

September 21, 2020

Online NUFSS Workshop 2020

Newsletter No. 2

Workshop in September

“Creative Writing: When you See Better, You Do Better”

Presenters:

Presenter Nic Comino
(Mansfield State High School, Australia),
Anthony Petracci
(Co-Owner Scribble Ink)



Date: September 12, 2020, 10:30-14:30 (Zoom Meeting)

Abstract:

The demands of writing on students are quite rigorous, particularly in the senior years of high schooling. Our unique program dramatically boosts the quality of student writing in most grade levels. After years of studying student writing in all grades, it was observed that a large disconnect exists between student work and professional writing. This program was developed to bridge that gap and teach students how to significantly impact the quality of their expression in all written subjects. As a result, thousands of students have improved their writing capabilities, many winning awards and competitions, and topping their classes, cohorts and schools. Typically students find that after 2-3 years engagement with our program, their writing improves to a standard 3-4 years above their grade level. Teachers and parents constantly comment on the dramatic difference they see in student work. This energetic and engaging presentation will guide participants through a selection of the program’s techniques falling under our Four Pillars of Quality Writing: Structure, Expression, Word Choice and Novelty. We have 2 simple mantras: When students see better, they do better, and Quality writing comes only from quality thinking. When we teach children to think about their writing, we empower them by boosting their confidence in their academic pursuits.

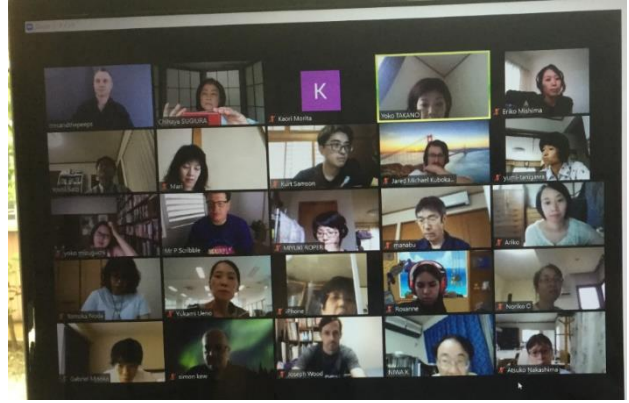


The number of participants: 39

1. Interesting activities you might want to use in your class. Why?

- Transforming sentences into different ones without using nouns as the beginning of the sentence. Students need both basic grammar skills and vocabulary knowledge. Also, it is a kind of game for them. They prefer a challenging task.
- I would like to use sentence starters and discover how creative my students are. This is new to them and

I hope that they will have different interesting answers. We have been giving them writing tasks that are too common. We have never done creative writing with them. I think writing is a good way to communicate and be able to put to life our imaginations.



- I liked the group brainstorming of “six actions” to set the basis of story making. Students would really enjoy collaborating to create imaginative and fun stories together, which in turn would give them confidence to then create their own individual stories.
- I do not have much experience teaching creative writing, but even for academic writing, I could use the idea of “reducing auxiliary verbs” for pair/group work when students are revising their drafts to make sentences more powerful and convincing! It could be an interesting exercise for college students to look for the better words in pairs or groups for peer editing, too. Also, “zingy idea” brainstorming was fun and could be used in my communication classes as well. I think this could be a great starting activity to make students have a casual discussion, without worrying about the right answer.
- The Fisherman story impressed me, especially because it’s a great example for poor writing. Most of students write this way, and by showing this particular story, I might be able to make my students understand the difference. Also The Plan, was a great activity, it could make the students be more focused. The words : who, where, what, tension, complication, resolution are important keys in helping the learners in understanding what they are expected to do, even if their English is very low

2. What you learned from today’s workshop

- I have learned how writing can benefit students greatly. When Nic talked about setting the standard higher, I think we haven't done that for a while and we should. We should not limit our students’ abilities and that we should believe in them. In doing so, we should provide them with tools to be the best version of themselves. Some of the basic methods were introduced in the seminar, however, some of them were too advanced for my students and I may need to speak Japanese to help them. I plan to push my students more but I have to be realistic as well.
- Clear objectives would help learners to improve writing, especially creative writing. I used to encourage them to write more (focus on fluency), so the method is helpful to lead them to create essay better.
- I was very surprised to learn that some students using this method of creative writing instruction can improve their writing performance by up to 400%! The usage of author techniques to push students to develop the creative part of their brains is something I would like to try in my lessons. Thank you Nic and Anthony for a wonderful and stimulating workshop!
- I didn’t know that effective writings can actually be acquired with all these techniques ; structure, expression, word choice, and novelty. As you told us, we should practice writing with the authors’ methods over and over so that we can sink them in our angular gyrus to be able to write like a professional writer automatically without thinking.
- I am very glad that I could learn the simple and easy techniques I can use to improve the writings of my

students and myself. In fact, I was surprised to see the great differences/improvement you could make on students' writings by just giving small advice; such as to start the sentence with certain elements like "when" and "where". The workshop made me very interested in incorporating some writing activities even in my non-writing classes, and I would love to apply the techniques into my own writings as well.

3. Questions and Answers

Before answering your question, we'd like to sincerely thank you for allowing us to share elements of our program with you. The first thing we would encourage you to do is tell your students to think **differently** to the student sitting next to them. All students see their response and write without thinking and in autopilot. This is a problem. We train our students to reject the first, second, third, and maybe even fourth idea when they are thinking of what and how to write.

The most basic way to improve and expand their thinking and writing is to start with a basic phrase - for example....**The dog chased the cat.**

It's important to modify sentences so that they don't begin with a noun and verb. It's acceptable and not illegal to do so, it's just not really creative.

Now explain all the different types of sentence starts and even find examples of how professional authors mix up and vary their sentences.

Where starts eg: Under Over Next to Between Beside Inside Outside
When starts eg: During While Sometime After Before Immediately after/before
Verb starts eg: Words that end in ING....Barking Chasing Yelping Running
Why starts eg: Because Due to (these can be challenging)

Prepositional starts : First Master the above starts!
Probability starts

Now, as a class, brainstorm on your whiteboard different examples of sentence starts using the above examples. We recommend initially just concentrating on one start per lesson.

Usingthe dog chased the cat.....as your example.

Under the fence, the dog chased the cat.
Over near the rose bush, the dog chased the cat.
Next to the garage, the dog chased the cat.
Between two hedges, the dog chased the cat.
Beside Mr Yoshi's car, the dog chased the cat.
Inside the backyard, the dog chased the cat.
Outside the back entrance, the dog chased the cat.

Repeat the same process for WHEN starts.

Eventually the students can do a double.....

Between two hedges, beside Mr Yoshi's car, the dog chased the cat.

And then eventually it builds to this....

Between two hedges, beside Mr Yoshi's car, the dog chased the cat **after first spotting each other near the pool.**

A verb start looking like this.....

Chasing the cat, the dog barked wildly.

Yelping after being scratched, the dog chased the cat.

Running at maximum speed, the dog chased the cat.

Each week, provide students with a new phrase.

The child cried.

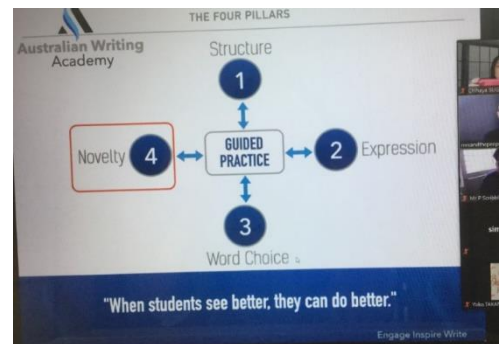
The students picked up rubbish.

The dog chewed its bone.

We packed our car.

They swam at the beach.

Etc



We also have Scribble resources we are happy to share. Please email us at hello@scribbleink.com.au

Question: ***I am interested in their program. To start, I would like to know some books about teaching how to write.***

Unfortunately, we cannot make any recommendations about resources....we develop our own. We do not believe that there are any available that specifically teach what we do. Scribble Ink is quite unique. What we have discovered is that when students repeatedly practice our starts and author techniques, apply our edits and concepts, they improve in time. Repetition is critical.

Question: ***Are there some students of particular personalities or proficiency levels that benefit more from your novel writing instruction techniques than others?***

All students improve when they apply our techniques. Obviously, having a basic grasp of English is critical for improvement. More capable students improve

faster. Students who struggle with English may also struggle with our program, though encouraging them to think differently is vital. Our author techniques are easy to remember- once practiced over and over again.

Eg ...**the A and He/She/It technique.**

Combining three sentences into one, this technique wows a teacher.

**Isla was a great ballet dancer.
She was popular with her friends.
She auditioned for the talent show.**

A great ballet dancer, **and** popular with her friends, **Isla** auditioned for the talent show.

Nagoya University is a fantastic place to learn.
The courses are world famous.
Students there achieve incredible success.

A fantastic place to learn, **and** with world famous courses, **Nagoya University** students achieve incredible success.

Question: *Do your creative writing lessons also have implications for the teaching of argumentative essays?*

It's fascinating, but our techniques can actually be applied to all genres of writing. When a student recognises the importance of **mixing up sentence starts, avoiding repetition of key nouns, using professional writing techniques, focusing on not providing irrelevant information, and eliminating STOP words** their writing honestly transforms.

Question: *I would love to know how the techniques for creative writing could be applied to academic writing. I teach college students a writing course in which they have to write several short essays using patterns/strategies of academic writing. As you can imagine, this type of writing class could be a little boring and the students' essays are pretty predictable, which is kind of expected for academic writing to get a good grade! It'll be great if I could get some advice to make the college writing course more enjoyable!*

Excellent question. Of course our techniques are applicable though we do accept that college students need to conform to expected standards of academic writing. If it was me teaching academic writing I would simply choose fun topics and begin with an engaging class discussion about the issue. For example: a new pill has been created to make men better listeners. This instantly creates interest and the student's brain is ignited to write. The list of topics would be endless. Additionally,

we'd need to look specifically into what, how, and why your program operates to make further suggestions. Please don't be afraid to contact us. We love a challenge.

Question: *Some of the information was useful but on the whole I thought that the presentation was inappropriate for the academic setting of NUFFS for a number of reasons: 1) there was no or little mention of L2 writers and the issues they face such as identity, voice, agency and so on, 2) the overall tone was promotional for a commercial school/product rather than academic and it was unrelated to research in L2 composition, and 3) the practices that they put forward were not based in theory or research and any evidence that they provided was anecdotal. There are a number of important researchers and scholars that specialize in L2 composition and pedagogy. If they would if they had cited scholarly research articles then the presentation would have been more appropriate, just a small example of L2 writing scholars would be (Cummings, Ferris, Leki, Matsuda, Polio, Silva, Tardy).*

Your statement is 100% correct, we are not academic researchers, we are senior classroom teachers with more than thirty years experience working directly with students developing a dynamic, evolving program that is producing remarkable results in a relatively short space of time. And students have fun as they learn. It's very difficult to find academic research in a field where you feel somewhat a pioneer.

In terms of hard data, our challenge has always been to go beyond the anecdotal evidence our students and parents provide to us. How do you quantify a parent saying, "Her teacher told me she's writing years above her age level"? It's very difficult to quantify data when L1 students walk into our tuition classrooms or tell us online on Zoom that they've received an A+ in English. Maybe this provides the perfect opportunity for academic researchers to find out more and we'd more than welcome a deeper investigation.

Mr C and I do believe we've 'cracked the code' of universal writing problems in both L1 and L2 students. In Beijing for example, our weekly online L2 students are genuinely improving by participating in lessons and completing homework. We can see and hear the definite improvements. Obviously more exposure will hasten this process. We are more than happy to share our expertise with anybody interested in improving the writing ability of their students and will gladly supply resources free of charge. We're different to every other program on earth and we genuinely want to see students thrive because we are passionate about what we do.

A final note, if anyone in the NUFFS community would like to join us for regular, free of charge online Scribble class, please contact us via email hello@scribbleink.com.au. We'd love to share our experience with you.

Mr P and Mr C

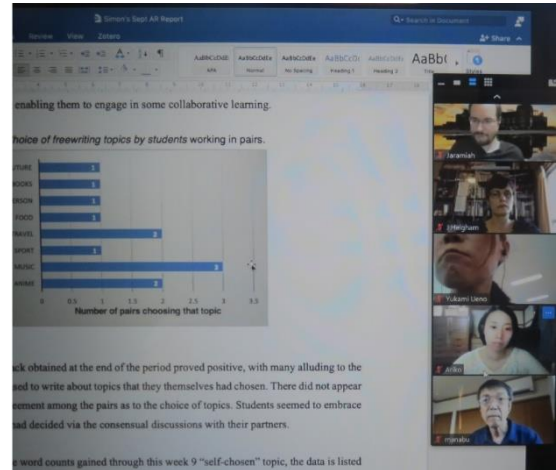
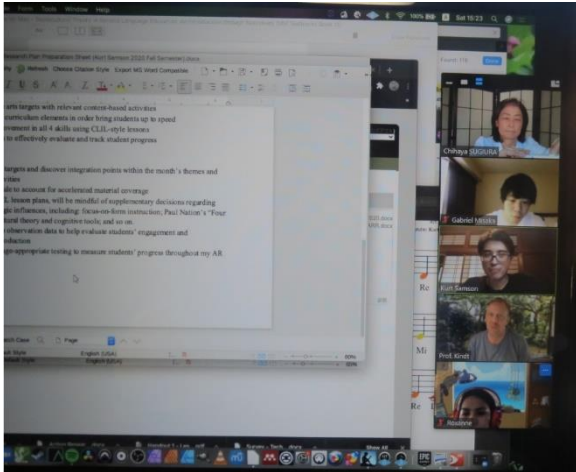
Workshop in September (AR Discussion)

Date: September 12, 2020, 15:00-17:00

Title: Group discussion on action research

Advisers: Kazuyoshi Sato, Duane Kindt,
Juanita Heigham (NUFS)

The number of participants: 10



Next workshop will be held on October 10th.
Detailed information is on our web site:

<https://www.nufs.ac.jp/workshop/news/>