Millennium Approaches

Controlled Error Correction and Publication on the WWW : Using a Facet of the Internet in the L2 Writing Class

John F. Mancuso

Abstract

This paper will examine my experience with using and exploiting the novelty of the Internet's World Wide Web, in an advanced-level composition class, as a vehicle to engage students in the writing process. Using primarily a deductive methodology, the students, prompted by certain symbols, key words and phrases added to their drafts by me, were guided to correctly revise their essays—thus improving each student's over-all writing proficiency. To facilitate communication between students, work-groups and the teacher, the power of e-mail was exclusively used. In addition, each student posted all their completed assignments on their own home page which was linked to the writing classes' main page, allowing them to be accessed, by computer, via the Internet's World Wide Web; hence, allowing every student to "publish" their essays.

Introduction

Teachers with a degree in Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages (TESOL) are constantly searching for and experimenting to come up with innovative methods and techniques to aid their students in acquiring better fluency in the target language. The Internet i.e., WWW, Telnet, Usenet etc., offers the language professional and learner a plethora of possibilities to exploit in and out of the classroom. Even though the vast majority of computer data bases around the world are in English does not necessarily rule out giving students of other languages equal time to use this new forum. Information and users other than English are still plentiful and easily accessible.

The Internet truly is a means of communication for the coming millennium that will bring all peoples of the world together in ways never before imagined. The twenty-first century, for me, is not only a numerical fact, it is also a metaphor to describe my ideas of language teaching.

I can still feel the agony of sitting through grammar class, while a language student in Seville, Spain. My eyes glazed-over watching the second hand of my watch, slowly, ever so slowly, tick down to the end of class and to my freedom to

experience the real language. It was at this time, the escaped prisoner, that I was able to use, experiment with and make mistakes, that I truly progressed in my ability to communicate in both the written and oral forms of Spanish. Many of my fellow students who put their faith in the grammar god, excelled on tests and in the make-believe world of classroom instruction. These same votaries of the grammar gospel, when faced with real-life situations saw how their false prophet had deceived them. I never scored an A on tests, but received accolades from Spanish speakers for my rapid progress in understanding their language and culture. I can also vividly remember, while teaching in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia, passing the many open-door offices of my fellow English teachers and witnessing them, once again, attempting to explain the correct formation of a sentence. The poor Bedouin student, with fourteen hundred years of oral history to use as a guide to the correct use of the spoken language, sitting, catatonic in front of his grammar-intoxicated stooge.

In some ways I can not blame my former teachers nor past and present colleagues for using antiquated ideas. Mr. David Paul, in a recent interview for the Daily Yomiuri, noted that language teachers (in Japan and elsewhere) overuse teacher-centered methods. "Everything relies on the teachers. Instructors seem to teach in the manner they were taught in middle or high school. So they say, 'Repeat after me.' That's boring. . . It's true that many teachers have started to move to other methods which are more fun but these still depend on the teacher 'modeling.' One reason [for this] is that teachers don't have enough training." [1] Dr. Stephen Krashen, while compiling research for a monograph on writing, notes that his colleagues, "admitted that they taught in the way they were themselves taught. In no case did any teacher say that his approach was even influenced by research or current theory, even though all of them were somewhat familiar with the current research on writing." [2]

Thus, the impending dawn of a new century is an opportunity to cleanse ourselves and breathe new air into our ideas. Teaching is by far one of the most demanding of professions because the teacher as pinnacle of learning, must constantly be challenged to stay on the cusp of new teaching methods and thought. Anyone negligent in this, in my opinion, has no place in this profession!

Seeing the WWW for the first time two years ago, I knew (as many other learned teachers) that it had a place in my classroom.

Summary of Research and Results on Writing

To get a better sense of where I base my philosophy of writing pedagogy, it is important to review some studies which relate to writing. Some of the most exciting research done on the development of writing ability shows a direct correlation between voluntary reading and improved writing.

Kimberling, Wingate, Rosser, DiChara and Krashen (1978), directly studied the

effects of pleasure reading and writing on sixty-six university freshmen. Using a questionnaire, the students were first divided into two groups classified as "highly competent" and "of low competence." It was then discovered that not one of the low competence students read for pleasure, but all of the highly competent students did.

Another study by Woodward and Phillips (1967) of 919 freshmen at the University of Miami found that students who received grades of A and B in writing reported to read newspapers on a daily basis. Students who received lower grades confided that they did not read daily newspapers.

Ryan (1977) found that good writers were read to by their parents more as children and that these parents also practiced voluntary pleasure reading.

These studies showed that "readers" demonstrated a significantly greater writing fluency and were able to write with greater complexity than did their "non-reader" counterparts.

Improved writing ability and writing frequency was studied by Bamberg (1978), who compared UCLA freshmen of a regular university writing class and those in a remedial writing class. He found that the students who were placed in the higher-level class had practiced more expository writing while at high school than those who placed lower.

Professor Paul E. Davenport of Hitotsubashi University (personal communication) has seen greater improvement in writing ability in his students who consistently take the initiative in completing non-assigned writing homework.

In the area of feedback, research findings indicate that when teacher's comments are done during the writing process, writing improves. The Garrison method of teacher feedback, discussed in Simmons (1979), has the teacher focusing on one aspect of an essay at a time and then moving on to others. A usual progression would be: student's overall writing, essay organization and then mechanics. A key component is that several drafts will be necessary in order to complete the writing assignment.

The most significant research, with profound implications for language instruction in Japan, is research that studies the effect of grammar instruction on writing. It can not be understated that findings persuasively suggest that focusing on the grammar level when teaching writing is not effective in improving a student's ability.

It is unfortunate that Japanese language teachers and institutions focus solely on the grammatical level. In Japan, structure over substance and components over communication is paramount. You only have to speak to a Japanese or read something by a Japanese "educated" in this manner to realize that, while grammatically this non-native speaker is accurate, culturally and communicatively this poor lost soul misses the target.

The Method   \

Using e-mail as a means of commenting on student writing has several limita-tions. Unlike paper and pen, a computer screen greatly reduces the manner in which a teacher can comment. E-mail does not support a variety of fonts of various sizes or differing styles, i.e., bold, underline and others. It would, however, be possible to comment and then send e-mail as an attachment or in another format, but because of technical problems I recommend keeping the use of e-mail as simple as possible. My comments, therefore, are always written in uppercase and symbols, words and phrases are used to indicate problems and give hints, to guide students toward the correct answer.

The bracket, [ ], is the most versatile of these symbols. The bracket is used to indicate major problems like in the sentence, [name John is my.] A student encountering this symbol in his draft should stop and think about how to correctly rewrite this sentence. The bracket can also be used to indicate a misplaced word, for example, My [is name] John. Or a misspelled word as in, My [neimu] is John.

The parenthesis, ( ), is simply used to indicate a word or phrase that could be omitted. In the sentence, I was born on a (spectacularly) gorgeous day in June, the word or phrase contained within the parenthesis is completely left to the discretion of the writer. The parenthesis is merely a suggestion.

A key component to this deductive method is the use of the line, ____, and the dash, ─. The line and dash indicate more than just a problem. They are used to gently redirect a student toward encountering the correct formation of a sentence, order of words or correct spelling. Whereas the bracket, [ ], merely shows a problem, the line or dash is more of a hint. This deductive idea is, for me, a written form of "hand signals" extensively employed in the Silent Way methodology.

With the incorrect sentence, My name John, the student's attention is directed toward the missing verb by the line as in, My name ____ John. A student receiving an essay with this comment should be wondering, "Now, what's missing ?" In more complex sentences, the line or lines are also used to offer a more vivid hint to students. With the problem sentence, I was standing the platform waiting train, this sentence would be represented to the student as, I was standing ____ the platform waiting ____ ____ train. Students who can not understand what I am trying to indicate might add a note to their revised draft like, "John, I couldn't understand what you meant. Please help." Some students (more often the case Japanese), however, will simply give up and correct problem areas while leaving other areas untouched. In that case, I would re-send their draft as, I was standing o_ the platform waiting f_ t_ train. Or for students who are completely lost, I would give more hints as in, I was standing o-- the platform waiting f-- t-- train. In more complex cases, I would send hints like, I was standing o- the platform waiting f-r t-e train. It is my experience, however, that students only need to be

given the first letter of a word to help them realize the correct answer.

Hints are an important part to help foster language development. I was impressed by a research project, When Dose Teacher Talk Work as Input?, by Lily Wong-Fillmore, that was done several years ago. The project was a demographic study, however, what impressed me was an explanation of a language class where a teacher voiced the first syllable of a word that students were having difficulty remembering. My use of the line and dash is a symbolic representation of this memory-jarring technique. Simply providing the answer will not help students' language development. The teacher as dictionary or language machine, at every student's beck and call must be stopped. For me, in the writing process, I see my role as editor—helping, guiding and suggesting. It is only as a last resort that would I give a correct answer. In many cases, I have seen, with writing, my "correct" answer is not the best. This is seen, many times, when a problem area of a student's writing is opened up for class discussion. This is indicated by the word, ASK!

A student who receives, ASK! on their drafts should bring a hard-copy of their manuscript to the next class meeting. At a certain time during each class, I request students to hand in drafts with this mark. Using an over-head projector, I then write the area in question and the problem is discussed by the entire class. On one level, students get their problems solved. On another level, all students clearly see that there are many possible ways to phrase and re-phrase a thought. On the most important level, for me, students' eyes are opened to the fact that the adage, "Two heads are better than one." clearly is true. Writing might be a solitary practice, but the process of writing should not be. Writing always improves when an impartial judge or judges critique it.

Having students acting as judge is an important feature of my writing class. At the start of the semester, all students exchange names, phone numbers and most importantly, e-mail addresses. Students are then asked to form groups of no more than five. These small work-groups act as intermediaries.

Members of each group send their essays (via e-mail) to each member and in-turn each person reads, comments on and offers suggestions to make the essay better. If a particular student is having some difficulty, this student has a resource available to request assistance. So, before a student sends an essay to me, up to four other people will have read it, offered comments and revisions will have been made.

If I feel that a student might not understand my hint (i.e., [ ], , ___, J—n), I use a combination of words and phrases. For example, WHAT?, WHEN?, WHERE?, WHO?, WHY?, SPELLING, RE-PHRASE, VAGUE, DELETE, TENSE (as in verb tense), ORDER (as in word order), PURE JAPANESE and BETTER WORD! or BETTER WORD?. At the same time the use of the return key and tab key to make space between problem areas is important to make the section in question as clear to the student as possible.

Examples of Student Work and Comments

Following are actual examples of student work and my comments. The style and size of the font has been reduced to conserve space. Additional explanations follow each selection.

Example 1 :
What made me what I am now[;]from old days to present life   REMEMBER THAT THIS IS A TITLE. PLEASE PUT THE CORRECT LETTERS OF THE CORRECT WORDS IN UPPER CASE!!!!! My name is(name deleted). I was born on one of the Goto Islands called Fukue City, a small town in Nagasaki Prefecture twenty-one years ago. I think my hometown is one of the most wonderful towns in Japan, with its natural environment like the beautiful sea where I have enjoyed swimming every summer, and the hill I went to for[the]school picnics. One of the best things for me is that the food in Fukue is delicious and prices[is]much cheaper than Tokyo.

I ask students to place a title on all of their compositions. My reasoning being that a student is not merely writing in order to complete a requirement, but rather each essay is one in a collection of writings—their writings. This first example is a model of their first assignment. For me, it is important for each student to introduce themselves to their "audience." This first assignment is also a perfect way to introduce the class to the initial rhetorical form: The biography or profile. It is also important to note that the essay was "handed in" formatted in double-space. Having essays sent in this way greatly enhances visual clarity as well as ease of marking.

Example 2 :
The most enjoyable[work] BETTER WORD!!!   for me was that we built a house with cardboard and thin wood. It was a small house and filled with a few children, so we played there, entering and then going out. However, we stopped going there before we knew.   KNEW WHAT???!!!   IT SEEMS THAT THIS SENTENCE IS NOT FINISHED!!! OR IS IT JUST MISSING ONE WORD!!
When I was an elementary high school student, I was a very active girl. I served as class monitor every year at Fukue Elementary School, and I practiced calligra-phy, Japanese swordmanship called Kendo, and Japanese tea ceremony as my extracur-ricular activities. Every[ ]Go[r]den Week[ ]in May, my family would go on family trips T____ such cities as Kumamoto, Fukuoka, Yamaguchi, and Tokyo. Wherever I could go, I would have a great time with my family, but it was one of the most wonderful memories that we went to Kumamoto.

Here we can see a variety of deductive hints. Punctuation is indicated by the

empty brackets as in, Go[r]den Week, which should be, "Golden Week."

Example 3 :
I also wanted to go to Tokyo, to tell the truth, not because I wanted to learn things
more deeply, but because I thought I could have many enjoyable things T____ D____
in Tokyo and I could go outside[freely.]VAGUE! Anyway, my idea that I wanted to go
to Tokyo[accorded]BETTER WORD! DID YOU GET THIS WORD FROM A DICTIONARY??!! PLEASE
TELL ME! with my father's one that he wanted to let me go there.   .

In this example, we can see a common mistake made by students who rely too
heavily on dictionaries or students who do not know how to properly use one.

Example 4 :
There were so many new things to do in Nagasaki, which I[didn't have]THINK!!!!!!
HOW DO YOU CORRECT THIS??! in Fukue. I always dropped in some shops and Karaoke
rooms with my friends on my way home when I was in first and second grade O____
H____ S____ and I neglected my studies, and as a result, my test scores fell. My
life in Nagasaki was so enjoyable that I couldn't find the risk that I might not be
able to enter a university. In third grade O____ H____ S____, I found my test
scores weren't good, so I started studying hard again, and then, my test scores
gradually improved, but I just couldn't pass the examination given by the univer-
sity that I wanted to enter. I was very sorry not to have studied hard in the first
half of M____ high school education, but[I]it was too late to regret that, so I
decided to prepare for[the]DELETE![entrance examinations of
universities]ORDER!!
    After graduating from my high school, I came to Tokyo to study in a preparatory
school for university entrance examinations. LOOK AT THIS SENTENCE TO HELP YOU
WITH THE ONE ABOVE!!!!!!

This is an important example to demonstrate how a student's own work can
help in aiding the correction process. It is my experience that a person who has
even a vague knowledge of the workings of a foreign language can produce correct
language in the oral or written forms. This language user, naturally, might become
confused in certain instances. So, instead of just giving the correct answer, it is far
more effective to let this student think about the correct answer from what has
just been written or said.

Example 5 :
The[m]oats:[a][b]eautiful[s]pot in the[c]ent[ral]of Saijyo City The moats
of[the]Saijyo City are remains of the old castle from the Edo era(____-____). GIVE
THE DATES OF THE EDO ERA!! Looking from the front of the moats, we can see one
passage, which is now paved by concrete, dividing the moats into two parts. The

width of the passway is about ten meters. People who go to[the] ___ high school WRITE THE NAME OF THE H.S.! pass through the big old gateway in front of the[prolonging]I DO NOT UNDERSTAND THIS WORD. ARE YOU SURE IT IS CORRECT????? way, besides people who go to[the] ___ Kindergarden NAME?! turn right and who go[to the museums]HOW MANY? WHAT TYPE OF MUSEUMS ARE THEY?? turn left at the end of this[way] P ___ : these ways are filled of many small pebbles. The banks of the moats are made of blue stones and surrounded by green moss. The depth of the moats is not so deep. Black swans, white ducks, and brocade carps are swimming around in green turbid water.

Example 6 :
Dear John,
Can I put #3 and #5 together and make one story? When I explain Lake Kawaguchi, I should describe the scenery around the lake at the same time, I think.(name deleted)

DEAR(name deleted),
I AM SORRY. I DO NOT LIKE THE IDEA OF PUTTING THE ASSIGNMENTS TOGETHER RIGHT NOW. LET ME READ BOTH OF THEM SEPARATELY AND THEN WE CAN TALK ABOUT PUTTING THEM TOGETHER. I HOPE THAT IS OK WITH YOU!
JOHN

E-mail is the perfect forum for students to communicate with the teacher. E-mail is direct and private and for Japanese students provides enough "safety" to allow them to be much more assertive then they would be in a face to face encounter.

Example 7a :
DEAR(name deleted),
SORRY!! YOUR DRAFT NUMBER IS NOT CORRECT! I WILL NOT EVEN LOOK AT THIS! DON'T ROLL YOUR EYES; I WANT TO KEEP TRACK OF ALL THE DRAFTS THAT I HAVE READ! GOOD LUCK!!
JOHN

Example 7b :
Dear John,
I'm sorry I forgot to write my name with my e-mails. But it was because my computer broken down and I changed the software to send you e-mails. However you just retern all of my e-mails!!!!!! You could be able to know whose mail they were from my e-mail address.
(name deleted),

DEAR(name deleted),

NO!! I DID NOT KNOW WHO SENT ME THE E-MAIL!! I HAVE NOT MEMORIZED EVERYBODY'S E-MAIL
ADDRESS!! HAVE YOU??? TRY NOT BLAMING ME, BUT BLAMING YOURSELF FOR YOUR LAZY
ATTITUDE!! REMEMBER: BEING A STUDENT IS YOUR JOB!! GOOD LUCK IN TRYING TO BECOME
A SERIOUS WORKER!!!!
YOUR SUPERVISOR,
JOHN

Example 7c :
Dear John,
You were so cold, weren't you? I'm very desperatly trying to make up for the delay.
I promise I will send my drafts right after I get my e-mails from you. Please help
me!!!
(name deleted)

Examples 7a to 7c show several comments from students and myself. It is
important, in this method, to maintain a certain amount of control. If several rules
are not followed exactly, I will not read the assignment, but just return it un-
checked. It has been my experience that it is very easy to loose track of students'
work and for chaos to ensue if order is not properly maintained. The rules are
those that I explained in the Method section.

Example 8 :
WELL, THIS IS A GOOD START. IT IS, HOWEVER, NOT REALLY WHAT I ASKED YOU TO DO. SINCE
THIS IS THE LAST ASSIGNMENT, YOU ARE SUPPOSED TO USE AS MANY FORMS(FROM PAST
ASSIGNMENTS)TO WRITE THIS ESSAY. FOR EXAMPLE, YOU COULD USE DESCRIPTIONS AND
REPORTING STYLES. GOOD LUCK!
JOHN

At the end of each assignment I write brief comments. Many times these are
more helpful hints or encouragement. Students enjoy receiving these personalized
comments and find them helpful.

Example 9a :
DEAR(name deleted),
DID YOU WRITE THIS??!!
TELL ME!
JOHN

Dear John,
What do you mean? Of course I wrote this. Is there anything strange in this draft?
Do you suspects that I send you other person's writing? If so it's terrible!!! I
never do that!!!!

(name deleted)

Example 9b :
DEAR(name deleted),
THE REASON WHY I WANT TO ASK IS BECAUSE I HAVE SEEN A DRASTIC, POSITIVE CHANGE IN
THE STYLE OF YOUR WRITING. THAT'S ALL. DON'T GET SO DEFENSIVE!! ALTHOUGH IT DOES
REMIND ME OF A FAMOUS QUOTE FROM SHAKESPEARE'S HAMLET, "THE LADY DOTH PROTEST TOO
MUCH, METHINKS."
John

Dear John,
I'm grad that my skill of writing in English has drastically, positively changed!!
I owe it to you and LONGMAN DICTIONARY!! Although I cannot understand the famous
English quote.
(name deleted)

Example 9c :
DEAR(name deleted),
GOOD QUESTION!!!! THE QUOTE, "THE LADY DOTH PROTEST TOO MUCH, METHINKS." REFERS TO
THE PERSON WHO SAYS THAT HE/SHE DID NOT DO SOMETHING AND EITHER REPEATS IT MANY
TIMES OR SAYS IT EMPHATICALLY, WHEN IN REALITY HE/SHE DID DO IT. SO, "THE LADY DOTH
PROTEST TOO MUCH, METHINKS." IS JUST SAYING THAT SHE, "THE LADY" IS SAYING THAT SHE
IS INNOCENT, SO SHE MUST HAVE DONE SOMETHING WRONG. IT MIGHT SEEM LIKE STRANGE
LOGIC, BUT THIS QUOTE IS VERY FAMOUS AND USED A LOT IN ENGLISH.

AS FOR THIS ASSIGNMENT, PLEASE FIX THE ONE PROBLEM AREA AND POST IT. IF YOU ARE NOT
SURE IF YOU HAVE MADE THE CORRECT CORRECTION, THEN PLEASE SEND IT TO ME AGAIN SO
THAT I CAN CHECK IT ONE MORE TIME. GOOD LUCK!!
JOHN

Examples 9a to 9c show a series of messages exchanged between me and the same student. Since the majority of work is not done in class, in front of the teacher, it is almost impossible to determine if a student actually wrote all of the assignments him/herself. This is the major dilemma facing Distance Learning advocates. From my experience and conversations with other teachers (both Japanese and Non-Japanese) it is extremely rare for a Japanese student to try to deceive a teacher. I, however, from time to time, "fish" if I see a drastic change in writing style. Class tests, however, resolve any doubts that I might have had about a particular student.

Example 10 :
DEAR JOHN(AND CC'S)

WRITING THIS GOT ME REALLY DEPRESSED. WHEN I DID THE TREE-BRANCHING EXERCISE IN CLASS I DID NOT REALISE THIS SUBJECT MEANT SO MUCH TO ME. CONSEQUENTLY I WAS UNABLE TO TREAT IT WITH THE NECESSARY DETACHMENT. IT HAS NO INTRODUCTION AND NO CONCLUSION. I'M SORRY, BUT THEN AGAIN, IF YOU WANT ME TO COMPOSE A 'STRUCTURED' TEXT OR WHATEVER, NEXT TIME GIVE ME A NEUTRAL SUBJECT, THE JAPANESE ECONOMY OR SOMETHING. I SIMPLY CANNOT PICTURE MYSELF BEING CARTESIAN ABOUT MY GRANDFATHER'S DEATH.

YOURS TRULY

(name deleted)

Dear (name deleted),

There is no need to apologize. As I write this I am drained. Out of all the essays that I have read over the years, this is perhaps the most emotional—you have made me weep—not so much for what was taken from you, but was has been taken from me.

Do what you like in terms of revision or handing this in.
All the best,
John

"CC's" is a reference to this student's work-group (Carbon Copy). It has been my experience with commenting on students' papers that the bond between teacher and student forms much quicker than in the traditional style classroom. Since students are also in constant contact with each other, via e-mail, this close connection is also carried to their group.

Example 11:
Dear All,

This is just a quick note to let you know that my computer is up and running!! Actually, I was able to re-format my disk and re-load the OS in just a couple of hours. I was back checking assignments on Thursday night. Remember: You can't keep a good Mancuso down!! (If you are not familiar with this, slightly changed, English saying, I can explain it to you next class!)OK! You had a few day's vacation—now send those assignments to me! Good luck!!
John

Communicating to the entire class is effortless when using e-mail. Mass-mailings are easily set up and messages, home work or important comments can be sent to everyone with the touch of a button!

The Bonus

There comes a point in this process of writing, commenting, re-writing, com-

File Edit Mailbox Message Transfer Special Window

(Student name deleted) Re: Assignment #1 (draft #4)

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        To (e-mail address deleted) (Student name deleted)
      From  pc00131@srv cc hit-u ac.jp (John F  Mancuso)
    Subject  Re  Assignment #1 (draft #4)
        Cc
        Bcc
Attachments.
```
-- --- --- - ---- -- -- -- ----- --- -- - -- ----- - - ---- - - ----- --- --- - --- -- ---- ----- -- -- --- ---- ------

>   My Memories From Old Days To Present Life
>
> My name is (name deleted) I was born on one of the Goto Isands called Fukue
>
> City, a small town in Nagasaki Prefecture tweny-one years ago I think my
> hometown is one of
>
> the most wonderful towns in Japan, with its natural environment like the
> beautiful sea
>
> where I have enjoyed swimming every summer, and the hill I went to for
> school picnics One of
>
> the best things for me is that the food in Fukue is delicious and prices
> are much cheaper than
>

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•	(Student name deleted)	5 53 PM 7/6/97 -070'	5 Assingment #3 (draft #3)
•		2 28 PM 7/7/97 +090'	6 Assignment #2 (draft #2)
•		3 24 PM 7/7/97 +090'	6 Assignment #1 (draft #6)
•		4 04 PM 7/7/97 +090'	7 Assignment #3 (draft #2)
•		4:10 PM 7/7/97 +090'	6 Assignment #3 (draft #2)
•		4 24 PM 7/8/97 +090'	7 Re Assignment #3 (draft #2)
•		1 55 PM 7/9/97 +090'	10 Assignment #3 (draft #2)
•		2·05 PM 7/9/97 +090'	6 Assignment #1 (draft #4)
•		2 14 PM 7/9/97 +090'	9 Assignment #2 (draft #3)
•		3 13 PM 7/10/97 +09'	8 Assignment #1 (draft #2)

143/409K/165K

menting etc., that either the assignment has improved to such a point that a grade can be given or that the student is not able to improve the piece any further. It is at this juncture that I will give a grade. It has been my experience that for beginning and intermediate level classes, an average of eight drafts will be needed in order for the essay to reach this level of acceptability or improvement-plateau. In advanced writing classes the average is about half as many drafts.

Even though a grade has been given, the assignment is not forgotten. At any time, until final grades are handed in, a student can re-write and then re-submit the assignment. Once an essay is re-submitted, the process of commenting and re-writing begins again.

Several scenarios are possible in this re-submission situation. Either the assignment will improve and the student will be awarded a higher grade or the student will not be able to improve the essay or after several attempts of re-writing, the student gives up and abandons the attempt. (It must be noted that this final scenario has only occurred some three times.)

For the first scenario, the student receives a higher grade. However, for the last two, the student is not penalized for attempting to get a higher grade and not succeeding.

The Home Page

Once a grade has been given, the student is now free to post the assignment on his/her own home page which has been linked to the class home page.

Overleaf are examples of the class home page and a few examples of student home pages and work.
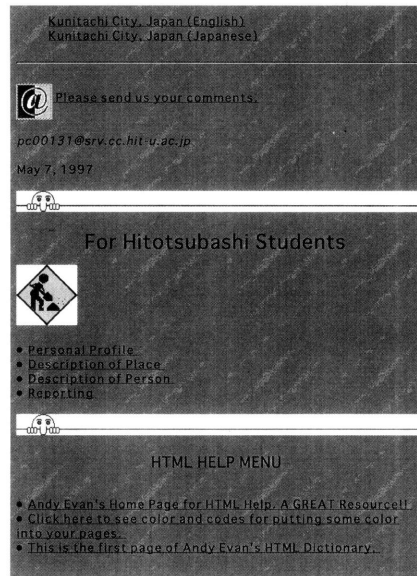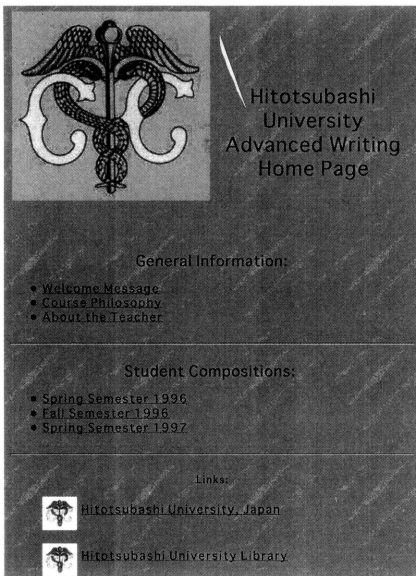
WELCOME

Thank you very much for pointing your Internet navigator to this spot on the WWW.

For the past several years I have been reading, thinking about and experimenting with various ideas to help non-native students of English improve their writing ability. After being introduced to the marvels of this new communication tool, I quickly came to the conclusion that the Internet is not only effective for native speakers but non-native alike.

All the writings posted here have been written by each student without any teacher editing or correction. My students and I hope you enjoy reading all of the compositions, articles, reports, etc.

Please stop by often because every week or two, more material will be posted. If you have any comments or questions, please feel free to contact us!

Once again, thanks so much for giving us some of your time.

Best regards,
John F. Mancuso

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Course Philosophy

The premise of this class is simple: The more you write, the better you will write. Since it is impossible for the teacher to have a one to one relationship with each student, because of class size, peer evaluation and correction will be used extensively in this class.

The teaching method used throughout the course is based on deductive techniques. That is, grammar and rhetorical structures will not be taught as separate entities. The composition (regardless of style) will be discussed holistically. Errors will be brought to each student's attention, but the teacher will not correct any of the student-generated compositions. It is the teacher's hope that, by engaging each student in the writing process and by discussing completed assignments, all students will discover their own errors and then make the appropriate changes. It is for this reason that the teacher considers all the compositions posted, to be works in progress up to the conclusion of the semester. It should be noted, however, that for the teacher, a composition that communicates the writers' main ideas and is enjoyable to read, is more important than a grammatically correct composition that is uninteresting and lacks style.

As a language teacher, teaching students how to express themselves in the correct linguistic and cultural context is paramount. It is also extremely important that, while teaching about communication in an English (American) context, the teacher's culture will be presented in a way that does not replace the students' own culture for American culture. That is why the main theme of this course is "My Country."

To speak a foreign language one must succumb to the foreign culture. However, too many times in language classes around the world, over-zealous teachers hoping to teach as effectively as possible are over-emphasizing the target language and culture, and eager students, wanting to embrace all that the new language offers, have substituted native communicative styles, habits, etc., with those of the language being studied. It is not the teacher's intention to ram his culture down his students' throats. This teacher has always felt uneasy with the idea of cultural imperialism that language teaching raises. It is thus the teacher's ultimate goal that his students will be able, while communicating correctly in English, to not forget their native culture. It is also the teacher's hope that by presenting English in a non-threatening, supportive manner, students will equally be open and receptive, thus intensifying the enjoyment of language learning and enhancing the educational experience.

John F. Mancuso
Tokyo, Japan
April 1996

Student Compositions
Spring Semester 1997

Andrei Cunha

Shinichi Nozaki

Robert Magyar
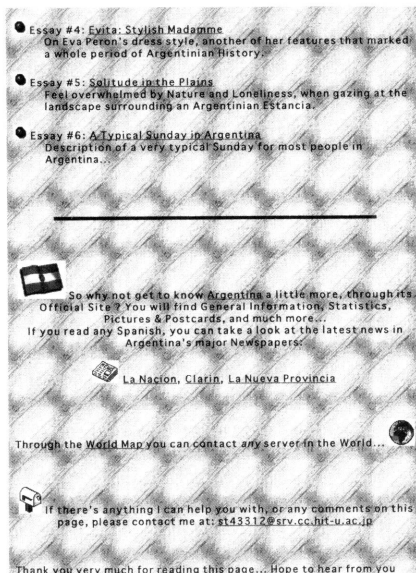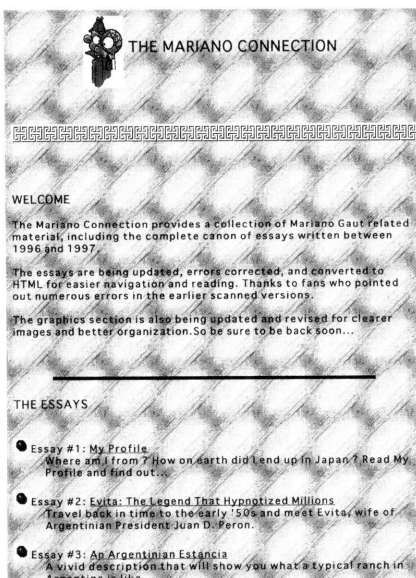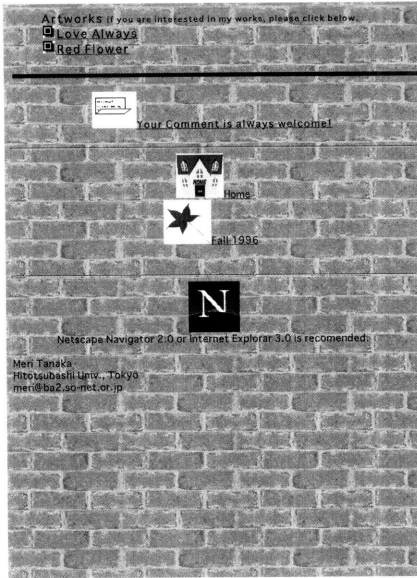

Yoshiko Sasano

Jun Daito

Bogdan Ciobanu

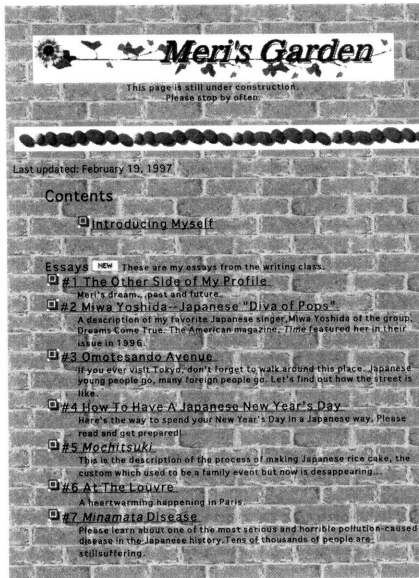Naoe Fujiike

Shigeru Kizawa

Myra Boyles

Home

Meri's Garden

This page is still under construction.
Please stop by often.

Last updated: February 19, 1997

Contents

- Introducing Myself

Essays NEW These are my essays from the writing class.

- #1 The Other Side of My Profile
  Meri's dream... past and future.
- #2 Miwa Yoshida--Japanese "Diva of Pops"
  A description of my favorite Japanese singer, Miwa Yoshida of the group,
  Dreams Come True. The American magazine, *Time* featured her in their
  issue in 1996.
- #3 Omotesando Avenue
  If you ever visit Tokyo, don't forget to walk around this place. Japanese
  young people go, many foreign people go. Let's find out how the street is
  like.
- #4 How To Have A Japanese New Year's Day
  Here's the way to spend your New Year's Day in a Japanese way. Please
  read and get prepared!
- #5 *Mochitsuki*
  This is the description of the process of making Japanese rice cake, the
  custom which used to be a family event but now is desappearing...
- #6 At The Louvre
  A heartwarming happening in Paris.
- #7 *Minamata Disease*
  Please learn about one of the most serious and horrible pollution-caused
  disease in the Japanese history. Tens of thousands of people are
  stillsuffering.

Artworks If you are interested in my works, please click below.
- Love Always
- Red Flower

Your Comment is always welcome!

Home

Fall 1996

N

Netscape Navigator 2.0 or Internet Explorar 3.0 is recomended.

Meri Tanaka
Hitotsubashi Univ., Tokyo
meri@ba2.so-net.or.jp

THE MARIANO CONNECTION

WELCOME

The Mariano Connection provides a collection of Mariano Gaut related
material, including the complete canon of essays written between
1996 and 1997.

The essays are being updated, errors corrected, and converted to
HTML for easier navigation and reading. Thanks to fans who pointed
out numerous errors in the earlier scanned versions.

The graphics section is also being updated and revised for clearer
images and better organization. So be sure to be back soon...

THE ESSAYS

- Essay #1: My Profile
  Where am I from ? How on earth did I end up in Japan ? Read My
  Profile and find out.

- Essay #2: Evita: The Legend That Hypnotized Millions
  Travel back in time to the early '50s and meet Evita, wife of
  Argentinian President Juan D. Peron.

- Essay #3: An Argentinian Estancia
  A vivid description that will show you what a typical ranch in
  Argentina is like.

- Essay #4: Evita: Stylish Madamme
  On Eva Peron's dress style, another of her features that marked
  a whole period of Argentinian History.

- Essay #5: Solitude in the Plains
  Feel overwhelmed by Nature and Loneliness, when gazing at the
  landscape surrounding an Argentinian Estancia.

- Essay #6: A Typical Sunday in Argentina
  Description of a very typical Sunday for most people in
  Argentina...

So why not get to know Argentina a little more, through its
Official Site ? You will find General Information, Statistics,
Pictures & Postcards, and much more...
If you read any Spanish, you can take a look at the latest news in
Argentina's major Newspapers:

La Nacion, Clarin, La Nueva Provincia

Through the World Map you can contact *any* server in the World...

If there's anything I can help you with, or any comments on this
page, please contact me at: st43312@srv.cc.hit-u.ac.jp

Thank you very much for reading this page... Hope to hear from you

Questionnaire

When I decided to write about this topic, I sent a questionnaire to all the students that had enrolled in this class, even if they dropped out. Below are the questions.

1.　Why did you take this course ?
2.　Did you finish the course ?
3.　If you did not, why did you drop out ?
4.　If you completed the course, how would you evaluate your writing ability before you started the course ?
5.　How would you evaluate your writing ability after finishing the course ?
6.　If your writing improved, what improved ? Please be specific.
7.　What are your opinions about using e-mail to hand in school assignments ?
8.　What are your opinions about posting your completed assignments on your personal home page which is within the writing class home page ?
9.　What are your opinions about the teacher's method of commenting on your assignments ?
10.　What are your opinions about the teacher's method of using a deductive (using symbols/hints that the students must figure out in order to correct their mistakes) method to teaching writing ?
11.　Please add any additional comments that you feel will help make this course better.

Here are just a few selected answers to this questionnaire. In the three semesters that I have been offering this class, 46 students have enrolled and only 10 have dropped out. Also, there is only one response to question number four because I only recieved one interesting response. All the other answers were answered in the affirmative, but no additional information was provided. Please note that these responses have not been edited.

3.　the assignments' volume and skills to make home page took too much time for me.
4.　I had never thought about writing several drafts. I was writing only with my poor vocabrary, and didn't have the idea of using the thrsaurus.
6.　I don't know ! What do you think ? Now I know where to start when writing, I think. And I realized that I was making so many mistakes and using inappropriate words, so that I have to rewrite over and over again. Also, your lecture about many different writing stiles was helped me a lot.
6.　My writing speed improved, and I learnt that the construction of a Japanese essay and the American way is completely different. Also I realized so many of the sentences which I thought made sense did not make sense to you at all.
7.　Great idea !
7.　I think it is just great, it DOES take a lot of time, for I am not used with typing, but, generally

speaking, it is one of those things in which I take pleasure doing them.

7.   It is sometimes convenient, because I can hand in my assignmentanytime. But the disadvantage is that I couldn't have your openion directly.

7.   using e-mail is a good idea. we can also practice typing while writing English.

7.   Sending assignments via email was a difficult task for me especially as I was still attending Kodaira and did not have much time to access to a computer. However for those who do have computers at home, it must have been an easy task.

8.   An even greater idea ! Thanks to that, I have made up my mind to have my own homepage, and I made it !

8.   I personally enjoyed posting them and making my own homepage, but some people had a hard time writing HTML and going through the complicated process of posting the file onto the Internet. It can be easier if they should just past their essay to the already-made HTML file.

8.   To learn to make home page is a big task, and some students are not interested in making one so much. so, if students can choose whether they make home page or not by themselves, it's better.

8.   very nice idea, and when I said that I have my home page, companies knew that I could use computers. It was good for job-hunting.

9.   Well, sometimes it feels like you are just rushing through the countless assignments you are getting every day, but I can understand that !

9.   When you read it for the first time, it is fairly shocking, but once you get used to it (in a relatively short period of time !), I think so far it is the best, I have seen, of course for English language.

9.   Very kind. Pointing out mistakes and giving comments are very effective and meets each needs

10.   the signals are easy to remember and work good. Sometimes, HOwever, I couldn't understand what's wrong on the point checked.

10.   I reckon it is relatively easy, although sometimes can pretty bothering. Seen from the proffesor's point of view (he has to correct a lot of assignments, and he has as much time as we do, no more, no less, it is analytical, and tries to give as much information as possible with as few words as possible.

10.   It's good to let me think about our mistakes, but they can imply only the small gramatical mistakes. Sometimes we need your advice about our writing stile or something that the simbols can't tell.

10.   I think it is good that you give me a chance to correct mistakes by myself instead of providing correct answer soon. This is how I never make the same mistakes again.

10.   I don't think you needed to write in such hints like the starting letter. It is helpful, but I don't think teachers have   to do that much.

10.   I think it helps make the students think and look up things. And it makes the correction more interesting, eventhough it can be confusing at times.

11.   Please remember what you meant by your hints to the student's mistakes.

11.   I emphasize that native speakers are absolutely needed in order to get writing ability better. Whenever I make Japanese essays, I have them read by others.

Problems

Clearly, the first problem with this method is the time the teacher has to dedicate to the class. It is easy to see that an extraordinary amount of work is created in only a few meetings. To give an example of the amount of work that is generated by this method, let us look at some statistics from the 1995-96 academic year.

During that year, I had roughly a total of 40 students in two intermediate composition classes. Both classes wrote 25 assignments which averaged about three pages with a yearly average of six drafts for each assignment. So, 40 students x 25 assignments x 3 pages x 6 drafts＝18,000 pages of student-generated papers.

Clearly a mountain of work to dig through! Using e-mail, however, greatly reduces the time needed by student and teacher. For the student, after writing the first draft a simple cut and paste is all that is needed to revise the manuscript. For the teacher, using e-mail is advantageous in that, characters are much more legible than many students' penmanship. Also, because of the tab and return keys, comments can be written much more easily than by using paper.

The next difficulty is with HyperText Markup Language. But, learning HTML is not so much an intellectual feat as it is a psychological one. People believe that HyperText is difficult and clearly, at first, it appears rather bizarre, but later, it has been my experience that a reasonably intelligent person can learn the absolute basics, that will allow the user to create a home page with numerous hyper links and simple color and graphics in no more than thirty minutes to one hour. The key, as with all learning, is for the student to believe in him/herself and in the teacher and immediately after, use what was just taught in a practical, concrete way.

On the individual level, teaching HTML requires little effort to teach and learn, however, add an entire class to this scenario and chaos can easily ensue. So, to keep my sanity and the students' frustration-level to a minimum, I have kept both aspects of this class separate.

The actual writing class is scheduled to begin immediately after the lunch period. During the lunch period, I have opted to forgo having a meal and instead use this period, when the university computer room is vacant, to have my students practice various aspects of using the Internet and in creating HTML documents. Naturally, this "class" is voluntary, but the turnout has been about 75%. Once everyone is comfortable using HTML, I can conclude this "service."

Conclusion

This is not the perfect method for teaching writing. It is, however, a method that I have found to work in my class and in the classes of several fellow language teachers who I have explained this to. Before discovering the WWW, I believed my writing classes were useful, but lacked a key motivation for all the students. A question always came to my mind: Why am I asking students to do this? For students, I am sure that they too are constantly asking themselves a similar

question : What's the point in doing this assignment?

In using the WWW to post or "publish" completed manuscripts, the question is answered : You are writing in order to communicate. Students can clearly see a reason to write and their completed work, displayed for the world to see is testament to their diligence and hard work.

Clearly, the Internet provides a plethora of possible ways to use it in a classroom environment. The only limitations in using this exciting technology is in the teacher's limits of imagination and willingness to experiment with new ideas, techniques, methods and materials. We owe it to ourselves and our students to breathe new life into our teaching for the very fact that—Millennium Approaches.

Notes

1. The Daily Yomiuri, Page 15, Helping Kids Explore English, May 19, 1997
2. Krashen, Stephen D., Page 1, Writing : Research, Theory, and Applications, 1984