made a few changes. She added "I don't know" to show that the mother wasn't sure. Then "drinking an orange juice" was no longer stated as a reason, but factual recall of a past action. Finally, she used the word "maybe" to indicate a mere guess. This made the plot more logical.

2. Clarity of ideas

Her teacher's comments also helped Rita to improve the clarity of her work. In the first paragraph of her first draft Rita wrote:

Last Sunday, when I woke up, I was very fascinating. It is because my mother had suddenly changed size and become much smaller.

An explanation of how Rita discovered her mother had shrunk would make the writing more coherent. Therefore the teacher wrote:

Can you describe how you found that?

In her revised draft Rita acted upon this comment and wrote:

Last Sunday, when I woke up, I was very surprised. I found my mother on the sofa. She was cried and sat on the sofa. The surprised thing was my mum had suddenly changed size and become much smaller.

The revision helped to link the sentences and improve the flow of ideas

Another example of improved clarity is the narrator's decision to buy a toy house for her mother. Rita wrote:

After, I bought a toy house for her.

It was not clear whether the narrator would go out alone or bring along her mother. If she went out alone, then her mother would be left at home and this could be dangerous; if she brought along her mother, then she would have to think of how to do it. Therefore the teacher wrote:

You went out by yourself and left her alone at home?

Above Miss Lee's comment Rita wrote this response:

No, I went out with mum. I put her in my bag.

But in her revised draft Rita wrote:

After that, I found my toy house in my room.

Rita said the teacher's comment prompted her to rethink her idea. She agreed that "the mother is old and shouldn't be left alone". At first, she decided to put Mother in a bag, but she changed her idea because "it wasn't good to put her there as she couldn't breathe well inside the bag". Finally, she opted for the idea of finding a toy house at home.

We can tell that Rita had to make decisions during the process of revision. She had to decide

- whether she agreed with her teacher, and

- what idea she would use to replace the original one

Because the teacher responded to Rita's draft as a reader rather than a teacher, Rita was given space to decide on actions to take. This fostered a sense of ownership of text.

Fostered a Sense of Ownership of Text

Not all comments made by teachers and peers are taken into account in students' revisions. In other words, students are selective about the comments:



Clearly students are aware of their right as writers to accept or reject peer and teacher comments. Indeed, such an ownership of text is encouraged by teachers.



Created a Sense of Audience

Because the students' work will be read by others, they have a heightened sense of audience and this has an impact on their attitude to writing:

"When I wrote the second draft, I knew that my classmates and my teacher would read it, so I tried my best to improve it." (*Carmen, an S.2 student*)

One student admitted that because her classmates will read her writing, she cares more about improving her work. Her English teacher, she explained, is able to understand what she writes:



Though peer comments are not as effective as teacher comments in prompting revision, they play an indispensable role in raising students' audience awareness.

Facilitated Evaluation of Writing



Throughout the Process Writing cycle, students evaluate their own as well as their peers' writing as follows:

- They exchange first drafts and make peer comments.
- They receive feedback from the teacher that draws their attention to strengths and weaknesses in their writing
- They read each other's work.

Students see value in receiving peer feedback, as their peers make suggestions from a reader's perspective and evaluate their ideas. At the same time, when students make peer comments, they do not simply evaluate each other's work. They reflect on their own writing by comparing their work with that of their peers:

Students mentioned a number of benefits of reading others' work:



On the surface, peer feedback does not lead to much revision, but the process of evaluation, reflection and comparing one's writing with others' benefits students.

One possible outcome of students' evaluation and reflection of their writing is self-initiated revision, i.e. changes to a draft without direct feedback from peers or the teacher. We looked at how Rita revised her draft with the help of her teacher's comments. There is also evidence of self-initiated revision. In Rita's first draft she wrote:

Suddenly, my dear mother grew back to her normal size!
We felt delighted.

In her revised draft she added a sentence:

Suddenly, my dear mother grew back to her normal size!
I hugged mum. We felt delighted.

Rita explained that her teacher did not ask her to add this sentence:

"I had the idea and thought maybe I should write it down and see how the teacher would comment on this."

Two other students we interviewed, Yuk Ying and Tramy, also reported they revised their writing even when the teacher did not indicate a need to change it.

"The teacher didn't comment on this part. However, I think I should revise it."

"When I rewrote the composition at home, I felt that I needed to add this piece of information."

Mrs Ronica Chan, the English panel chairperson, is aware that students revise their work on their own initiative and she thinks that this is attributable to feedback received in class and reading others' writing:



Changed Attitudes Towards Writing

Process Writing gives students a second chance to improve their work, and their improvement is shown not only in the quality of their work but also in their attitude to writing. Both teachers and students reported these improvements in students:

- More confidence



"... students gained a lot of confidence in writing. The feedback from teachers gave them more ideas for their second draft." (*Miss Magnolia Leung, an S.2 English teacher*)

"In my compositions, my marks were low. I thought my writing was poor. However, now I get higher marks, and I'm more confident in showing my work to others."

- Greater satisfaction



"Well I do see that students feel satisfied with their work, especially when they receive higher marks." (*Mrs Chan, English panel chair*)

- Higher motivation

"My teacher's and classmates' comments encourage me to write better. I know that their opinions are good for my essay." (*Yuk Ying, an S.2 student*)

Process Writing and Product Writing: Their Complementary Roles

An emphasis on revision and providing of opportunities for students to improve their writing and get higher grades give Process Writing an edge over Product Writing. An S.4 student, Larry, who has done Process Writing for more than three years, thinks it gives him "good training". Students have a better understanding of their work if they get one more chance to improve it:

"I will have a better understanding of my essay if I write it twice."

(Yuk Ying, an S.2 student)

Such a second chance is lacking in Product Writing:

"The main function of Product Writing is that after students write the first draft, you comment on their mistakes. Then they correct their grammatical mistakes. However, we can't help them improve their organisation and presentation of ideas if we only correct grammar."

(Miss Grace Wong, assistant panel chair)



However, because it takes more time to complete a Process Writing cycle, students may write fewer pieces of work, practise writing fewer genres and not have adequate exam practice. All these are concerns for both teachers and students:

"We need a lot of lessons for only one piece of Process Writing, so it's better to have it occasionally."

(Tracy, an S.2 student)

"There will not be so many topics since we have to write on the same topic twice."

(Ka Lung, an S.2 student)

"Their exposure to different genres may also be lowered."

(Miss Lee, an English teacher)

"... in Product Writing, students have to finish their writing within one lesson ... there's a time limit ... in order to prepare students for public exams, we need to give them practice on writing within a time limit."

(Miss Wong, assistant panel chair)

Considering the pros and cons of Process and Product Writing, teachers in CSS have worked out a compromise. They adopt Process Writing the first time a difficult topic or genre is covered. In this way, students experience a learning process, and Product and Process Writing complement each other:

"When we first started Process Writing, it was more frequent ... But then, students learned how to organise their ideas. We don't see the need for lots of Process Writing in each form. On the other hand, we see that it's important for students to learn different genres. For example, when Form Three students learn to write argumentative writing ... it's quite difficult and new to them. It's then worth adopting Process Writing."

(Miss Wong, an English teacher)

Suggested writing genres for adopting Process Writing

Junior Forms	Senior Forms

Narrative	Argumentative
Imaginative	Expository
Descriptive	Discussion

Conception of Regular Writing

Regular Writing encourages writing on a regular basis. It is in addition to the compositions that students do weekly or bi-weekly. Regular Writing was introduced to S.3 and above in 2000/01.

The idea of Regular Writing came from the principal, who believes that students benefit from regular and frequent writing practice. Since the purpose of Regular Writing is to encourage students to write more, teachers do not have to do intensive marking:

"Writing more makes students think. We hope that this can train them to think and write more fluently ... What teachers have to do (for Regular Writing) is to skim the writing, and give some feedback ..."



It is worth noting that the school requires teachers' comments to be content-focused, and to provide "positive", "encouraging" feedback showing the teacher's "interest".

Implementation at S.4

We are going to look at how Regular Writing was adopted in an S.4 science class taught by Mrs Ronica Chan.



Students in this class are of diverse English proficiency. We interviewed students of various English abilities in the class as well as the teacher, and analysed samples of students' writing. There are five key aspects of Regular Writing:

- [Variety of writing tasks](#)
- [Mediation of reading and writing](#)
- [Integration of regular writing into English lessons](#)
- [Activation of peer support](#)
- [Provision of teacher feedback](#)

Variety of Writing Tasks

When asked why students improve in Regular Writing, Mrs Ronica Chan mentioned two key factors – frequency and variety:

"They can have more writing practices and a variety of tasks."

The Regular Writing assignments that Mrs Chan's S.4 class did in the academic year 2003/04 illustrate this variety. They are listed below:

Date	Task
5/9/2003	Me (self-introduction)
13/9/2003	Newspaper work: ways of practising English (drawing a mind map)
24/9/2003	Quiz/Dictation (close exercise)
27/9/2003	Should S.4 students do more PE? (Topic from course book)
11/10/2003	Is doing homework good or bad? (Topic from news reading)
31/10/2003	How do you know that they are VIPs? (Writing a summary)
1/11/2003	Sentence-making (11 sentences)
16/11/2003	Should students be allowed to bring mobile phones to school? (topic from news reading)
30/11/2003	Reflections
14/12/2003	Extensive reading (topic from news reading)
Christmas holidays	1. Class reader <i>A Pack of Liars</i> (reading journal) 2. Narrative writing (topic from course book)
6/2/2004	Arson attack (topic from news reading)
14/2/2004	1st Term Paper 1 exam corrections & evaluation
2/3/2004	Sentence-making (17 sentences) + comments
26/3/2004	Stress (topic from news reading)
10/4/2004	Hong Kong's education system (topic from news reading)

These tasks can be categorised as follows:

- Writing to introduce oneself
- Writing in response to news reading
- Writing on course book topics
- Reflections and evaluation
- Holiday reading journal
- Summary writing
- Others: mind map, quiz/dictation, sentence-making

The tasks range from personal topics to examination practice, from those with greater emphasis on grammatical accuracy to those on fluency and free expression of ideas. The students we

interviewed reacted positively to the variety of writing tasks. Clarence, an S.4 student, pointed out that compared with composition writing, in Regular Writing:

"... I can express myself more...; I can write on a wider range of topics."

Teachers in CSS are free to choose those writing tasks that best suit students' needs. This gives them flexibility and benefits students. Mrs Chan recalled having taught a very weak S.7 class that could not write long pieces. With Regular Writing she was able to tailor the tasks to the students.



"The students were very weak, and I had to teach them how to write sentences and paragraphs. They couldn't write a longer piece. But Regular Writing allows teachers to design various tasks to suit the needs and abilities of each class. Unlike compositions where every class has to write on the same topic, the format of Regular Writing is flexible and students can be asked to write sentences. Of course they are asked to write at least 10-20 sentences."

Mediation of Reading and Writing

Over half of the Regular Writing tasks in the S.4 class we studied were related to news reading. Interviews with both teachers and students in CSS revealed that news topics are often chosen for Regular Writing:

"For Regular Writing, I usually read the newspaper with them in the lessons. Usually, I choose topics that students like. After reading the newspaper, I ask them to go home to do a news commentary ..."
(Miss Wong, assistant English panel chair)

"The teacher asks us to cut the articles out of the newspaper and we read them together. We underline the main points and write something when we return home. We also include our personal opinions."
(Ka Ho, an S.4 student)

News reading provides students with input for writing. They can use the ideas, vocabulary and sentence structures from news articles and this in turn improves their English.

Ka Ho and Ka Wo, both S.4 students with weak English, mentioned that news reading helps them improve their writing; and Ka Lung, another S.4 student with average English, said that ideas "gush out" when he writes.



Integration of Regular Writing into English Lessons

Instead of merely assigning a topic as homework, Mrs Ronica Chan spends a lot of class time preparing students for their Regular Writing, which is integrated into her lessons. She sees such integration as important, as it provides an opportunity for students to practise their language immediately after it is covered in class:



"...most of them [writing tasks] are related to what I've done with my students in the English lesson. I always ask my students to read newspaper articles in the English lessons and then they have to present to each other. Regular Writing is a very good exercise as a follow up... We do quizzes, dictation or sentence-making. I've designed tasks for my students and they are suited to their needs. ...For example, when I found that they were very weak in using conditionals, then I designed some writing practices for them."

"There are not many opportunities for practice if we just rely on composition lessons."

It is clear from Mrs Chan's explanation that there is much flexibility in Regular Writing. While developing fluency is the primary aim of Regular Writing, accuracy work is built in occasionally.

Students described Regular Writing as "closely-related" to their English lessons. They recalled how Mrs Chan:

- Went through an article on mobile phones with the class.
- Got them to write on this topic in their Regular Writing.
- Arranged a class debate on this same topic afterwards.
- Used their writing as input for a debating lesson that focused on persuasive language.

Activation of Peer Support

Though writing is considered an individual activity, Mrs Ronica Chan brings in collaborative learning by

- asking students to work in groups of four,
- having them brainstorm ideas as preparation for Regular Writing in class, and
- asking them to proofread each other's writing before submitting it.



Mrs Chan has used this grouping arrangement to good effect. She announces the names of students in a group who have improved, as well as the names of students in a group who have not put in enough effort. This creates pressure for students in the same group to support one another. Gary, an S.4 student, said students read their peers' writing seriously because they want their group to be praised in class:

"The teacher will name us in class if we have improved. It's great encouragement."

Mrs Chan also encourages better students in a group to urge other group members to work harder. One student, Ka Lung, recalled having been asked to help a group mate:

"... at the bottom of my heart, I wanted to help him. I asked him to start working early. But sometimes he didn't do his homework, and then I had to push him to work."

"Sometimes, the English of the whole group improves."

Ka Lung admits that he might not be motivated or able to proofread his work if he had to work individually. The activation of peer support leads to a positive learning outcome – students improve as a group, not only individually. This was noted by Mrs Chan and the students:



Provision of Teacher Feedback

Mrs Ronica Chan attaches a lot of importance to feedback on Regular Writing. To her, learning does not stop upon completion of a writing task. She explained:



We will look at how Mrs Chan provides feedback to the whole class as well as to individual students.

1. Whole-class feedback According to the students we interviewed, Mrs Chan provides the following feedback:

- gives an overview of students' performance
- highlights common mistakes
- introduces good writing skills used by students
- discusses the strengths and weaknesses of sample writing
- copies good students' writing for the class
- encourages students to read classmates' writing
-

"She first gives us an overview of our performance. She tells us the mistakes that most of us have made or introduces some good writing skills used by classmates."
(Larry, an S.4 student)

"Mrs Chan discusses with us the good points of well written compositions ... she also talks about the problems of the writing ... she asks us to paste classmates' good writing in the book. When I look at the work, I find they [the classmates] are doing a great job and I am motivated to do better." (Ka Ho, an S.4 student)

For students, such feedback is "absolutely helpful". Besides being more aware of their own mistakes and strengths, they learn to distinguish between good and bad writing:

"I can identify strengths in others' writing ... After we've read pieces of writing, we have in mind the piece we consider the best...After we've read some bad ones, we can tell which ones are good."
(Joey, an S.4 student)

There is also an affective impact if one's writing is copied and read in class by others:

"... for those whose writing has been copied, it's great encouragement. I admire those students so much."
(Ka Lung, an S.4 student)

"I hope I can have my writing copied one day."
(Gary, an S.4 student)

If there were no feedback in class, some students would still go over the teacher's feedback at home, but some would not. Joey, an S.4 student, admitted that she would not bother with it. She said:



2. Individual Feedback

The English panel at CSS stresses "positive", "encouraging" comments that show the teacher's interest in students' work, and there is much evidence of this in Mrs Ronica Chan's written feedback on her students' writing. Upon examination of Mrs Chan's feedback to individual students, the following deserve particular attention:

- Making genuine personalised comments
- Using humorous drawings

Making Genuine Personalised Comments

Students we interviewed described Regular Writing as a chance to "chat" with their teacher. Clarence, an S.4 student, maintained "written conversation" with Mrs Chan through Regular Writing:

"We chat all the time. It's really like chatting with a friend. I write my response when she asks me some questions and I write down what I feel ... and she goes on writing her response."

Such a personal touch can be seen in the way Mrs Chan writes her comments. She shares her views and experience, gives advice, and shows compassion in her response to her students' writing. For example, one of her S.4 students, Ka Wo, wrote that he had an unhappy childhood, and that he was the only boy in his family, and therefore, his parents had high hopes for him. Mrs Chan then responded with:

OH! Sorry to hear about it. You must be under a lot of stress, William?

Another S.4 student Gary did not do well enough in his studies and in one of his Regular Writing entries Mrs Chan wrote:

Dear Gordon
I am so eager to teach you next year. Don't repeat.
Try your utmost. Can you promise me?
Mrs. Chan

There is a strong affective element in Mrs Chan's comments. Larry, an S.4 student, said her comments were "warm and close to one's heart" and showed her concern for students.

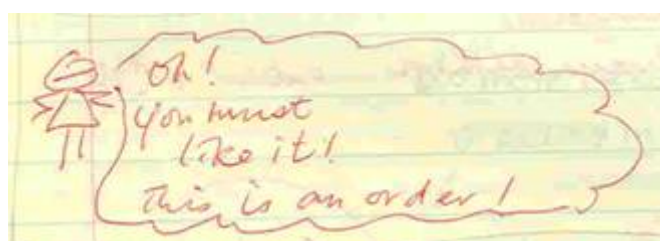
For Mrs Chan, giving genuine personalised comments builds rapport and helps students learn:



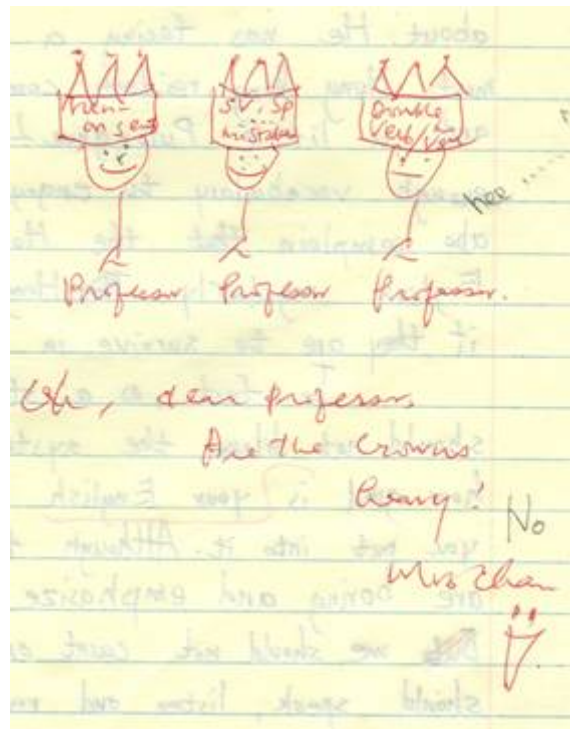
Using Humorous Drawings

Drawing matchstick cartoons is Mrs Chan's light-hearted way of indicating disagreement and pointing out mistakes in students' work, and this, to students, is "fun" and "memorable ". ([Ka Ho, an S.4 student](#))

When Ka Wo, an S.4 student, wrote that he hated doing English homework, Mrs Chan drew the picture below:



Ka Ho, another S.4 student, recalled Mrs Chan having drawn a picture reminding him of mistakes he often made (i.e. run-on sentences, subject-verb agreement, spelling, and verb problems).



These cartoons softened the tone, while still drawing students' attention to their errors. Hence a student remarked:

"Even though she is scolding you, you will laugh when you see her drawing."
(Joey, an S.4 student)

Because a personal teacher-student relationship is established, Regular Writing is perceived as a means to "interact" with the teacher and share opinions:

"I don't regard Regular Writing as homework. It's like an outlet for me to express my views, and my diary. I can write what I want. I enjoy it."
(Kwai Chi, an S.5 student)

Despite the workload, the English teachers in CSS described providing comments as "enjoyable" because:

"Marking is very personalised. It's a form of communication."
(Mr Thomas, an English teacher)

Impact on Students' Learning

Regular Writing has had a positive impact on student learning. The students we interviewed reported that Regular Writing has:

- [Alleviated their writing anxiety](#)
- [Increased their interest in writing](#)
- [Improved their writing performance](#)



Alleviated Writing Anxiety

Joey and Kwai Chi, in S.4 and S.5 respectively, spoke about how they experienced a change in their attitude towards writing. They were afraid of it at first, but with constant practice, their confidence grew. Kwai Chi said:

"I have more confidence and interest when I write more. I feel less intimidated by writing... Regular Writing can help boost our confidence."

Joey said: "At first, I was afraid of Regular Writing. But now, I just do it and do it well. At first, I worried that I couldn't write what I'd like to write. Now, I worry whether I can write it well."

Increased Interest in Writing

Students' interest in writing has also grown. Ka Lung can write with greater ease as he has learnt more points from reading newspaper articles. Writing to him is no longer a pain. For Larry, the required length of writing no longer bothers him as his interest in writing has increased.

"I feel it's easier to write, and I like writing more now. In the past, I felt very bad when I knew I had to do writing. Now, I don't mind writing since it's so easy..."

"Before, I was troubled by the word requirement. I'd keep counting the words I had written when I was doing Regular Writing. Usually I didn't write enough. But now I can write freely and not bother about the word requirement."

Improved Writing Performance

Student improvement is shown in the length of their writing, their organisation and their grammatical accuracy. Gary finds that the more he writes, the better his writing gets, and the better he writes the more he dares to write:

"I keep writing ... and even exceed the word limit, but I'm still capable of keeping the content meaningful...Now, I put in more effort and I dare to write."

Clarence and Larry think regular writing helps them with their thinking and organisation, and this, as Larry pointed out, would be of help for studying other subjects:

"...doing more regular writing can train my thinking, and develop my logic."
(Clarence, an S.4 student)

"[Regular writing] helps me answer questions in other subjects...I can organise my answers quickly."
(Larry, an S.4 student)

Regular Writing also helps students improve their grammar. They make fewer grammatical mistakes, use more sentence patterns and write with greater fluency. Joey pointed out, though, that such improvement takes time:

"At the start of the school year, it was very difficult to write the first sentence for the English composition. I had to think over and over, but I still didn't know what to write. But as I do more news-reading, all the sentence patterns just appear naturally in my mind. I can write fluently."
(Ka Ho, an S.4 student)

"When I first did Regular Writing, there were a lot of red marks and comments. And later on, there were fewer red marks and I saw the words "Good work"... It took a lot of time and effort, but I finally improved."
(Joey, an S.4 student)

Regular and Composition Writing: Their Complementary Roles

Composition writing refers to both Product and Process Writing. It was out of a concern for more writing practice that Regular Writing was introduced in CSS. This higher writing frequency is in fact seen as a crucial reason for students' improvement in writing, and Regular Writing supports composition writing:

"Regular Writing can help us write more, which can help us write better compositions."

(Joey, an S.4 student)

"At first, I found composition and Regular Writing very troublesome. ... We started writing a lot in Regular Writing. After some time, it became easier for us to write the compositions."

(Ka Ho, an S.4 student)

As Regular Writing is freer, with more flexible topic choice and less stringent marking than compositions, it becomes a vehicle for free expression. In this respect, Regular Writing complements composition writing, which is more formal and is geared towards examination practice.