

Walking with the Re-takers of Theme Writing

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This paper reports the path the author took in teaching Theme Writing—an academic writing course—in Winter Semester of the academic year 2013, where all the students were re-takers and she tried to help them to overcome the difficulties they faced. Based on the words of advice from the colleagues, writing experts' recommendations, and her own observation of the students, she customized the lesson content and group work, implemented suggested writing strategies from the literature, and communicated closely with the students. At the end of the semester, 10 out of 13 students passed the course. This paper also discusses how teachers may guide this group of students. It was found from the survey that the students attributed their successful completion of the course to the fact that they had more time to write and that they had strong motivation to pass. The survey results also show that the students find research skills and abstract thinking skills such as narrowing the topic, synthesizing sources, organizing a paper to be most challenging. Implication as well as the limited applicability of this study is discussed.

Theme Writing (TW) used to be one of the two compulsory sophomore components of the English Language Program (ELP) of International Christian University (ICU). It was a one-term course that meets twice a week where each student wrote an academic research paper in English by the end of the term (Hatakeyama, 2009). Reflecting the concept of process writing, each student wrote drafts during the term and received feedback from the instructor in tutorials (Hatakeyama, 2009). However, under the philosophy that “a university is, or should be, a constantly evolving entity,” ELP underwent the structural reform, and “as part of this reform, the name of the program has been changed to English for Liberal Arts Program (ELA)” which started in the AY 2012 (ELA, 2012, p.81). In the ELA, Theme Writing and another twice-a-week sophomore course titled Sophomore English (SE) were replaced by, or evolved into, a new compulsory sophomore course titled Research Writing, which emphasizes “students’ critical engagement, analytical reading, research, and writing skills” (ELA, 2012. P.10).

Although most of the sophomore students successfully passed TW during the AY 2012, there were some students who failed the course and thus needed to retake the course in the AY 2013. Therefore, two sections of TW for re-takers were offered in each term of the AY 2013. Naturally, different from the common situations of having one or two re-takers out of a class of around 20 students up until AY2012, all the TW students in the AY 2013 class were re-takers. Given the above context, it was crucial for those re-takers to pass the course because it was one of the required courses for them to graduate from ICU and also because there would be less TW classes offered in the following AY. The author taught TW for re-takers in Winter Semester of AY 2013. This was the author’s sixth time teaching TW but her first time teaching the class consisting only of re-takers.

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This paper reports the path that the author took in teaching TW, trying to help TW re-takers to overcome the difficulties they faced and to complete their writing. It also aims to explore how teachers could provide assistance to students writing long academic papers.

Preparation before Winter Semester AY2012

Talking with Colleagues about TW re-takers

In order to obtain a realistic picture of TW re-takers, the author sought advice from the TW coordinator and several colleagues who had taught re-takers in previous semesters. The pieces of advice included: a) fewer students come to class regularly—the attendance rate is lower than regular courses; b) planning a lesson very much connected with the previous lesson may be challenging because, due to the above reason, the students who came to the previous class may not come to the next class; c) having a peer-review activity in class may not work well since students tend not to bring their drafts to class; and d) giving students individual attention and as many tutorials as possible may help them to write. These words of advice were extremely helpful in developing lesson plans and activities.

Literature on Writing Strategies

Reading several books on academic writing led the author to revisit practical strategies for writing. The focus of the literature review was on the strategy of writing for struggling writers rather than how to teach academic writing in order to familiarize the author with this aspect. It was also because, from the author's experience, TW re-takers did not seem to have effective writing strategies such as how to start and continue writing in order to complete a paper.

Many would agree that it is hard to start writing. Silvia (2007) admits, "writing about research isn't fun: writing is frustrating, complicated, and un-fun" (p.4). Indeed, we may feel familiar to Warburton's (2007) description of typical behaviors of avoidance from writing: "Give someone an essay to write, and suddenly they will remember a list of urgent chores they have to perform before they get started on it" (p.15). Thus, it is suggested that writers try various strategies to overcome psychological obstacles for writing and to get started because "once you've started the process, writing usually gets much easier" (Warburton, 2007, p.16).

The first strategy recommended is "instead of finding time to write, *allot* time to write. Prolific writers make a schedule and stick to it" (Silvia, 2007, p.12). Research shows that "struggling writers wrote a lot when they simply followed a schedule . . . [whereas those] who waited until they 'felt like it' wrote almost nothing" (Boice, 1990, cited in Silvia 2007, p.46). Here, "any action that is instrumental in completing a writing project counts as writing" (Silvia, 2007, p.19), which means that reading and analyzing is part of the writing process.

The second step recommended is goal setting (Silvia, 2007). This includes a) "to realize that goal setting . . . [and] . . . planning is part of writing"; b) "to list your *project goals*"; and c) "to set a concrete goal for each day of writing" (pp.30-31). This is consistent with what Warburton (2007) writes: "A good strategy for completing a large task ... is to break it down into smaller, manageable tasks. Plan and write a particular paragraph or section rather than taking on the whole project in one go. Each of these shorter sections should be relatively simple to complete" (p.18).

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The third step is monitoring the progress. Citing the works of Carver & Scheier (1998) and Duval & Silvia (2001), Silvia (2007) asserts that “it isn’t enough to set a goal and make it a priority: People must monitor their progress toward the goal” (p.39) since “people who write a lot typically do some kind of monitoring” (p.40). Additionally, Silvia (2007) refers to forming a writers’ support group as an effective strategy. He writes that using “principles of motivation, goal setting, and social support” helps people maintain good writing habits (p.50).

Literature on Motivation

Revisiting motivation theories and practices helped the author to have insight into how to keep students motivated and how to avoid demotivating them. Given that passing this course was one of the necessary conditions for graduation, the students must have been at least extrinsically motivated to pass the course. With additional motivational factors, the students would be further motivated, leading to the lower possibility of dropping out. Moreover, if any of the potential de-motivating factors for students are eliminated, there would be less risk for the students to fail.

Dörnyei (2001) gives a practical list to motivate language learners in general. In chapter 2 of his book titled *Motivational Strategies in the Language Classroom*, he reports that the first motivational factor is teacher behavior with the second being group dynamics. He lists "appropriate teacher behaviors" in order to create basic motivational conditions such as a) enthusiasm, b) commitment to and expectations for the students' learning, c) relationship with the students, and d) relationship with the students' parents (p.32). He asserts that having "enthusiasm . . . and the ability to make this enthusiasm public . . . is one of the most important ingredients of motivationally successful teaching" since "projecting enthusiasm is related to the more general process of modelling" (p.33). He also claims that "it is important that everybody in the classroom should be aware that you care . . . because students are extremely sensitive to the cues coming from the teacher" (p.34). In addition, he emphasizes that "you also need to have sufficiently high expectations for what the students can achieve" (p.35); if a teacher has a greater expectation, the better the student performs, referred to as the pygmalion effect. Regarding the third point of "developing a personal relationship with the students and achieving their respect," he lists a) accepting the students in a positive way without being judgemental, b) listening to and paying attention to them, and c) indicating the teacher's "mental and physical availability" as key elements (p.39).

With regard to the group dynamics, Dörnyei maintains the importance of creating "a pleasant and supportive classroom atmosphere" (p.40) and "a cohesive learner group with appropriate group norms" where "students are happy to belong to" as basic motivational conditions (p.43)

Beginning of Winter Semester AY2013

Students' Profile

There were 13 students registered for the author’s TW class: seven male students and six female students. As for their general English proficiency at the beginning of their freshman year, out of the 11 students who came to the first class meeting, two students had been placed in Program C (advanced), four students in Program B (high-intermediate), five in

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Program A (intermediate). The students' identification number shows that seven students were juniors, four were seniors, and two were in their fifth year of college.

Beginning-of-term Survey

In order to understand the author's TW students, the author conducted a beginning-of-the-term survey of the 11 students who attended the first class. The survey consisted of three open-ended questions: 1) Where do you find difficulty in writing a paper in English?; 2) What skills, techniques, and/or strategies do you want to learn in this course?; and 3) What would you like the instructor to know including your health/mental issues and/or concerns?

The students' responses to the first question showed that they find it difficult to search for sources and to narrow the topic (and their interests). In addition, it was revealed that they find difficulty in using appropriate grammar and vocabulary as well as in writing and organizing long papers. Besides, one student shared his frustration regarding how different his thinking in Japanese and writing in English are, and another student confessed that it is difficult for her to write in her native language of Japanese as well. A summary of their responses is given in Table 1 below.

Table 1. The Areas Students Find Difficulty in

Searching for sources	3
Using appropriate grammar and vocabulary	3
Writing and organizing a long paper	2
Narrowing the topic and their interests	2
Others	2

As responses to the second question, the students provided a varied list of what they would like to learn. The items in the list covered three major areas/aspects: English-related skills (vocabulary and accuracy of sentences), research-related skills (finding and citing sources), and abstract/critical thinking skills (narrowing the topic, forming a research question, and organizing an essay). Interestingly, what students wanted to learn revolved around abstract thinking skills, which coincides with their responses to the first question. A summary of their responses is given in Table 2 below.

Table 2. What Students Want to Learn in This Course

Skill to find sources	5
Narrowing the topic	4
Citing sources (incl. the Work-cited list)	4
Acquiring a larger vocabulary size	3
Writing a conclusion	2
Writing accurate sentences	2
Forming a research question	1
Building an essay little by little	1
How to organize an essay and where to start	1

A few students responded to the third question. Two comments conveyed the mental problems that students may potentially have, and one comment apprehended that the potential

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time pressure the student may have in managing multiple and different tasks including job-hunting. All the students' responses are shown in Appendix A without any grammatical corrections made.

First Day Observations

To roughly assess the students' English proficiency as well as to know the students better, the author observed the students during class activities on the first day of class. The activities themselves were quite similar to those in previous TW, such as talking in groups about the possible topics for their papers, but the atmosphere of this group of students seemed somewhat different.

First, the group work did not proceed as lively as usual. There seemed to be fewer turns in conversations and the voices of students sounded softer. This could have derived from the nervousness that the students had on the first day meeting new members. Or, perhaps many students may have been more introvert than extrovert and thus tend not to communicate with others very actively. Or, one possible factor could have been lack of their confidence in their English proficiency. Students had been away from the intensive English program for nearly two years at least, and it may have been a while since they last attended the course given in English. Indeed, students sometimes seemed to be looking for words to express what they were thinking or feeling during group work.

Second, there were no questions asked in class during (or after) the syllabus explanation although the students did have questions; some students approached the instructor for questions after class. Perhaps it was because they were lacking confidence in asking questions in class; they were not sure whether their English—or the content of the question—was good enough. Indeed, most of them asked questions in Japanese. Or, perhaps they did not like to stand out and to receive the attention on the first day. Or, they were careful thinkers who finished developing questions after the explanation was over. Or, they might have wanted to talk to the instructor in person to develop a personal relationship. Whatever the reason behind this phenomenon may be, the questions students asked after class were quite reasonable and related to the rest of the members of this class.

Suppositions and Countermeasures

From a) the words of advice from the colleagues, b) the review of the literature on writing and motivation, c) the student survey responses, and d) the author's observation from the first class, the author made several suppositions of this group of students and developed and tried countermeasures as follows.

Supposition 1: Students may need to recall some of what they had learned as freshmen.

Given that it had been at least nearly two years since they finished their intensive English program as freshmen, it would require some time and steps for them to recall (and feel comfortable with) what they had learned previously. In fact, their self-perceived low English proficiency especially in academic writing—revealed in the beginning of the term

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survey—could be attributed at least partially to the fact that it had been years since they last worked on academic writing.

As a countermeasure, the class activities took a step-by-step approach revisiting what they had learned and then applying them. In terms of academic writing, for example, the class activities for a conclusion started by recalling the basics of conclusion such as its purposes and typical elements included, followed by the activities of identifying these elements in sample conclusions, and then by critically examining, in pairs, sample conclusions. In this way, it was hoped that the students would review what they had once learned in a less face-threatening way before getting to apply them. Another purpose of these activities was to give them much related input by exposing them to academic texts to help them produce output. Here, the length of the texts was kept short given the possibly slower reading (and processing) speed of this group of students. During these activities, the author sat with each pair to monitor their performance and to stimulate their discussion.

Supposition 2: Some students may be reluctant to reveal themselves in class.

From what some students wrote in the beginning-of-the-term survey, it seemed that some students were mentally sensitive and/or very introvert. Additionally, the author's observation from the first class led to the assumption that these students may need some time before they start to feel comfortable with their classmates.

Since it was crucial that they come to class regularly, the author tried to avoid giving additional pressure which may cause their absence. In this regard, the author refrained from having formal peer-review activities given the sensitiveness and reluctance some students had since peer review requires students to show what they wrote and to give/receive both positive and negative feedback. Instead, this aspect of the course was replaced by tutorials. However, after the students had come to know one another better, casual pair and group activities such as sharing the topics of what they were writing about were done in the second half of the semester in order to make the students benefit from the group dynamics.

Supposition 3: Some students may be less confident/proficient in English

From what some students wrote in the beginning-of-the-term survey, the author sensed the lack of confidence they had in using English. The author's observation in the first class where group work seemed less active endorsed the survey results.

The author, however, did plan to have opportunities for group work to give additional practice—with added attention paid—since having students work in groups and exchange their ideas is one of the important aspects of learning. Especially from the critical thinking perspective, organizing and explaining their ideas to their peers and being stimulated by new ideas are too precious opportunities to be lost. Therefore, efforts were made to make the group work less face-threatening given the general characteristics of the group. For example, in matching students, the author took into account their English proficiency, personality, and perceived willingness to work in groups, and avoided matching the students with those who were very different in many respects. In this way, the author aimed to lower the students' affective filters in group work and hoped that they would feel comfortable communicating with and exchanging ideas with their peers. The author had additional intention that the students would feel a sense of belonging to this group with the shared goal of writing a paper

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and passing the course, thereby finding their peers as support group as mentioned in Silvia (2007).

Although the English-only policy during class time was maintained and observed by the students, the use of Japanese during tutorials was allowed to those who needed it. During tutorials, when a student started to speak in Japanese, the author responded back in Japanese. Indeed, some students desperately needed to use Japanese during tutorials to fully and freely express what they wanted to.

Supposition 4: Some students may feel anxiety in completing a paper.

This could have been partly due to the fact that students had been away from writing academic English for some time. Or, this may have derived from their bitter experience of failing TW once or more; the students listed many challenging aspects/areas of academic writing for them in the survey above. Or, it could be that they are not good at managing the process of writing—completing a paper of a certain quality to meet the deadline.

Part of the possible solutions for this assumption seemed related to the writing strategies in the literature to make academic writing less burdensome. Thus, the author explicitly taught the students what writing experts advises—it is better to allot time to write than waiting until getting ready and willing to write.

Additionally, a few recommended courses of action from the literature were included in the course schedule and the assignments themselves. For example, drawing on Warburton (2007), the process of writing an essay was divided into many parts, and students were asked to follow the schedule and submit one part at a time. In fact, the practice of having students submit multiple drafts have been widely done in the ELP and the ELA, reflecting the idea of process writing; the author made each task smaller so that they feel less pressured for each task and have a sense of accomplishment by finishing each. It was hoped that they get accustomed to submitting one assignment per week, which would help them to monitor their progress (Silvia, 2007); if they followed the schedule, they would naturally finish a paper.

As another example, drawing on Sylvia's (2007) claim that it is crucially important to start writing and allotting time to write, one of the twice-a-week classes was held in the computer-equipped room where students individually did research or writing. In this way, they could start writing a paper in class and feel easier to continue as Warburton (2007) suggests. Every week, they allotted at least 70 minutes for writing. Again, this practice had already been made among some instructors in the ELP and the ELA. Having the literature which endorses the practice gave the author confidence.

Supposition 5: Some students may give up and fail the course.

This assumption was made from the advice given by the colleagues as well as from the author's experience of having re-takers in previous TW classes. The cases expected were: a) be absent from class without any e-mails in advance; b) do not initiate any communication (e.g. writing an e-mail) to seek information on the missed class; c) be absent repeatedly once they missed one class; d) do not initiate any communication (e.g. approach the instructor and ask for handouts) when coming back to class after absence.

The first countermeasure was to keep the students updated on the TW class including the content of each lesson, the topic of the next lesson, and the assignment. The author had the students sign up for the course Moodle—a course management system used at ICU—and

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wrote an announcement email to all the students after each class to make sure all the students were informed. (The author manually enrolled those who had not signed up to the course Moodle.) In addition, PowerPoint slides used in class were posted on the course Moodle so that even if they missed a class, they could have a concrete idea about what was done in class. The author also hoped that this would work as reminders for the students who attended classes.

Drawing on Dörnyei (2001), the second countermeasure taken was to show that the author did care how each student was doing. For example, the author held the first round of tutorials during the first and second weeks of the semester to get to know each student better as well as to give advice on the topics of their papers, one of the aspects they feel difficulties in academic writing. As another example, if a student had been absent for more than a week, the author wrote an email asking how he/she was doing, encouraging him/her to come to class or tutorial. When the student came to class after some absence, the author approached him/her to warmly welcome him/her and to follow up on what they missed.

The third countermeasure was to make the author available as much as possible as suggested by Dörnyei (2001). Many tutorial slots were made available which could be booked online. With mutual agreement and upon request, tutorials were often held during class time when other students were individually researching and writing.

The fourth countermeasure was to keep encouraging the students, sending the message of "You can do it! Never give up!" These messages were conveyed many times in class, in emails, and in tutorials. In this way, the author hoped that the students would maintain their motivation and energy for writing and keep writing persistently until they completed their work.

End of Winter Semester AY2013

Results

Out of the 13 students registered for the course, eight students attended the last class to submit their paper, two students submitted the paper late, and three students—who stopped coming to class or who never came to class—did not submit the final paper. In summary, 10 out of 13 students passed the course. Given the profile of the students and the context surrounding the course, the standard for passing was admittedly somewhat lower than regular TW classes the author had taught before. However, the standards for giving higher grades were kept the same for fairness sake.

End-of-term Survey

On the last day of class, a named survey was conducted of the eight students who attended the class. The purpose was to obtain their fresh thoughts and reflection—just after they completed their work—on academic writing. The survey had five open-ended questions: 1) what made you finish writing this time?; 2) which aspect of writing was most challenging for you?; 3) if you were to write a paper in the future, what would you do differently?; 4) any suggestions for the course/instructor?; and 5) any comments? They could write either in English or Japanese. Since it was a named survey conducted and collected on the last day of

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class, it may be necessary to discount their responses to some questions instead of taking their comments at face value.

As for the first question asking the reasons for their success this semester, three students attributed their success to ample time they had, three students to the selection (and the narrowing) of their topics, two students to the motivation for writing, one to the frequent visit to the tutorials, and one to their good mental health. A summary is shown in Table 3.

Table 3. Students' Self-reported Reasons of Success

Had enough time	3
Successful selection (and narrowing) of the topic	3
Motivation for writing	2
Frequent visit to tutorials	1
Good mental health	1

As for the most challenging aspect of writing, the students' responses varied but centered on the pre-writing process of finding (and reading) sources and narrowing the topic. Other responses were choice of words, writing logically, citations, and writing persuasive paragraphs. A summary is shown in Table 4.

Table 4. Most challenging Aspects of Academic Writing

Finding (and reading) sources	3
(Finding and) narrowing the topic	2
Word choice	1
Writing logically	1
Citations	1
Composing persuasive paragraphs	1

As for how they would write a paper differently, two referred to the writing schedule and another two referred to the tutorials for help. Other comments included: better usage of grammar, use of more sources and visuals, and correct work-cited list.

As for suggestions for the course and the instructor, one student stated her preference of tutorials to in-class individual writing since she could not concentrate with people around her. Another student mentioned that e-mail reminders were helpful. All of the students' responses are shown in Appendix B without any grammatical corrections made.

Discussion

The reason why the re-takers were able to complete their work this time needs to be examined. Survey results show that they attributed their success mainly to the ample time they had and to the motivation they had to complete their work. Indeed, compared to their schedule as sophomores, they might have had fewer classes to take and had more time to work on their papers. In addition, their motivation to pass this course and graduate must have been a significant driving force for them to write a paper. Actually, some students were to start working from April, and they desperately needed to graduate in March.

In addition to the above-mentioned major external and internal factors, measures taken to reduce the risk of their failing the course could have contributed to keeping their

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motivation. From the students' perspective, regular updates on classes, e-mail reminders, a warm welcome to class and tutorials, encouragement by e-mails and in person, and enough opportunities for tutorials may have led to regaining their motivation to write. In fact, a student wrote in the end-term-survey that e-mail reminders were helpful. Moreover, the author's positive attitude toward the re-takers and enthusiasm in helping them to achieve the goal might have worked as a model for the students, as Dörnyei (2001) described. Some measures taken for Supposition 2 and 3 in order to lower their affective filters may have avoided de-motivating them, as well. However, giving up peer review could imply that one of the opportunities to develop critical/abstract thinking skills—essential skills in academic writing—would be lost. Naturally, tutorials had become the only opportunities for the students to develop them and to receive feedback on their drafts. Taking this into account, how to balance the benefit of lowering the re-takers' affective filters and that of challenging them intellectually is a question the author may need to keep asking.

Having motivation and time to write, however, does not automatically lead struggling writers to completing a paper. As the author had assumed in supposition 4 that many students may feel anxiety in completing a paper, they did have a lot of pressure, which they shared with the author during tutorials. Perhaps the implementation of writing strategies from the literature may have worked to ease their anxiety. By coming to classes for individual writing, the students did start their research and writing, allotted at least 70 minutes for writing per week, and made progress every week. By coming to class, perhaps they may have felt a sense of belonging to this group, which might have functioned as writers' support group as mentioned in Sylvia (2007). In this regard, explicitly verbalizing and implementing what writing experts advise might have played a certain role.

Even with enough time, high motivation, and effective writing strategies, some may still find difficulties writing a paper. What, then, are most challenging aspects of academic writing for re-takers? Interestingly, the two survey responses yielded similar yet slightly different results. One notable difference was that there were no responses regarding English-related skills but more on research skills and abstract/logical thinking skills in the survey conducted at the end of the semester. By reading their drafts and communicating with them in tutorials, the author has also come to realize during the semester that some students not only needed to learn academic writing in English in a narrow sense but also were lacking research skills (such as searching for sources) and critical/abstract thinking skills (such as narrowing the topic, synthesizing sources, and organizing a long paper). From both the instructor and students' perspectives, re-takers seem to have struggled with the above non-language, highly cognitive skills.

To what extent and how, then, did the course content and tutorials contribute to their achievement? Perhaps students benefited from one-on-one tutorial sessions where they were advised as well as challenged on these aspects. Indeed, reading and giving feedback to their proposals and drafts, listening to their struggle, helping them to synthesize various sources and organize the essay, are essential parts of tutorials in TW. The author, however, regrets that effective in-class activities focusing on these abstract thinking skills could have been done. Although a student wrote a positive comment on the course content in that it was easily understandable, there must be room for improvement in this regard. Furthermore, boldly put, whether the students had these skills in their native language is a question worth investigating; one student wrote about the difficulty she had in writing in her native language Japanese in the beginning-of-the-term survey. How to equip students with these skills remains the issue worth exploring for the author.

Conclusion

From the two surveys, it was found that the areas the author's students find difficulties in ranged widely from language-related skills to research skills and abstract thinking skills, with more emphasis on the latter. Although the applicability of this finding is limited due to the small number of students, this coincides with the author's observation, and the effective way to equip students with these skills may be one of the areas worth exploring. Perhaps the lack of these skills in students may be one of the causes of so-called writing blocks; it may be writing teachers who could help them by bridging the gap between where they are and where they need (or would like) to be, as Hjortshoj (2001) maintains. The author hopes that noticing this would be helpful in her teaching of both regular students and re-takers in the future, especially in the newly implemented course: Research Writing.

Teaching a class consisting only of re-takers—the very first experience for the author—triggered the author to mediate what to do and how to teach them, leading to the reading of the literature on writing strategies and motivation. Seeing the students struggle led the author to reflect on her lessons and tutorials. Perhaps this opportunity gave meditational space (Johnson and Golombek, 2011; Yoshida, 2011) for the growth of the author as a teacher.

The author hopes that the students who successfully passed learned something that is not measurable but valuable through the experience of re-taking TW. Perhaps it is the spirit of “grit”—“passion and perseverance for very long-term goals”—presented in the TED talk given by Angela Lee Duckworth. As Duckworth compares *grit* with “living life like it's a marathon, not a sprint,” writing a long academic paper indeed may indeed require “grit.” The author hopes that her students have acquired it.

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Appendix A: Beginning-of-the-term survey (11 respondents)

Q1: Where do you find difficulty in writing a paper in English? What do you want to overcome by taking this course?

- Academic writing is a long writing. It's difficult for me to write long essay or have a long speech in English. So I want to try writing long essay in this class.
- To make good sentences.
- Narrowing my interesting. Researching and finding sources.
- Searching and gathering sources. Narrowing a topic.
- Grammar and vocabulary (are my weak points).
- Distance between thinking with Japanese and writing in English.
- Writing a paper in English is difficult. Sometimes, I have difficulty in writing in Japanese.
- I am not good at finding resources and citing them. Therefore, I want to acquire these skills in this course.
- I don't know how to write academic paper in English because I don't read academic (or non-academic) paper in English.
- Speed and accuracy.
- I want to overcome my childish English.

Q2: What skills, techniques, and/or strategies do you want to learn in this course?

- speed and accuracy
- finding sources, narrowing a topic, widening vocabulary
- narrowing a topic, how to write a conclusion, how to write a work-cited list. I sometimes feel, I don't know how I write a paper. Maybe I can search and read a book, but I'll become have no idea in front of white paper.
- I have a theme that I want to write in this course, and my lack of academic skill is narrowing a topic and summarising. I desire them!
- I want to get a large vocabulary and a knowledge of nuclear plant.
- To make good sentences and good expressions
- Building an essay little by little, submitting drafts by due date. Writing works-cited--I forgot how to do it in English academic essays.
- Searching and gathering sources. Narrowing the topic.
- Narrowing a topic
- I want to learn skills of finding sources, citing them, and writing a conclusion and a work-cited list.
- Finding sources. How to write specific research questions.

Q3: Please freely write what you would like me to know including your health or mental issues and concerns.

- I am a little mentally weak. I don't like English
- I am doing job hunting and taking Anthropology's searching class, so I'm busy this term. Please help me. I'll do my best.
- I'm in therapy at ICU, and I'm taking medicine for my sleeping problem (?)

Walking with the Re-takers of Theme Writing

Appendix B: The Students' Final Thoughts on Theme Writing (eight respondents)

**Sentences in brackets were written by students in Japanese and translated by the author into English.*

Q1: What made you finish writing this time? Is there anything you did differently from the last time?

- I'm not a member of American Football Club any longer, so I have some time.
- I have more time to write TW than last year.
- Went to tutorial more frequently than last time.
- The motivation and the duty.
- I chose the topic which is related to other class, so it's easy to write. Teacher was kind :) Thank you.
- A lot of hours. [I had more time and less assignment from other classes. I was mentally healthy. I was able to narrow the scope of my essay from the beginning.]
- To graduate this semester. Not to give up at the end again.
- I did almost nothing last time because I could not find my interests. But I could find what I wanted to know and what I want to say this time.

Q2: Which aspect/part of writing was most challenging for you?

- How to compose paragraphs to have more persuasive. How to use photos.
- Finding sources. Reading English sources.
- Citations
- The contents
- Reading sources...I could use enough number of sources.
- Need to write logically. [I have been anxious whether I was writing logically.] I cannot use "correct" word / lack of knowledge.
- Choosing the topic that has enough sources related to (supporting) my idea.
- To narrow what are the points of the essay is the most difficult when writing. Researching was fun.

Q3: If you were to write a paper in the future, what would you do differently?

- I have to finish the paper more quickly
- Differently
- Go to tutorials
- I will make my grammar better
- More sources, more visualistic, correct form of works-cited
- I'm not good at using English :) The fact will not change. But I wish change.
- I would ask help to choose the topic that I could really write easier.
- I'd like to write as more well-scheduled next.

Q4: Any suggestions for the course / to the instructor?

- Ms. Hatakeyama taught us a lot of things easily understandable.
- Couldn't attend much on Fridays because of SHUKATSU. I prefer tutorials to individual writing just because I can't concentrate while people around me are writing.
- Professor was very good: I wish I have more classes with you.
- Reminding e-mails were very helpful.

Walking with the Re-takers of Theme Writing

Q5: Any comments?

- Thank you!
- Thank you for your kind tutorial!
- Thank you for your support.
- Thank you very much. I am very grateful.
- [Sorry for bothering you]
- Thank you so much! I enjoyed writing.