

The Framework of Online Writing System

Yu-Ting LAN^{a*}, Jen-Hang Wang^b, Tak-Wai Chan^a

^a*Graduate Institute of Network Learning Technology, National Central University, Taiwan*

^b*Department of Computer Science and Information Engineering,
National Central University, Taiwan*

*jenny@cl.ncu.edu.tw

Abstract: The research provides a design framework for online writing system. In the system, six different activities are designed which include two key features: peer feedback and “feedback of feedback.” Through the online writing system, we hope there would be writer and reader interaction between students to procure excellent writing and feedback culture. The two important features designed in the system help improving students’ language skills while developing their creativity and critical thinking ability.

Keywords: Peer feedback; Feedback of feedback; Peer writer; Peer readers

Introduction

In writing activities, many teachers often have difficulties in reviewing and giving scores to students’ essays (Hsieh, 1995). Moreover, the feedback is often based on the teachers’ viewpoints. Thus, it is hard for students to improve their writing quality and they may lose interest in writing. The above reasons cause students’ poor writing ability and affect individual creativity and critical thinking ability developments. According to the flaws of writing activities described above, many researchers have applied peer feedback in writing systems (Hu, 2005), for example, students comment each other’s work. Therefore, the aim of the research is to provide students an online writing system which integrates peer feedback in writing activities to help students write their essays.

1. Definition of Peer Feedback and Relative Research

Peer feedback used to be defined as the feedback process where readers give comments to the author. The process in which a group of students evaluate each other’s work, in verbal expression or oral interaction, is qualitative; whereas giving scores or ranks is quantitative (Topping, 1998). The interaction is the communication between writer and readers which encourages creative conversation and trains both parties’ communication skills (Villamil & Guerrero, 1996). It gives peer students a chance to learn how to give comments to their peers; it also provides the advantage of understanding the comments given by peers (Mendonca & Johnson, 1994). Students are each other’s teacher and essay sharer. They would develop their own standard for the evaluation of essay quality and know by experience which essays are the good ones and in turn seek better quality essays of their own. According to many peer feedback research, the results show: Students are active and positive toward peer feedback activity which in turn increases their learning motivation and

enhances the development of high-level language skills (Davies, 2000; Searby & Ewers, 1997; Topping, 1998).

The online writing system designed in the research allows students to give comments to help peer students in essay writing through peer feedback activity. In addition, as the research mentioned above lacks an evaluation mechanism that is used after peer feedback, it is designed in the writing system. The system has a “feedback of feedback” evaluation mechanism which allows peer writers to evaluate the comments given by peer readers to increase the quality of peer feedback. Hence, in terms of the online writing system, not only students are the writers, they are also the readers and the constructive reviewers.

2. The Design of Online Writing System

The system consists of six steps (see Fig. 1). Step 1: All students complete their essay drafts in the system. Step 2: This activity is where peer readers read peer writers’ essays and give comments and scores in the system. Step 3: Peer writers read and evaluate the comments given by peer readers. Step 2 and Step 3 is key features of the system. We will be described in detail later. Step 4: Peer writers can modify their essay in compliance with peer readers’ comments or write more of their own opinions. Step 5: Students share their essays online and observe and learn from the comments given by peer students. The system provides the ratio of how many of the comments each peer reader gives is accepted. Evaluating the ratio of “Agreed with the comment” encourages peer readers to devote in giving good comments and every peer reader is able to clearly identify and understand other peer readers’ opinions. Step 6: The essays are made public and good ones are published in the class journal. It is a sub-activity of Step 2: According to the ranking agreement of group peer feedback, the number 1 and 2 essays from each group is selected and published in the class journal.

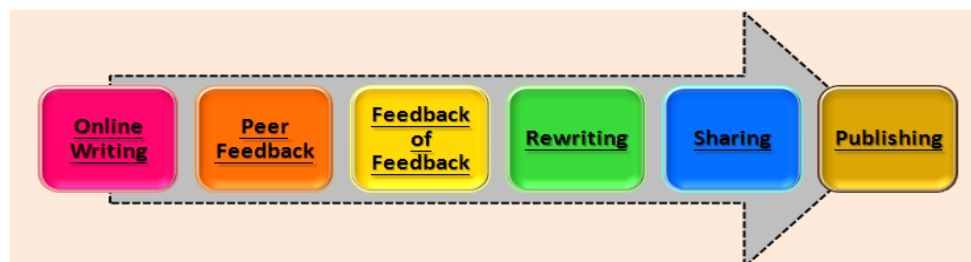


Figure 1. Six activities in the online writing system

In order to promote the interaction between peers, peer feedback is subdivided into two parts: Individual peer reader feedback and Group peer feedback. Individual peer reader feedback is where students independently give peer writers comments and scores for their essays. After a score is given, the system would integrate the result of this sub-activity and calculate the scores peer readers give to the same essay in order to obtain the rank of peer writers’ essay scores. In group peer feedback, members in each group discuss the rank of some essays. Moreover, as group members have different personal opinions to the scores they give to the essays during individual peer reader feedback, they must discuss the rank of these essays and obtain a ranking agreement in the end before sending the result to the system. Giving quantitative scoring and comments may help writing activities’ processing. This is also providing frame of reference with students. Through peer feedback, peers’ comments are more suitable for peers to understand and improve their essays.

After peer feedback, “feedback of feedback” is also the key feature of the system. Peer writers play the reader and the reviewer roles at the same time. The evaluation contents in

the system are divided into three options: “Agreed with the comment, I am willing to modify the essay,” “Agreed with the comment, I am not willing to modify the essay” and “Disagreed with the comment.” In this procedure, peer writers read peer readers’ comments and find good feedback from them to review the improvement direction of their essays. Then it will be able to inspire new ideas. In a feedback process, sometimes peer writers may not fully understand feedback from reviewers and want to clarify them. The activity also provides a section with peer writers. They can elaborate rationale on why they disagree with comments and what they are not willing to modify the essay. From the options in the evaluation, they give feedback to encourage excellent peer readers and stimulate readers to give more detailed comments.

3. Conclusion

This research provides the design framework for online writing system which is an excellent cycle between peer readers and peer writers. Students would put more efforts in making their comments more convincing for peer writers to accept. They are able to understand their strong points and shortcomings from writing in order to increase the ownership toward their essays (Richards & Rodgers, 2001). Therefore, we hope that the peer feedback online writing system may increase students’ interaction and writing motivation. The key features, peer feedback and “feedback of feedback” activities, may help students to become excellent writers, readers and reviewers in the future. At present, the system is still under construction and it will include all six activities mentioned above. In addition to helping students improve their writing ability, the long-term goal of the research is to train students’ individual creativity and critical thinking ability through peer evaluation mechanism.

Acknowledgements

The authors would like to thank S. Y. Chen, Y. M. Ku, and H. W. Ko for suggestions on revision of this document. This study was funded by the National Science Council of Taiwan, ROC (NSC 99-2511-S-008-002-MY3, NSC 100-2511-S-008-013-MY3, NSC 100-2631-S-008-005-) and by Research Center for Science and Technology for Learning, National Central University, Taiwan.

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