

Insessional writing classes: Motivating students to write

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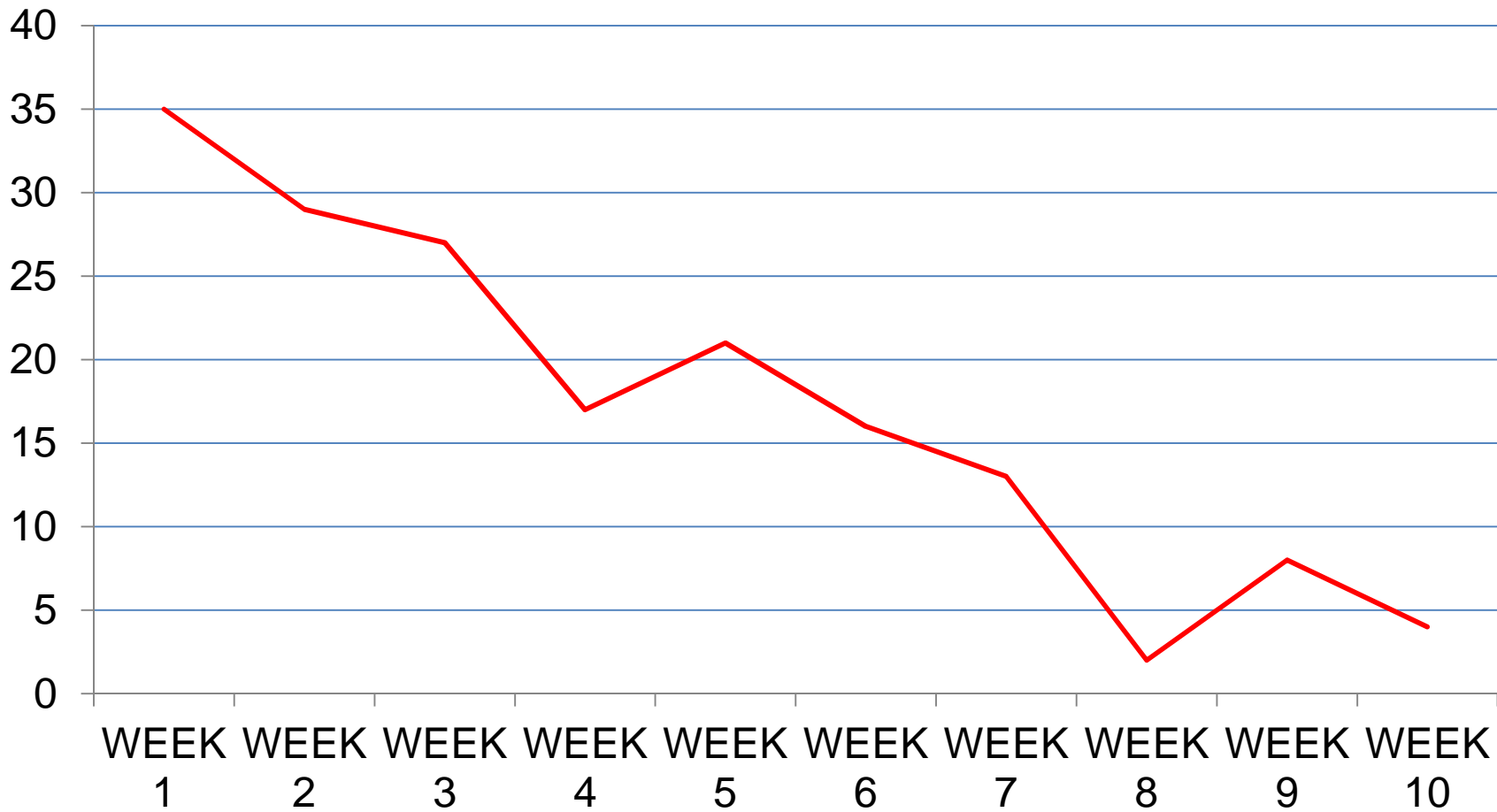
Insessional writing classes: Motivating students to write

- A. Teaching context
- B. The present study
- C. Challenges
- D. Responses
- E. Evaluation and further work

A. Teaching context: insessional

- ULC insessional programme:
 - Writing
 - Pronunciation
 - Grammar
 - Speaking & listening
- 1,347 students registered (2014-15)
- 64% PGT, 15% PGR, 18% UG, 3% staff/visitors
- Run for 10 weeks (Sem 1), 7-10 weeks (Sem 2) & few classes after Easter holiday

Insessional Writing: Average Attendance, Sem 1 2015-2016



Insessional Writing “Classes”/“Workshops”

- 18 x 1.5hr workshop per week (Sem 1 2015-16)
 - students attend one writing class per week
- Late: Most (12) workshops start 4.30pm or later
- Voluntary attendance
- Free of charge for registered students, but non-credited
- Initial placement test, but no subsequent assessment
- 12 different EAP tutors teaching

Insessional Writing Classes: cohorts

- Mostly split by faculty
 - English for General Academic Purposes (EGAP): Humanities, Life Sciences, Medical & Human Sciences, Engineering & Physical Sciences
 - Some workshops run for individual schools: e.g. Business, (Engineering) Management of Projects
- Some English for Specific Academic Purposes (ESAP) programme-specific support:
e.g. Computer Science Writing (mostly PGT)
- BUT heterogenous groups: “multidisciplinary class” (Swales and Feak, 2012, p.xi)
- Continuous attrition/enrolment: cohort variation week by week

Insessional Writing Classes: course outlines & materials

- Initial workshops: General EAP writing/skills e.g. Academic Style, Key Functions, Summarising
- Later workshops: Specific sections of a research report/dissertation e.g. Introduction, Methods, Discussion
- In-house materials written by ULC tutors, evolving over several years
- “Standalone” workshops

B. The present study

- Theoretical framework: action research
“taking practical action to resolve classroom problems”
(Richards and Farrell, 2005, p.171)
- Retrospective “reflection-on-action” (Schön, 1983 & 1987, cited in Burton (2009 p. 299)
- Data collection
 - Course administration e.g. attendance figures
 - Student feedback questionnaire data
 - Materials developed: tutors’ comments, my notes
 - MA TESOL dissertation
 - The literature

C. Challenges for tutors in this teaching context

1. **What exactly** should be taught in an in-session writing class?
2. How can the tutor **motivate** students to write?
3. How can the tutor **feed back** on what the students write?

C. Challenges for tutors in this teaching context

1) ***What exactly*** should be taught in an in-session writing class?

- Most workshops have structure:
 - Analyse genre
 - Language focus/restricted practice activities
 - Freer writing practice (Alexander, Argent and Spencer, 2008, p.201)
- BUT should writing workshops involve students “doing writing”? (Basturkmen, 2010, p.131)
 - Definition of writing for this study
= producing a paragraph or more of text
 - What do students think?

“It could be really helpful if we could do some practice during the class instead of just looking at the paper lecturer prepared for us.”

“The opportunity to write pieces of work that would be checked by the tutor afterwards.”

“Would be nice to have an opportunity to practice some writings during the class time.”

- Implication: some students want to “do writing” in class
- BUT some tutors do not “do writing” in class

C. Challenges for tutors in this teaching context

2) *How can the tutor **motivate** students to write, given that...*

- Most classes start 4.30pm or later
- Voluntary attendance
- Non-credited
- No summative assessment

C. Challenges for tutors in this teaching context

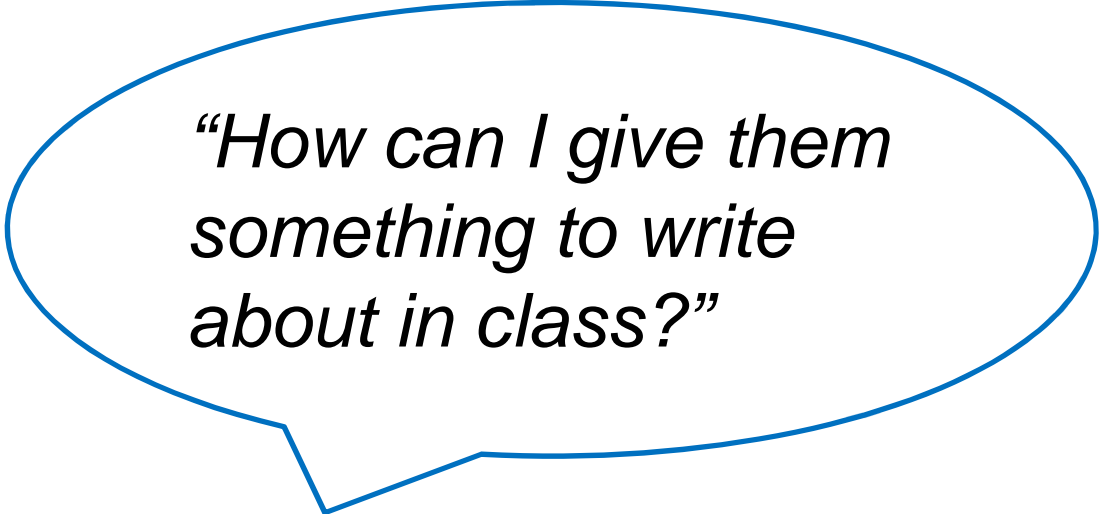
3. *How can the tutor **feed back** on what the students write?*

- Large classes
- Cohort variation week to week & attrition > inefficient & demotivating for tutor to mark writing if students don't collect it
- No VLE (pre-Sem 2 2015-16)
- Is lack of individual feedback demotivating for students?

D. Responses to these challenges

- **Materials: writing tasks**
 - i. Personalised
 - ii. Writing from notes/tables/graphs
 - iii. Editing & register transfer
 - iv. Lined paper on handout
- **Classroom techniques**
 - Individual v. group writing
 - Feedback techniques

D: Materials: writing tasks



“How can I give them something to write about in class?”

Alexander, Argent and Spencer (2008, p.179)

(i) Personalised tasks: deep end

Write an introduction and a conclusion for an assignment that you are currently working on.



(i) Personalised tasks: scaffolded

Write a short paragraph on one or two of the following ...

- *Defining a term, exemplifying if necessary*
 - *Describing the properties and/or applications of a material/substance etc.*
 - *Outlining a category & providing examples if necessary*
 - *Comparing and contrasting two things*
- (list continues)*



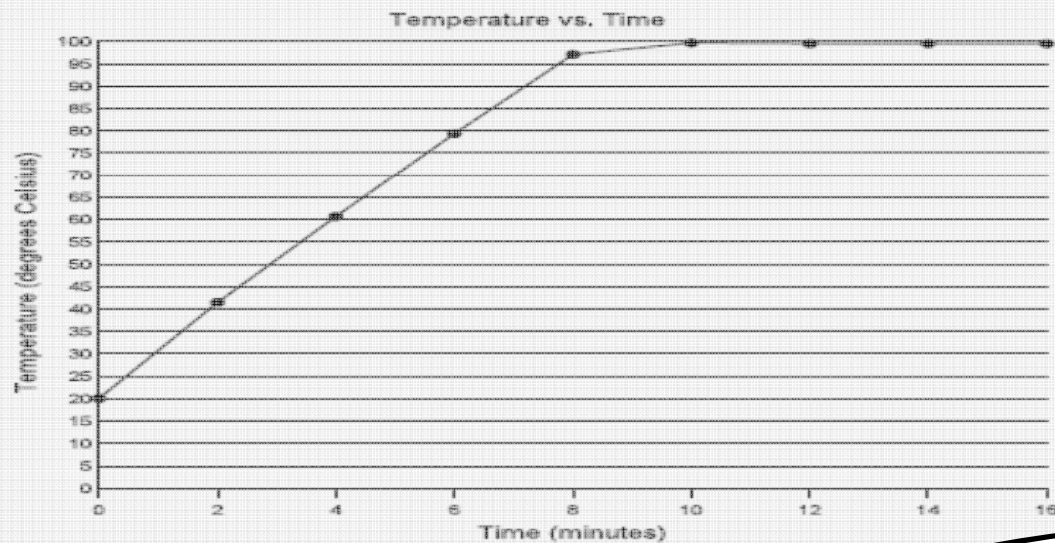
(ii) Writing from notes: example

Using the notes, write a paragraph showing the process of dispensing cash from an ATM.

- *Insert card*
- *Enter PIN*
- *Verify PIN and account*
- *ATM host computer: ask cardholder's bank*
- *Bank: check if enough money in account*
(continues)

You have performed a simple experiment to test that the boiling point of water is 100°C. You heated some water in a glass beaker and measured its temperature every two minutes. The results are presented below:

Time (minutes)	0	2	4	6	8	10	12	14	16
Temp (°C)	20.05	41.46	60.62	79.39	97.11	99.68	99.51	99.51	99.51



(iii) Writing tasks: Editing & register transfer

Rewrite the main ideas of the article in a more academic style. Use the sequence of headings shown on the projector screen... You should write 1 – 3 sentences per heading, and try to paraphrase from the article.

Lectures Aren't Just Boring, They're Ineffective, Too, Study Finds

Are your lectures droning on? Change it up every 10 minutes with more active teaching techniques and more students will succeed, researchers say. A new study finds that undergraduate students in classes with traditional stand-and-deliver lectures are 1.5 times more likely to fail than students in classes that use more stimulating, so-called active learning methods...

(Bajak 2014)

(iv) Lined paper on handout, often with suggested first line of writing task.

The process of withdrawing cash from an ATM takes only a few seconds.

D: Classroom techniques

- Individual or group writing?
- Which feedback technique?
 - Delayed aggregated correction, as used in speaking activities (Harmer, 2001, p109)
 - Individual correction
 - Peer correction/feedback
 - Model answers
 - Reformulation

One factor: attendance (size of class)

Feedback: Aggregated or individual correction and size of class

Attendance	Writing: individual or pair	Feedback mode
25-50 +	Individual / pair	Delayed aggregated correction
15-25	Individual	Delayed aggregated correction
1-15	Individual	Individual correction, on the spot/delayed

Feedback: Model answers

- Students compare their text to the original which the notes/table/graph were sourced from.

ISSUES

- Original text may be seen as too “perfect”
- “... Not generally seen as feedback”
(Pryjmachuk et al., 2012, p.162)

Feedback: reformulation

- “Having a native writer... rewrite the learner’s essay, preserving all the learner’s ideas, making it sound as nativelike as possible” (Cohen, 1983, cited in Hanaoka and Izumi, 2012, p.334)
- “Promote learner noticing” of how a writer solved a problem (Hanaoka and Izumi, 2012, p.333)
- Implication: individualised delayed feedback
- Suggestion: develop bank of reformulated answers written by tutors – or are these ‘model answers’?

E: Evaluation

Tutors: mixed feedback

- Some don't seem to like “doing writing” in class
- Some like the achievable writing tasks

Students: (EPS group, Sem 1 2015-16, n=28)

- 82% “extremely/very useful”
- 65% “extremely/very interesting/enjoyable”

*“In some classes, students were asked to **write paragraphs, which could be reviewed** by Rob. My writing had ever been reviewed and some mistakes were found. This is **very helpful**, because practicing and learning from mistakes are absolutely good methods when learning a new skill.”*

*“**I like it** when the tutor asked you to try to **write several paragraphs** and tenth tutor would **have a review** based on your writing”*

E: Further work

- Systematically investigate students' and tutors' perceptions of writing classes and writing tasks
- Explore subject lecturer's attitudes to insessional writing classes
- Develop more (tutor-written) reformulations for writing tasks instead of model answers

Review

- A. Teaching context
- B. The present study
- C. Challenges
 - 1) What to teach in an insessional writing class?
 - 2) Feeding back on writing
 - 3) Motivating students to write
- D. Responses
 - Writing tasks
 - Classroom techniques
- E. Evaluation and further work

List of references: materials

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Any questions?

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