

# Strategies for College English Writing Teaching under the Internet Environment

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**ABSTRACT.** *English writing plays a crucial role in improving students' comprehensive ability in English application. As there exist some drawbacks in the traditional teaching approach after years of practice, this paper is intended to present some strategies for English writing teaching under the Internet environment through the analysis of current situation of English teaching.*

**KEYWORDS:** *Strategies, Comprehensive ability, English writing teaching*

## 1. Introduction

Writing is an important component of English teaching and composition practice is a crucial way to improve writing. But the process of traditional English writing teaching is as follows. First, teachers set writing objectives, instruct writing skills and interpret excellent models of composition. Second, students are required to discuss with each other and start to write following the model. They have to hand in their assignments after finishing them within the limited time. At last, teachers will mark the compositions in detail, devoting much time to finding out every mistake. However, despite so much time and energy spent, the effect is far from desirable. On one hand, the feedback given to students lags far behind, resulting in decreasing interest in writing. On the other hand, this makes students unable to take any initiatives in the writing process. Once finishing the writing assignment, most students won't check nor revise it and they just hand it in. Even after they receive the marked composition, they just take a glance at the mark and comments and let it go. They won't consider how to polish their composition, let alone to continue revising it.

## 2. Current Situation of College English Writing Teaching

With the globalization of knowledge economy, increasing exchanges of international communications and rapid growth of information technology, college English teaching is faced with new challenges. In April, 2003, the Ministry of Education launched *the project of teaching quality and teaching reform in colleges*

and universities, putting individualized autonomous learning in place and bringing the opportunity to comprehensively improve English teaching quality. In 2007, the Ministry of Education issued *College English Curriculum Requirements*, stating clearly that traditional teaching approaches should be revolutionized with advanced information technology and teaching reform programs should commence to enhance students' comprehensive ability in English application. The new teaching reform puts forward new requirements for English writing teaching. In previous English teaching activities, when teachers set teaching plans, they knew it important to improve writing skills gradually, but in implementing the plan, they found it hard to ensure adequate writing class periods and relatively complete feedback system. Most of the teaching time was spent explaining texts, and training reading and listening. As a result, the writing part of teaching plans could not attain the expected teaching aims. To some extent, writing teaching is reduced to short-term intensive training of test-oriented education and it is difficult to achieve desired teaching effects. Given this, teachers usually adopt product-based writing approach to conduct writing teaching in limited class periods.

Product-oriented writing approach features overemphasis on linguistic knowledge, and focus on correctness of word and grammatical usage. Its advantage is that students can get access to comprehensible input through familiarity with format features of sample writings presented by teachers, then organize and process target language's linguistic knowledge, and finally attain comprehensible output. In the meantime, words and sentences should be weighed to ensure their correctness and appropriateness. Repeatedly doing it this way will stimulate the internalization of linguistic knowledge and automation of language use.

However, when product-oriented writing approach is adopted to conduct English writing teaching, writing forms tend to be stressed instead of its contents. In other words, teachers are inclined to focus on correctness of words and sentences and neglect the logic of the writing, and completeness and originality of the contents. This approach is concerned too much with linguistic correctness, which makes the writing teaching process tedious and students gradually lose their awareness of autonomous learning. That's why there appear so many writings with similar contents and sentence structures. All-around improvement of students' English writing requires injection of new thoughts into traditional writing teaching approach.

### **3. Automated Writing Evaluation System**

With fast growth of information technology and widespread application of computer network, automated writing evaluation system (hereinafter referred to as AWES) based on natural language processing and artificial intelligence technology brings new hopes for improving students' writing ability. After several decades of research, AWES was put into practice at the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century and has become one of the main ways of computer-aided foreign language writing teaching both at home and abroad.

China has been making researches on automated English writing evaluation

technology and in recent years has made some progress. Currently, pigai. com has been widely applied in universities. Paigai. com is an online service system supporting teachers to mark English compositions. It can automatically correct students' writings according to the writing marking standard of CET 4 or CET 6 and offer some suggestions for students. Besides marking the writings, pigai. com also places emphasis on feedback. Targeted at Chinese learners who take English as foreign language, it can identify most of Chinese English through quickly comparing with the Internet data bank. Students can be helped to polish their writings several times after receiving the feedback from the word processing system of automated Internet marking platform and be guided to focus more attention on the writing process.

Saddled with teaching and research, college English teachers devote most of their time to preparing lessons, conducting classes, reading, writing and research. As a result, it is not easy to provide timely feedback to students after marking the compositions in accordance with the traditional marking way. Now the computer-aided automated marking platform can solve this problem, for it is characterized as being timely and swift. Moreover, simple mistakes can be automatically corrected through pigai. com and after handing in their compositions, they can immediately find out sentence-based correction tips. Despite its advantages, pigai. com also has some weak points. It can not fully realize artificial intelligence. Although it can be of great help to students in lexical collocations and grammatical expressions, it can do little in analyzing the topic, text structure and content. Though it can sometimes point out some mistakes, it can not provide specific targeted correction suggestions.

#### **4. Effective Positioning of Teachers in Writing Practice**

Although many online marking systems can offer feedback to students in time and marks are comparatively close to those given by teachers, machines can never replace people who can think for themselves. In the process of teaching, many factors are involved, but only humans are animate. As the main body of teaching process, experienced teachers and students with great potential need to cooperate with each other and put each step of teaching and learning into practice under the guidance of teachers.

Thought is the guide of action. Teaching and learning are mutual interactions between teachers and students. Students' active participation is an integral part of writing teaching and it is also the key for students to improve their writing. Therefore, teachers should leave no stones unturned to arouse their enthusiasm and develop their interest in writing. The effect of language learning is determined to a large extent by learners' attitude. To turn language skills from theory to practice, students have to keep practising on their own. As a matter of fact, independent learning is what is required for college students. In the writing course, teachers should tell students the importance of involving themselves in marking compositions. Students can be guided to mark writings with the help of automatic online marking in the pigai. com. They can make use of its advantages---quick response and

suggestions, to help correct their own compositions. In this way, they can be helped to cultivate the awareness of active participation.

Traditional writing teaching is a teacher-centered top-down process while constructivist psychology advocates that rich and multi-directional communication should be conducted between teachers and students and between students themselves. Teachers are not only the instructors of knowledge but also should serve as the designer of classroom teaching and the organizer of student activities. In terms of writing practice, even with the help of computer-aided automatic marking, when the revision goes on to some extent, the writer himself may become insensitive to his mistakes. At this moment, it is teachers' turn to guide students to comment on each other's writings. The feedback from students is more objective in judging others' compositions. Therefore, teachers should tear students away from the thought of relying on teachers' correction and lead them in engaging in various writing practice.

There is no denying that teachers' help and guidance is essential when it comes to online marking on one's own and marking each other's compositions. With the help of computers, students usually can find and correct some obvious language mistakes. But due to the restrictions of such factors as life experience, writing ability and cultural background, students are less competent in the organization of content and text. Therefore, on one hand, in the classroom teachers can talk over writing skills with students and lead them in appreciating model writing, so as to improve their ability of appreciation and self-reflection. On the other hand, teachers should work with students to set the common requirements for composition marking and marking standards. Students are trained to master the main points of marking through role models and learn how to write in the interaction.

As a means of communication, writing should be linked with students' true feelings, interest and needs instead of just being treated as a mechanical practice. Traditional writing teaching focuses on training students for accuracy, so compositions are mainly marked to pick out mistakes, which tends to dampen students' enthusiasm and bring pressure on them. In the process of writing, teachers should follow the principle of more encouragement and less criticism, trying to find out good points of their writings.

Online writing marking system provides possibility for establishing the formative multiple writing evaluation system because the writing platform can keep students' wrings on record, reflecting their writing process and progress. It can be used as part of formative evaluation, which will make writing evaluation more complete and transparent. In the meantime, online automatic marking system makes both teachers and students become active participants in writing marking. Teachers and students are on equal terms, working together to set writing objectives and marking standards. Under the guidance of teachers, students learn how to mark their own compositions and each other's, building a multi-channel writing evaluation model.

Under the active guidance of teachers and support of the online marking platform a formative writing evaluation system is established. Int the whole process

of evaluation, students also take part in self-comment and mutual comment, learn to monitor their own learning process and reflect on their writing. Ultimately, they will learn to be responsible for their own learning, which conforms to the modern education concept.

In the age of advanced modern education information technology, the online writing marking platform will bring a lot of benefits to college English writing teaching, making it possible to establish a process-focused formative multiple writing marking system. The effective operation of the the whole system can not go without the guidance of teachers, which also places greater demands on them.

## **5. Strategies for English Writing Teaching under the Internet Environment**

In the past few years of teaching reform, English teachers have made attempts and researches on such fields as students' autonomous learning, teaching and learning through multimedia or internet, but few combine the Internet and writing teaching. No adequate efforts are made to utilize such support means as online learning guide, online testing, online discussion, self-learning tutoring and learning assessment to conduct writing teaching. The new teaching approach should be propped up with modern information technology, in particular, Internet technology so that college English teaching can be developed towards personalized learning and active learning.

### ***5.1 A New Approach Based on Process-Oriented Writing***

Different from product-oriented writing, process-oriented writing lays stress on writing process instead of writing product. Writing is supposed to be a mental process consisting of such procedures as conception and revision. In this process, when constantly finding out, analyzing and solving problems, teachers and learners also participate, giving feedback and making assessment, to facilitate the completion of the writing. The guiding thought of the approach is that the writing process is not one way street. The revision is not only restricted to that of such linguistic mistakes as grammatical, spelling and sentence ones. The mistakes in semantics such as incoherent and illogical in thought should also be corrected. Compared with other approaches, process-oriented writing approach no doubt better embodies the essence of writing, thus achieving better results. The approach places emphasis on the cultivation of strategy in such writing stages as conception, writing and revision while underscoring language skills. In accordance with this process, the writing strategy falls into three parts: before-writing, while-writing, and after-writing.

During the before-writing stage, students are required to comprehend the given topics, around which they work hard to find out relevant materials and utilize them in their compositions. Teachers provide adequate thought-provoking questions, written descriptions or pictures to arouse students' interest. It's important to develop the ability to think for oneself. Teachers only offer necessary guidance and it's up to students to search the Internet for information relevant to the topic and useful for

writing. Once opening their mind, students will find lots of things worth writing and their compositions will not follow the same pattern.

During the while-writing stage, measures should be taken to improve their sense of language so that they become familiar with words, grammar and sentence patterns. It also should not be neglected to develop their logical thinking and coherent writing. Besides, teachers can offer them frequently used sentence patterns for them to master and require them to use various sentence patterns to enrich their compositions.

During the after-writing stage, teachers can assign them new tasks, mainly to check their compositions from the overall aspect and from details. The former means to see whether topic sentences are appropriate or sentences are coherent while the latter cares more about word usage, grammar and sentence patterns.

### ***5.2 Metacognitive Strategy and Affective Strategy***

Teaching students how to learn is considered an effective means to improve learning efficiency and an effective measure to relieve the burden on students and to enhance the teaching quality. How to effectively use teaching strategies has become an important subject.

Metacognition is defined as self-awareness and self-experience of students of their own cognitive activities and it is the core of learning strategy. In the process of Internet-aided writing teaching, efforts should be made to guide students through online tests or learning assessment so as to help them produce clear self-awareness about learning contents, learning methods and learning motives. After students choose right materials from the the Internet resources and finish the writing assignments, teachers can lead them to classify what they have done during the three stages and store it in their personal network files.

Affective strategy mainly refers to the strategy of interest and cooperation. Compared with traditional writing teaching, writing teaching under the Internet environment puts more emphasis on personalized learning and cooperative learning. In such environment students can broaden their horizons and obtain inspirations from sound, words and colors. They can opt for learning resources that interest them, so they can become more active and creative in writing. In the meantime, through establishing a complete set of English teaching network platform, students can get easy access to it for learning, discussion and writing practice.

### ***5.3 Analytic Scoring and Face-to-Face Correction***

In terms of classroom learning assessment, analytic scoring is more appropriate than holistic scoring, as the development in such aspects as vocabulary and grammar is unbalanced. Through analytic scoring, teachers offer diagnostic information, which is of great help for students to improve their writing skills.

Internet technology facilitates the advancement of writing teaching, but as far as

the feedback system is concerned, one can't only rely on the Internet and as a good complement, face-to face correction can give full play to students' initiatives. After taking effective writing strategies to finish assignments, students are eager to know the result of the assessment. However, they can't fully comprehend the comments on their writings through the Internet, which makes the feedback achieve less desired results. In this case, teachers should have a face-to-face discussion with each student, pointing out good points, weak points or defects in the compositions and urging them to make revisions. Thus, students can be helped to improve the ability to appreciate writings and know how to write better.

## **6. Conclusion**

With the development of information and Internet technology, writing teaching under the Internet environment plays a positive role in college English writing teaching but at the same time brings out negative factors. Abundant Internet resources has broadened students' horizons, but it takes them more time to choose right materials and they tend to rely too much on the Internet when needed to finish writing assignments. Moreover, there exist some uncertainties. For example, the failure of the Internet may disrupt classroom teaching. While developing students' writing strategies and applied skills, one should integrate traditional and new teaching approaches to develop the good points and avoid the weak points so as to help students improve their comprehensive abilities in using English.

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