

CORRECTING STUDENT ERROR IN WRITING

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Annotation: *This article proves the significance of error analysis and correction in enhancing the writing skills of English learners, but the beliefs and applications of teachers in error correction methods still differ.*

Key words: *error correction, writing, teacher's belief, practice, contrast.*

English writing can be difficult if the writer does not make use of the many English language writing resources that are available to help them. Writers can use dictionaries, style guides, spell checks, show the writing to friends, fellow students and of course their English language teachers.

How to correct English writing Errors?

The most obvious answer is teacher correction. But is teacher-correction effective? There is some research that shows English language students do not make effective use of teacher-corrections. Every English writing teacher would like to imagine that their student takes their corrected paper home, pulls out a dictionary and grammar book and carefully goes over each correction. Unfortunately, most students only check to see how much “red” is on the paper and then file it away – never to be looked at again. Most of the teacher's careful written corrections are actually wasted. Error correcting takes lots of teacher time and energy and many students just do not want to see their writing compositions after teacher corrections. Beware of the student who forgot the homework and just before the homework is due dashes off a quick paper. He makes a lot of mistakes all made in haste. The problem is that the student wants his paper to be corrected and correcting it takes four times the effort to read the “mess with multiple errors”. Your policy should be: if the student does not have time to try to write it well, then you do not have time to try to correct it. John Truscott and later Krashen have presented research indicating that grammar correction does not really help students at all. Personally, I have seen that my students do learn from some corrections.

Except for typos and simple errors, self-correction is very difficult for English students because if they understood what was wrong they would not have written it in the first place. One to One peer correction is not fun and it is difficult for many students to fully trust their partner's language experience or writing ability.

How can the student add to his English writing skills in a way that interacts with his previous English grammar knowledge and vocabulary? One of many new methods is called Group writing.

Group writing. Group writing helps students to benefit from several peers, helps students to learn not only from their mistakes but from the mistakes of others and makes economical and efficient use of the students' and the teacher's time.

The group writing tasks are everything from writing a paragraph to writing an essay. Each group can get a different topic to work on or sometimes it can be the same topic and they compete with the other groups. You can use the whiteboard, the large paper paper pads on an easel or overhead projector as long as there is one per group. One student writes while the rest of the team from one to three others offers suggestions and corrections during the writing process. Group writing gets the students to benefit from group assistance as a peer-learning experience with more resource value than one to one peer sharing. With the entire class looking on we examine each finished writing sample and I ask the class to offer corrections. The class really focuses on every group finished writing to see if it is correct or not. Especially if there is challenge or competition at stake. Group writing seems to be an effective method of correcting English writing errors. Immediate feedback is quick within the groups and again when corrections are suggested in front of the entire class.

Is the language situation an informal situation or formal one?

Is the student speaking extemporaneously or writing a first draft, or has she had time to plan and reflect? Who are the participants in the situation—other students or the larger community, for example? All of these considerations matter in deciding if it's appropriate or not to correct student error. Even native speakers, actually, sometimes make mistakes like subject/verb agreement errors when engaged in spontaneous speech in an informal situation. It's just that nobody really notices their errors. We tend to be more attuned to the errors students and nonnative speakers make as we're looking for them; we assume native speakers "know better" and won't make errors. Which errors should be corrected?

Should all student errors be marked? If they are mistakes, the instructor should point them out, shouldn't she? Again, we should go back here to the purpose of correction. If the purpose is to help students improve production, then correction should be limited to one or two areas for students to focus on which are important to overall comprehensibility: the student's pattern of run-on sentences, for example, or stress patterns, not a single misspelling or [mispronunciation](#). Isolated issues of misspelling and mispronunciation usually do not detract from overall comprehensibility (if this were the case, most native speakers of English would on occasion lapse into incoherence); rather,

the instructor should look for the global problems—problems in verb tense switch, for example, usually effect overall comprehensibility of a message.

Cost-Benefit.

Are all errors even worth the time and trouble to correct? For example, prepositions in English, especially the more abstract ones that don't refer to a literal place, are very difficult to teach as they are idiomatic and dialectal: for example, in American English I “come around” to see a friend; in British English I “come round.” Is it “go down” the street or “go up” the street? They mean the same thing. And if a nonnative speaker mixed up these expressions, I probably wouldn't notice, much less be confused. So considering the difficulty in learning prepositions, and the overall unimportance of them, it probably is not worth the time investment to learn them. This also goes for trying to “correct” specific nonnative English speech sounds, like the non-English trilled “r.” It is all right in most cases, unless the student is training to be a spy, to retain some nonnative “accent” in both speech and writing.



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