Some Effects of Varying the Structure of a Topic on College Students' Writing
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What is This?
Incoming freshmen are typically required to write essays which are then holistically rated to determine composition course placement. These placement essays vary not only in topic, but also in the way the topic is structured. Two topic structures are most commonly used: Open (students draw on their own knowledge) and Response (students read a given text and respond to it). It has been established that students perform differently on topic structure itself. To investigate this effect, one topic was used but presented as (1) an Open topic structure, (2) a Response topic structure with one reading passage, and (3) a Response topic structure with three reading passages. The essays, written by college freshmen, were holistically rated for quality and analyzed for fluency, total error, and error ratios. The results indicated that the structure of the topic made a difference in quality, fluency, and total error, but not in any error ratio. These results suggest that, for placement testing, one should first decide which types of students one wishes to identify because each topic structure distinguishes low, average, and high ability students differently.

Some Effects of Varying the Structure of a Topic on College Students' Writing

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It is well known that students enter college with widely varied writing abilities. Consequently, in order to better meet the needs of different students, most colleges and universities place entering freshmen into two or more levels of composition courses. Although various methods for placing students are used, the most common is to have students write an impromptu essay on a presented topic and then evaluate the essays using holistic scoring. This method is efficient, has adequate reliability, seems to provide adequate evidence for

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placement. Indeed, colleagues from various institutions suggest that they typically have a 5% error rate. Thus, as most composition classes have about 20 students, one is typically found to be misplaced, and that misplaced student typically should be in a more advanced course.

Because essay placement tests seem to work well and, perhaps more importantly, have credibility (see Rentz, 1984), we need to know how to best construct such tests so that they will provide adequate representations of students’ writing abilities. In fact, research during the past decade has provided important evidence concerning the effects of several variables related to essay testing.

It is now generally agreed that any topic used as a stimulus for an essay will give some students an advantage, and it is equally agreed that no one topic is best for all students. There is also a considerable body of scholarship concerning the effects of such variables as mode of discourse (e.g., Crowhurst & Piche, 1979; Rubin & Piche, 1979; Witte & Davis, 1980; Quellmalz, Capell, & Chou, 1982), rhetorical setting (e.g., Brossell, 1980), culture bias of topics (e.g., Labov, 1969; Clark, 1980), the degree to which abstract reasoning is required by the topic (e.g., White, 1974), and what influences readers (e.g., Freedman, 1977; Hake & Williams, 1981).

However, one variable—the way a topic is framed or structured—has not been adequately addressed in the literature. In general, universities use one of two “topic structure” models: (1) an open structure (i.e., students are given a broad topic and asked to draw upon personal knowledge and experience in their response) and (2) a response structure (i.e., students are given a text, usually short, to read and are asked to respond in some way to that text). Thus, Baker and Quellmalz’s (1980) comparison of pictorial and written descriptions is not immediately relevant. Meredith’s report (1984) that, in South Carolina, after examining and field testing “divergent prompt types,” a three-paragraph prompt was chosen that more closely addresses the issue of topic structure, but no data from the pilot testing have been published.

Consequently, this study was designed to examine directly whether (and how) the topic structures typically used by colleges affect writing, for it might be the case that the structure itself enables or disables some students and, thus, the results from holistic ratings and more atomistic analyses might differentiate students differently (i.e., might distribute them differently). A student might do well on one
structure but less well on another. This, we believe, is an important issue in placement testing and even in diagnostic and exit-exam testing (all of which are commonly used). All three types of tests differ in purpose and consequence. Therefore, the topic structure used should provide the evidence most appropriate for the purpose and be the most reliable.

DESIGN AND PROCEDURES

Selection of Subjects

Three groups of randomly selected college students were used in this study: those in the Basic Writing (BW) course, those in the General Writing (GW) course, and those in Advanced Writing (AW) courses. The BW subjects had been assigned to that course because they had received scores of 2 or lower (on a 1 to 4 holistic rating scale) on the placement test. The GW subjects had been assigned to that course because they either had received a 3 on the placement test or had successfully completed BW (with a grade of C or better and had passed the exit exam). The AW subjects were in those courses (we drew our sample from two different courses) because they had received a 4 on the placement test or had successfully completed GW.

We are confident that these subjects represent their groups because in all classes on the first day the students wrote an essay that the instructors analyzed to determine whether the students were appropriately placed. Misplaced students were moved immediately.

Within each group, subjects were randomly assigned to writing groups on the basis of topic structure (TS). The sample sizes for each group are presented in Table 1.

Topic Structures

Three topic structures (TSs) were used (See Appendix 1). They were similar in what they required subjects to do but differed in the amount of material that subjects were given to read.

TS1: (Open structure) Subjects were asked to think of a time that they did something creative, to describe the event, and then, on a basis
TABLE 1
Number of Subjects per Cell

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>TOPIC STRUCTURE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Group</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BW</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GW</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AW</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ALL</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

of what they had written (i.e., the instance), to explain what a creative act seems to involve. Thus, subjects had to create a text, then generalize from that text about what a creative act seems to involve.

TS2: (Response structure, one text provided) Subjects were asked to read a passage (206 words) in which D. H. Lawrence describes a time when he did something creative. (This, we believed, was roughly similar to "think about a time when you were creative.") Subjects were to describe what they thought Lawrence did and then, on the basis of what they had written (i.e., the instance), to form a generalization about what a creative act seems to involve.

TS3: (Response structure, more than one text provided) Subjects were asked to read three passages: the Lawrence passage, one by A. E. Housman (180 words), and one by Henry Miller (134 words). Thus, they read a total of 520 words. In each passage the author describes a time when he did something creative. Subjects were to describe what they thought each author did and then, on the basis of what they had written (i.e., the instances), to form a generalization about what a creative act seems to involve. This TS was used because it might be the case that being required to read more extensive text prior to writing would decrease fluency. Thus, if time spent reading decreases fluency, subjects writing on TS3 should produce fewer words than those
writing on TS2. Without TS3, we should not be able to interpret the results from TS1 and TS2.

Collection of the Data

During the second week of the Winter 1982-1983 term (after all misplaced students had been moved), the instructors of the classes administered the test. To allow students sufficient time for reading and writing, each class was 80 minutes. The instructors were told to hand out the topics in the order that we had packaged them (randomized) and to allow subjects at least 70 minutes for reading/writing/revising/editing.

The instructors returned the essays after class. We then coded the students’ essays and xerographed multiple copies. The originals were returned to the instructors.

Analysis of Essays

The essays from all groups and all tasks were randomized and holistically rated using a 1 to 4 scale. To avoid any bias that might have been created through our training of the raters, we used raters who had previously been trained to do the placement rating. The raters used the same procedures they had been trained to use in the placement essay rating. Raters made their judgments on the basis of coherence, organization, relationship between the two essay parts, and control of language/error. The essays were rated initially by two independent raters. No two raters had the same set of essays. If these raters did not agree, a third (or a fourth) independent rater resolved the difference. Thus, for each essay we had one agreed-upon modal rating. Modal rating was used because it was used for the placement test. The first two raters agreed on 61.93% of the essays. For 34.65% a third rater resolved differences, and for 3.41% a fourth rater was required.

Error Analysis

Errors were labelled and counted using a previously designed and tested method (see Hjelmervik, 1982). Using this method, each error is
TABLE 2
Means and Standard Deviations for Quality Ratings
by Group, by TS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>TS 1</th>
<th></th>
<th>TS 2</th>
<th></th>
<th>TS 3</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>GROUP</td>
<td>MEAN</td>
<td>SD</td>
<td>MEAN</td>
<td>SD</td>
<td>MEAN</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BW</td>
<td>2.20</td>
<td>.52</td>
<td>2.27</td>
<td>.63</td>
<td>2.37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GW</td>
<td>2.32</td>
<td>.69</td>
<td>2.36</td>
<td>.49</td>
<td>2.92</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AW</td>
<td>3.43</td>
<td>.51</td>
<td>2.71</td>
<td>.83</td>
<td>2.93</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

categorized only once. This prevents, for example, counting a comma splice (two independent clauses joined by a comma) as more than one error: Indeed, one could count as many as three, or even four, errors if other category schema were used.

The taxonomy (See Appendix 2) has five sequenced categories, from sentence level to word level (with sequenced subcategories): sentence level, constituent level, word level, punctuation, and other. Thus, the taxonomy allows one to count particular error types as well as related groups. Merging categories allows calculation of total error.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Quality

The results (see Table 2) indicate that the different topic structures (TSs) produce different quality ($F = 3.50$ [2, 167]). There was also a group effect ($F = 21.50$ [2, 176]) and an interaction effect ($F = 4.50$ [4, 167]). As the means indicate, the AW students outperformed the GW students, who outperformed the BW students, both overall and on each TS. However, these means are not always significantly different from one another. On TSI, BW and GW students were not different,
but AW students were markedly superior. On TS2, BW and GW students were even more alike than on TS1, and AW students, although superior, were significantly different from only the BW students. On TS3, the pattern again changes. The AW and GW students were not different, but the BW students were significantly lower than both.

Thus, it seems that the TS used should be chosen only after considering the purpose of the essay exam. If one desires to identify those students with the lowest ability (e.g., the high risk students), TS3 is best. But if the highest-ability students are to be identified, TS1 is best. TS2 does not accentuate differences so that either high- or low-ability students are clearly distinguishable.

**Words Produced (Fluency)**

Fluency is generally considered an important factor in quality rating, perhaps even in quality per se, because lack of length tends to indicate inadequate development of ideas. It is not uncommon, therefore, to find that longer essays receive higher quality ratings. Indeed, the correlation between quality and fluency is typically reported to be about .50.

There was a significant group and TS effect for essay length, but not a significant interaction. Group: $F = 16.78\, (2,\, 167)$; TS: $F = 5.10\, (2,\, 167)$.

The results (Table 3) indicate that on TS1 fluency reflects quality: BW and GW students produced about the same number of words whereas AW students produced significantly longer essays. On TS2, however, all three groups produced essays of nearly identical length.
and all produced fewer words than on TS1 or TS3. On TS3 all groups produced fewer words than on TS1 and the three groups are spread by about the same number of words, BW having the lowest fluency, AW the highest.

Overall, the AW students produced significantly more words than BW and GW students, who did not differ on this subject. TS2 elicited significantly fewer words than did TS1 or TS3.

Thus, it appears that TS2 for some reason suppressed fluency, that TS1 and TS3 provoked similar fluency for BW and GW students, but that AW students were much more fluent on TS1. Therefore, we would question the conventional wisdom that open topics such as TS1 enable lower-ability writers. Instead, open topics seem to enable high-ability writers. Perhaps we have looked at ourselves to determine what would be the best type of topic structure instead of looking at our students.

If one assumes that increasing the time spent in reading decreases, somewhat proportionally, the time spent writing, all groups should have produced the longest essays on TS1 and the shortest on TS3. This was clearly not the case. Each group wrote the most on TS1, but each group also wrote more words on TS3 than on TS2. Thus, for these groups one might conclude that being asked to read longer texts actually increases the potential of producing longer essays. But one might also conclude that being asked to read a short text somehow decreases fluency.

There are at least two possible reasons for this apparent contradiction. First, advanced writers may be more fluent on open structures (TS1) because they are able to more quickly marshal and organize evidence. One might argue that advanced writers are simply more fluent, but their lack of fluency on TS2 does not support this argument. Other research, as well as teacher comments, has indicated that lower-ability writers spend less time writing, even if allowed a considerable amount of time. Thus, these students should not write many words regardless of the topic structure. Our Basic Writers may have written more on TS3 than on TS2 because they were given more to think about. Second, BW and GW students need time, when given an open structure, to gather evidence. Thus, being given more to read may actually enable them because they are given more evidence that they do not have to generate.

TS2 provides perhaps the most interesting data because the groups performed almost identically on it. We currently offer three possible explanations concerning why all groups had the same mean fluency:
(1) The length of the passage (206 words) cued them to produce about the same length. (2) The single passage did not give them enough evidence, perhaps even less than they could create themselves. Thus, this TS actually disables them. (3) TS2 may resemble what students typically see on tests in content areas and on placement and diagnostic examinations, perhaps causing them to respond with what might be called a standard response (what some have termed ‘theme-writing’).

Error

Error can be calculated in several ways, and one can argue for the legitimacy of each. Therefore, we calculated error using three methods.

(1) Frequency of Error. This method assumes that all errors are of equal weight and that the existence of error is the important point. Total error for each subject was summed.

(2) Frequency of Error per 100 Words. This method also assumes that all errors are of equal weight. However, it assumes that error must be considered in relation to fluency. The assumption is that producing more words creates the possibility for more error.

(3) Ratio of Category of Error per Potential for Occurrence. This method does not assume that all errors are of equal weight or have equal potential for occurrence. Rather, it assumes that the frequencies of different types of errors must be divided by the sum of the units in which such errors might occur. For example, each word could be misspelled; therefore, the logical denominator would be total words. However, tense errors or subject-verb errors can only occur once per clause; thus, the logical denominator must be the total number of clauses. We analyzed all of the ratios. There was some evidence that different types of error may occur with greater frequency according to TS, but there were no significant differences among TSs and only a few instances of significant differences among groups. Furthermore, there was no apparent pattern in the differences or the similarities. Therefore, these data will not be presented.

Frequency of Error

The results show a significant difference only among TSs. Both group and interaction Fs were less than 1.0.
TABLE 4
Means and Standard Deviations: Frequency of Error

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>TS 1</th>
<th></th>
<th>TS 2</th>
<th></th>
<th>TS 3</th>
<th></th>
<th>ALL TSs</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>GROUP</td>
<td>MEAN</td>
<td>SD</td>
<td>MEAN</td>
<td>SD</td>
<td>MEAN</td>
<td>SD</td>
<td>MEAN</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BW</td>
<td>11.95</td>
<td>7.54</td>
<td>8.82</td>
<td>6.22</td>
<td>13.47</td>
<td>8.02</td>
<td>11.30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GW</td>
<td>12.08</td>
<td>6.56</td>
<td>8.95</td>
<td>7.08</td>
<td>9.77</td>
<td>5.15</td>
<td>10.32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AW</td>
<td>13.93</td>
<td>9.84</td>
<td>8.71</td>
<td>6.35</td>
<td>12.00</td>
<td>12.40</td>
<td>11.55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ALL</td>
<td>12.47</td>
<td>7.67</td>
<td>8.84</td>
<td>6.47</td>
<td>11.49</td>
<td>8.28</td>
<td>10.95</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

TS2 again is different. Far fewer errors were committed on this TS (See Table 4). As it is typically believed that frequency of error decreases with writing ability, the nondifference among the groups may seem odd. However, the perception of error and the existence of error may be quite different. Indeed, AW students writing on TS1 had the highest quality, yet made the most errors.

The post hoc comparisons are very interesting. The different patterns among the groups (but also the similarity in response to TS2) may indicate that the potential for making errors is not directly related to the length of the student’s text. There may be something about the nature of TS2 that causes students to commit fewer errors. The most obvious reason would be that subjects “borrowed” from the text given them. However, they could also have borrowed when responding to TS3, yet they made far more errors on TS3 than on TS2. Therefore, there must be some other reason. Perhaps TS3 makes a higher cognitive demand. Being given a wealth of evidence may cause students to synthesize. We have some indirect evidence of this: The students responding to TS2 made far more quotation errors. This might indicate a “text-boundness.” When responding to TS3, however, the students apparently tried to synthesize and put the information into their own words.

**Frequency of Error per 100 Words**

The results from the ANOVA showed no significant differences anywhere. Indeed, the means (see Table 5) are all within a close range
### TABLE 5
Means and Standard Deviations: Error per 100 Words

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>GROUP</th>
<th>TS 1 MEAN</th>
<th>TS 1 SD</th>
<th>TS 2 MEAN</th>
<th>TS 2 SD</th>
<th>TS 3 MEAN</th>
<th>TS 3 SD</th>
<th>ALL TSS MEAN</th>
<th>ALL TSS SD</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>BW</td>
<td>4.11</td>
<td>1.86</td>
<td>3.91</td>
<td>2.09</td>
<td>5.02</td>
<td>3.09</td>
<td>4.32</td>
<td>2.39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GW</td>
<td>4.21</td>
<td>2.93</td>
<td>3.82</td>
<td>3.47</td>
<td>3.61</td>
<td>2.23</td>
<td>3.88</td>
<td>2.35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AW</td>
<td>3.35</td>
<td>2.41</td>
<td>4.14</td>
<td>3.02</td>
<td>3.42</td>
<td>2.88</td>
<td>3.64</td>
<td>2.74</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ALL</td>
<td>3.97</td>
<td>2.47</td>
<td>3.93</td>
<td>2.20</td>
<td>4.02</td>
<td>2.77</td>
<td>3.98</td>
<td>2.46</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(3.35 to 5.02). These data indicate that although the BW students overall committed slightly more errors per 100 words than did the GW students who, in turn, committed slightly more errors per 100 words than did the AW students, the common assumption that BW students will make more errors even when length is factored is not valid. These results may also indicate that raters do not create “error per” frequencies while they read. Instead, “existence of error” may be what raters note, especially when they perceive low quality in general.

### CONCLUSIONS

The structure of the topic does appear to make a difference in quality, fluency, and total error, but not in any of the error ratios. Because the purpose underlying this research was both to determine the effect of topic structure on the students’ writing and to attempt to determine the appropriateness of topic structures for different kinds of testing, particularly placement tests, we would cautiously suggest the following.

For placement tests (i.e., determining who must take what course) it appears that one must first decide which types of students should be most clearly identified and distinguished. If higher-ability writers are to be distinguished from average- and lower-ability writers, an open topic structure (TS1) seems the best. But if the lower-ability writers
are to be distinguished (the usual reason for such testing), the response structure with multiple readings (TS3) seems best. This structure does not seem to enable lower-ability students as much as it enables the average students. If one wishes to create a topic structure that will produce the shortest essays (that can, thus, be read and rated fastest, most cost effectively, and with a lessened chance that raters will be consciously or unconsciously affected by length) yet still sort the students, the single passage structure (TS2) seems preferable.

For exit-exam essays (e.g., essays used to determine who may move to a more advanced course or be exempted from further courses) the decision concerning topic structure depends on whether one wishes to err in the direction of pass or fail. The open topic structure (TS1) may prevent more marginal cases from moving on to new courses whereas the multiple passage response structure (TS3) may allow some weaker writers to pass. TS2 seems least preferable because it does not distinguish as clearly students at various proficiency levels.

If the essay is to be used for diagnosing the abilities and problems of individual students, we suspect that either the open structure (TS1) or the response structure with multiple readings (TS3) would be best because they elicit the greatest length and the greatest number of errors. TS2 seems least appropriate overall. However, as diagnosis in freshman composition courses typically focuses on error, and as each TS seems to provoke different error types, each could be used for different purposes.

APPENDIX 1

Topic Structures
(Material Given to Subjects)

TOPIC STRUCTURE 1

Think about a time when you did something creative, and write an essay in which you describe that time. Then on the basis of this instance, go on to explain what a creative act seems to involve.
TOPIC STRUCTURE 2

Read the following passage in which D. H. Lawrence describes a time when he did something creative, and write an essay in which you describe what you think D. H. Lawrence did. Then on the basis of this instance, go on to explain what a creative act seems to involve.

I learnt to paint from copying other pictures—usually reproductions, sometimes even photographs. When I was a boy, how I concentrated over it! Copying some perfectly worthless scene reproduction in some magazine. I worked with almost dry watercolour, stroke by stroke, covering half a square-inch at a time, each square-inch perfect and completed, proceeding in a kind of broad wash. Hours and hours of intense concentration, inch by inch progress, in a method entirely wrong—and yet those copies of mine managed, when they were finished, to have a certain something that delighted me: a certain glow of life, which was beauty to me. A picture lives with the life you put into it. If you put no life into it—no thrill, no concentration of delight or exaltation of visual discovery—then the picture is dead, like so many canvases, no matter how much thorough and scientific work is put into it. Even if you only copy a purely banal reproduction of an old bridge, some sort of keen, delighted awareness of the old bridge or of its atmosphere, or the image it has kindled inside you, can go over on to the paper and give a certain touch of life to a banal conception.

TOPIC STRUCTURE 3

Read the following passages in which D. H. Lawrence, A. E. Housman, and Henry Miller describe times when they did something creative, and write an essay in which you describe what you think they did. Then on the basis of these instances, go on to explain what a creative act seems to involve.

D. H. Lawrence

I learnt to paint from copying other pictures—usually reproductions, sometimes even photographs. When I was a boy, how I concentrated over it! Copying some perfectly worthless scene reproduction in some magazine. I worked with almost dry watercolour, stroke by stroke, covering half a square-inch at a time, each square-inch perfect and completed, proceeding in a kind of broad wash. Hours and hours of intense concentration, inch by inch progress, in a method entirely
wrong—and yet those copies of mine managed, when they were finished, to have a certain something that delighted me: a certain glow of life, which was beauty to me. A picture lives with the life you put into it. If you put no life into it—no thrill, no concentration of delight or exaltation of visual discovery—then the picture is dead, like so many canvases, no matter how much thorough and scientific work is put into it. Even if you only copy a purely banal reproduction of an old bridge, some sort of keen, delighted awareness of the old bridge or of its atmosphere, or the image it has kindled inside you, can go over on to the paper and give a certain touch of life to a banal conception.

A. E. Housman

Having drunk a pint of beer at luncheon—beer is a sedative to the brain, and my afternoons are the least intellectual portion of my life—I would go out for a walk of two or three hours. As I went along, thinking of nothing in particular, only looking at things around me and following the progress of the seasons, there would flow into my mind, with sudden and unaccountable emotion, sometimes a line or two of verse, sometimes a whole stanza at once, accompanied, not preceded, by a vague notion of the poem which they were destined to form part of. Then there would usually be a lull of an hour or so, then perhaps the spring would bubble up again. I say bubble up, because so far as I could make out, the source of the suggestions thus proffered to the brain was an abyss which I have already had occasion to mention, the pit of the stomach. When I got home I wrote them down, leaving gaps, and hoping that further inspiration might be forthcoming another day.

Henry Miller

I haven’t the slightest idea what my future books will be like, even the one immediately to follow. My charts and plans are the slenderest sort of guides: I scrap them at will, I invent, distort, deform, lie, inflate, exaggerate, confound and confuse as the mood seizes me. I obey only my own instincts and intuitions. I know nothing in advance. Often I put down things which I do not understand myself, secure in the knowledge that later they will become clear and meaningful to me. I have faith in the man who is writing, who is myself, the writer. I do not believe in words, no matter if strung together by the most skillful man: I believe in language, which is something beyond words, something which words give only an inadequate illusion of.
APPENDIX 2
Error Taxonomy

I. Sentence Level Error (Ratio: per T-Unit)
   1. Fragment
   2. Run-on/comma splice
   3. Mixed sentence (consolidation error)

II. Constituent Level Error (Ratio: per Clause)
   4. Noun or Pronoun: case, number
   5. Pronoun and antecedent: number agreement
   6. Verb: tense
   7. Subject-verb disagreement
   8. Adjective or adverb: use or degree
   9. Multiple negative
  10. Preposition
  11. Determiner

III. Word Level Error (Ratio: per 100 Words)
   12. Omitted word(s)
   13. Garbled/undecipherable word(s)
   14. Accidental error
   15. Spelling
   16. Wrong word

IV. Punctuation Level Error (Ratio: per T-unit)
   17. Sentence boundary (initial or final)
   18. Quotation
   19. Comma
   20. Other (hyphen, parentheses, colon, dash, brackets, semi-colon)

V. Other (Ratio: per T-Unit)
   21. Any error which does not fit into one of the above
categories.
   NB: Because all differences among analysts must be resolved,
very few errors are included in this category.

REFERENCES


William L. Smith is Associate Professor of English and Director of the Writing Workshop at the University of Pittsburgh. His research has focused on the syntactic choices students make when composing and revising and on how students respond to overt and covert cues and to instruction. He is currently Project Director on a grant to study the use of computers in teaching composition.

Glynda A. Hull is a University Post-Doctoral Fellow in the Learning Research and Development Center at the University of Pittsburgh. Her research focuses on error in writing, particularly on the strategies students use to detect and correct error. She was the recipient of the 1984 AERA Outstanding Dissertation Award for Empirical Research.

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Michael T. Moore is Assistant Professor of Reading in Developmental Studies at Georgia Southern College. His research focuses on problem discovery as a process preceding problem solving and how this relates to writing and reading.

Carolyn Ball is a doctoral student in the English Department at the University of Pittsburgh. She is conducting research on assignment sequences and on the reading-writing relationship.

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