

July 2, 1990

Samuel Maruta  
708 Pammel Court  
Ames, IA 50010

Dear Samuel,

Congratulations on being nominated by your Program of Study chair for a Research Excellence Award. The Graduate Studies committee was impressed both by the quality of the writing and the scope of research you undertook.

Although your thesis was not the one selected for the Graduate College award, I am happy to tell you that you will receive a special departmental research award, which Dr. Haggard will present to you at the end of the summer term. You certainly have good reason to be very proud of the work you have done.

~~Respectfully,~~

~~David D. Roberts~~

cc: F. Haggard  
D. Douglas

**An assessment of composition writing proficiency of form  
four students at a selected secondary school in Zimbabwe**

by

**Samuel Maruta**

A Thesis Submitted to the  
Graduate Faculty in Partial Fulfillment of the  
Requirements of the Degree of  
**MASTER OF ARTS**

Department: English

Major: English (Teaching English as a Second  
Language/Linguistics)

Approved: /

Signatures have been redacted for privacy

Iowa State University  
Ames, Iowa

1990

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

	PAGE
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS . . . . .	iv
CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION . . . . .	1
CHAPTER 2: BACKGROUND . . . . .	7
The Language Situation in Zimbabwe . . . . .	7
The Education System . . . . .	11
Types of Secondary Schools . . . . .	14
Education, English, and Social Class . . . . .	16
CHAPTER 3: LITERATURE REVIEW . . . . .	20
Writing Quality . . . . .	20
Assessment Techniques . . . . .	32
CHAPTER 4: METHODS . . . . .	44
Background . . . . .	44
Preparation for Assessment . . . . .	46
The Assessments . . . . .	48
CHAPTER 5: RESULTS . . . . .	54
CHAPTER 6: ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION OF RESULTS. . . . .	64

The Hypotheses . . . . .	65
Factors that Influenced the Ratings . . . . .	67
Differences between the Passes and the Fails . . . . .	69
Differences between the Actual and the Possible Scores . . . . .	76
CHAPTER 7: CONCLUSION . . . . .	79
Limitations . . . . .	83
Implications for Pedagogy and Research . . . . .	84
BIBLIOGRAPHY . . . . .	89
APPENDIX . . . . .	93

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

For the success of this study, I am greatly indebted to the following people for their valuable assistance without which this study would have been impossible.

First, I am indebted to my Major Professor, Dr. Dan Douglas for his much needed guidance and encouragement throughout the study, from its conceptualization to its editing.

Second, many thanks go to Mr. S. Mikisoni Nyandoro, a teacher of English and my former colleague at Elise Gledhill Secondary School in Sakubva, Mutare, in Zimbabwe, for obtaining and sending me the scripts that I used in this study; without these scripts, this study would have been impossible.

Third, I am indebted to my wife Paulina, and her friend Thokozile Shumba, for preparing the scripts from Zimbabwe for assessment by transcribing them onto a type of paper similar to that used for the Spring 1990 ESL Placement Test here at Iowa State University.

Finally, I am indebted to all the assessors of the papers for donating their very precious time to help me with my study by assessing the papers free of charge.

## CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Throughout my seven years of teaching secondary school English, grammatical and mechanical accuracy more often than not determined the grades I awarded to students' writing. I remember week after week year-in year-out bleeding the students' exercise books as I furiously searched for the slightest error and mistake. The students expected it, the administration demanded it, the system prescribed it. Yet the students' writing never seemed to improve and the mistakes and errors never seemed to go. All the time I suspected that something was wrong, but had only a vague idea what it was, and an equally vague idea as to how to rectify the situation. Doing a research study on composition writing would, I thought, help answer some of the questions that I have always asked myself and make me understand what I had been doing for those seven years.

Instead of studying the composition writing of local international students, I decided to study that of Zimbabwean students. This would make the findings more readily applicable to Zimbabwe, and thus influence the teaching of writing in Zimbabwean secondary schools, and in the education system as a whole, especially at this time when the Ministry of Education is in the process of localizing 'O' level examinations which until recently were wholly controlled from Britain. Research in writing is particularly important now for us to determine what our students can do and what we want them to do in keeping with what the society needs and can afford.

We must come up with reasonable and sustainable standards of writing, and our examination system must reflect those standards at each particular level of education.

Many research studies have been carried out in assessing composition writing, both in English as a first language, and in English as a second language (ESL). Some of the researchers have sought to find out what constitutes writing quality (Witte and Faigley (1981), Bamberg (1983,1984), McCulley (1985), Fitzgerald and Spiegel (1986), and Connor (1987)), and writing proficiency in ESL writing. All these researchers have identified coherence as a very important constituent of writing quality/proficiency. Others, like McCulley (1985), have also found that cohesion contributes to writing quality both directly, and indirectly through coherence.

Meanwhile, other researchers have been experimenting with how to assess writing quality. The two major approaches to writing assessment that have been used are holistic assessment which Cooper (quoted in Jacobs et al., 1981) defines as "any procedure which stops short of enumerating linguistic, rhetorical, or informational features of a piece of writing" (p. 29); and objective assessment. Objective assessment rallies around the concept of a T-unit formulated and defined by Hunt (1970) as "a main clause plus all subordinate clauses and nonclausal structures attached to or embedded in it" (Gaies 1980:54). Some of the leading researchers in these methods of assessment are Larsen-Freeman (1978), Perkins (1980,1983) and Gaies (1980).

The study reported here applied the knowledge from and techniques of assessment used in the research studies referred to above in a study of composition writing by some Form 4 students at a selected secondary school in Zimbabwe. The study sought to determine how proficient these students were in composition writing, especially in view of the fact that the majority of them will never again be formally taught how to write. Some of the questions the study tried to answer were: How would the students fare in the writing section of the English Placement Test at Iowa State University? How would they perform in the Freshman English Placement Test? And, generally, what are their strengths, and what are their weaknesses?

In trying to answer the foregoing questions, the study was so designed to test the following hypotheses.

**Hypothesis 1:** The students would pass the writing section of the English Placement Test administered at Iowa State University to in-coming foreign students whose native language is not English.

In order to test this hypothesis, papers of compositions written by the students were assessed by a team of experienced ESL teachers who were also experienced in assessing ESL placement test papers, using the ESL English Placement Test standards.

**Hypothesis 2:** The students would meet the Freshman English Placement Test requirements for placement in either English 104 or English 105.

In order to test this hypothesis, copies of the compositions written by the students were assessed by two teachers experienced in both teaching Freshman English, and assessing the placement test essays. The argument underlying these two hypotheses is that these Form 4 students were good enough not to require further ESL writing instruction; that is, they were as good as in-coming freshmen who are first language speakers of English. This argument is the corollary of the basic argument that the writer of this research report was trying to make which, put in form of a question, was: Since the Zimbabwean students are not formally taught how to write beyond Form 4, how good are they at that point, and how well equipped are they to face up to the challenges of tertiary education and real life? Answers to this question have far reaching implications for the teaching of writing up to Form 4, the training of teachers for the job, and the whole philosophy of writing instruction that guides the determination of such important issues as who should be taught writing, at what level, by who, and how should progress be monitored and achievement assessed.

Because the methods of assessment used to test the above hypotheses are holistic impressionistic marking techniques which just place the student into a ranking, they could not adequately account for the grades awarded the students' papers, nor could they identify the students' areas of strength and weakness. In order to make up for these deficiencies, one analytical marking technique (ESL Composition Profile), and one frequency-count marking

technique (T-unit analysis), were used. Since these techniques are analytical, it was hoped that they would complement the holistic assessments by pinpointing those aspects of writing ability wherein the students were weak or strong. It is on the basis of this breakdown of the writing abilities that conclusions on the writing proficiencies of the students used in this study, and implications for pedagogy and for further research would be drawn.

This report is divided into five sections: Background, Literature Review, Methods, Results, Analysis and Discussion, and Conclusion. The background section discusses the Zimbabwean society and the place of English in that society in order to show that for most of the young people today, English is as good as a first language alongside the local languages, thereby justifying the use of knowledge and techniques from research in English as a first language as well as those from research in English as a second language. The section also shows that the school that was chosen for the study, and the students whose writings were used, were to an extent representative of all the secondary schools and the students in Zimbabwe, respectively, thereby making the findings of the study more generalizable (than would otherwise be the case) to the Zimbabwean education system as a whole. Consequently, this report will argue for generalizing the findings to all Zimbabwean secondary schools and secondary school students, and makes recommendations for the teaching of writing in the school system, and for the training

of teachers for the job. Thus, the background section helps place this study into perspective.

## CHAPTER 2: BACKGROUND

Before describing and discussing the study proper, I will describe and discuss the aspects of the Zimbabwean Society and mode of life that have a bearing on the students that wrote the compositions and thus influenced the compositions themselves.

### The Language Situation in Zimbabwe

#### The local languages

In Zimbabwe, there are six indigenous languages: Shona, Ndebele, Tonga, Hlengwe, Venda and Chewa. Shona, the majority language spoken as mother tongue by 75% of the total population of the country, has six dialects. Shona and Ndebele are the National-Official languages, with each serving as a lingua franca in one section of the country. In this capacity, Shona covers three quarters of the country and Ndebele one quarter. This means that speakers of the smaller language groups have to learn at least one other indigenous language if they are to function effectively in the wider society.

#### The place of English

Although it happens on a daily basis that Ndebele speakers learn Shona and vice versa in order to communicate, they do not have to do so in order to survive. A Ndebele or Shona speaker can communicate with a non-Ndebele or Shona speaker through the medium of English. That is, while Ndebele and Shona function as

regional *linguae francae*, English functions as the national *lingua franca*. Consequently, it is one of the three official languages, and the most important one, alongside Shona and Ndebele. This means that if one wants to participate more fully in the affairs of the nation, be it at local, regional, or national level, one has to learn English in addition to either Shona or Ndebele. In the end, therefore, speakers of the minor language groupings have to learn at least three languages if they are to participate fully in the affairs of the nation.

### Historical background

This obviously complex situation has not always been like that. It was brought about by demographic movements through history. The Shona speaking people were the first to establish themselves in that part of the continent now called Zimbabwe. This was in about the 16<sup>th</sup> century when they built the stone fortifications now called Zimbabwe Ruins from which the country derives its name (Zimbabwe = House of Stone). Meanwhile the Ndebeles were in present day South Africa, in the Natal area. Then during the rule of Chaka the Zulu in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century, there occurred a demographic movement called the Mfecane, which refers to the resolution of tensions that had built up through the years between the various ethnic groupings that constituted the Zulu tribe. In this resolution, various smaller groups ran away from Chaka, mostly northwards. One of these groups settled in Malawi, another settled in the mountains that form the Zimbabwe-Mozambique border, and yet

another, the Ndebele, settled in the west of present day Zimbabwe, near the Matopo hills, established their center at Bulawayo, and dominated that part of the country. The other language groups, except the Chewa, happened to be cut off from their parent groups in neighboring countries when the Europeans were partitioning Southern Africa. The Chewa are people of Malawian origin who came to Zimbabwe from Malawi as migrant workers in the mines and farms during the Federation of the Rhodesias and Nyasaland; as a result, they are still found mostly in the mining and farming areas of the country.

In 1890, decades after the Ndebele established themselves in the Matopo area, English arrived in the form of Cecil John Rhodes and his British South Africa Company, and was established as the language of government, commerce, law and education, and today, exactly a century later, we still have it.

### Language policy

In drawing up the language policy, the colonial governments had no problem at all. English, of course, was the national-official language used for everything of consequence, with the vernacular languages confined to gossip and the home. But as the decades wore on, even gossip and conversations in the home were taken over by English, especially if the participants had at least five years of formal education. This phenomenon was largely due to the educational language policy. English was used as the medium of instruction from

day one regardless of the pupils' first language, and everyone was taught English from day one. So, not only was English used as the medium of instruction, it also dominated the school timetable. For example, in the 1970s, English received twelve compulsory periods of instruction per week in the primary schools, compared to only four optional ones for Shona/Ndebele. Meanwhile, in commerce, industry, government, anywhere in the modern sector of the economy, the command of English, both written and spoken was the key to employment and promotion.

The consequences of this language policy were far reaching. A great percentage of Zimbabweans attained varying degrees of bilingualism, some of them very high. The policy also brought English into the home and other domains of society ordinarily regarded as the preserves of the vernacular languages. Everyone wanted to learn English, and parents, even if they themselves did not understand a single word, loved to hear their children recite English rhymes learned at school. English and learning became synonymous, and with English came prestige.

Another consequence of the policy was that literate bilinguals developed greater writing facility in English than in Shona or Ndebele, such that they (even today) find it easier to compose in English than in Shona/Ndebele. In conversations (depending on the situation), everyone who has come into contact with English either formally or informally switches from Shona/Ndebele to English and back automatically without being aware of it. The whole country has

become a society of 'code switchers'. In short, therefore, English has become just another language, with more or less the same functions as the local languages, a language taken for granted. This phenomenon is irreversible.

## The Education System

### Stages

The education system can be divided into three distinctly recognizable stages from bottom to top. First, there is primary school education. This is a seven year course, from Grade 1 to Grade 7, at the end of which the students' write an examination in two subjects: English and Mathematics. Although the examination is multiple choice in nature, one of the main emphases of English teaching through the seven years of the course is writing. Students begin writing compositions in English as early as the first grade. In Grades 1 and 2, they call it creative writing, but after that they call it composition. In Grades 1 and 2, students write compositions up to five lines long, in Grades 3 to 5, from half a page to a full page, and in Grades 6 and 7, one to one and a half or even two pages. The type of writing is most often narrative and descriptive, with occasional discursive topics, and the main emphasis is on getting ideas on paper, that is, on content, encouraging the students to think in English. The second emphasis is correct syntax, spelling, and such other language related matters. By the end of the seven year course, the student should be able to write comprehensibly on a given topic.

The second stage in the educational structure is secondary school education. This is a four year course, from Form 1 to Form 4, at the end of which the student must have acquired enough basic knowledge in at least five subjects, including English, to succeed in society in general and in the world of work or further education. This four year course is subdivided into two subcourses: the Junior Certificate course taking the first two years, and the 'O' Level course taking the second two years. At the end of the first two years, students write an examination which includes two short compositions and questions on a reading passage. Composition teaching at this stage shifts emphasis from content per se to such organizational aspects as introduction, conclusion and paragraphing. Sentence structures and other such aspects of language accuracy continue to receive attention. Themes and types of writing continue to expand.

Although the Junior Certificate examination is very important in itself in case a student drops out of the formal education system at this stage, in the majority of cases it is important as a rehearsal for the more important and crucial 'O' Level examination two years away. Often, performance in the Junior Certificate examination will predict the likely performance in the 'O' Level examinations, and/or warn the student to pull up his/her socks. In the two years of preparation for the 'O' Level examinations, the emphasis is on refining all the skills learned before. Students have to write compositions up to 500 words long on a variety of themes. They also have to demonstrate better mastery of organization, coherence and

cohesion, paragraphing, introductions and conclusions, mechanical accuracy, syntactic versatility and variety of expression. In short, they should demonstrate a mastery of the language, and a high degree of composition writing proficiency.

In the 'O' Level examinations, students write two essays in one and one half hours: one free composition 500 words long and one situational composition 250 words long. In the section on free writing composition, the students are given up to five topics and asked to choose one and write about it. On the other hand, in the situational composition section, they are given one topic and either a picture, diagram, or some notes to assist them. That is, the first section is unguided while the second section is guided. In scoring the essays, the examiners look for content, organization, expression, and mechanical accuracy, aspects which students are supposed to be trained in during the course.

The third stage in the educational structure is high school education. High School in Zimbabwe generally refers to the two years after 'O' Level which prepare the students for University work. From Grade One through 'O' Level, the student is required to study eight or more subjects. At this advanced level ('A' Level), the student narrows down from eight subjects to three subjects only which he/she hopes to study at University. In the area of English, while students study both English Language and Literature in English as separate subjects for their 'O' Level examinations, only Literature in English is studied for the 'A' Level examinations at the end of high

school. The teaching of composition writing in its own right does not exist at this stage, nor, I should add, at university level.

### The importance of the 'O' level course

The 'O' Level course is a very important stage in the educational career of any student: to the student, to the family, and to the nation as a whole. 'O' Level is the launching point for students. Everybody is expected to reach 'O' Level. Thereafter, some go into the junior colleges, apprenticeships, job training programs, high school in preparation for university, or straight into the world of work. This means that most of the people on the job market and in the various facets of the economy exit the formal education system after 'O' Level; most of them, depending on the nature of their pursuits, will never be taught how to write again. The significance of the writing programs in the secondary schools cannot therefore be overemphasized.

## Types of Secondary Schools

### The preindependence period

Before independence in 1980, the Ministry of Education was divided into two completely separate systems: the Division of African Education and the Division of European Education. In the Division of African Education, there were two types of secondary schools: Government Secondary Schools limited to the urban areas, and mission schools mostly situated in the rural areas. Through the

bottle neck system of entry into secondary schools, these schools catered for a very few good students. For example at my school, which was one of the only two schools in a whole district, only 72 students were allowed in forms 1 and 2, and only 30 in forms 3 and 4. The facilities and staff, though limited in quantity, were adequate for the few good students that made it into secondary school.

Meanwhile in the Division of European Education, there were the two main types of secondary schools: private (including mission schools) and government. There was no bottle neck system in this division, and the government spent much more money on European than on African education. As a result, in spite of the numbers of students the classes were much smaller, and the classrooms well equipped.

### The post-independence period

After independence in 1980, there was a reorganization of the school systems. The two divisions of education were abolished and all the schools fell under one unified Ministry. The former whites only schools came to be called Group A Schools, the former government and mission schools for the Africans came to be called Group B schools, and a new type of Secondary School called the Upper Top came into being to cater for the majority of the black students who hitherto had been denied access into the Secondary Schools. They were called Upper Tops because they began as attachments of nearby primary schools, using the infrastructure of

the primary schools while putting up their own buildings. This happened especially in the rural areas where schools were in shortest supply.

Suddenly everyone of school-going age was going to school, and also a number of those who had been denied access before, even though they were now well over 20. However, educational infrastructure, equipment, and materials did not expand as rapidly to cater for these large numbers, nor did the supply of well-trained teachers. Classes increased in size, and the teacher-pupil ratio increased. Teachers had to learn to deal with large numbers of students, and with limited resources. Teaching and learning quality fell in all school subjects. Because of this drop in teaching-learning quality, and because now everyone could go to school, the failure rate increased. These problems were most felt in the newly established Upper Tops, followed by Group B schools, and then finally by Group A schools.

This phenomenon forced a spontaneous societal reorganization of who would go to what school. Before independence, the main determining factor was color; now it is money.

### **Education, English, and Social Class**

The Zimbabwean society can be broadly divided into four major classifications: the rich, the middle class (for example, teachers), the urban working class, and the peasants. Each individual's exposure to English varies with his/her social class, or

the social class one most associates with. The last clause is necessary because one might be born to peasants but attend school in an urban area where one's brother or sister works.

### English and social class

Regarding exposure to English, while there is English all around, the role of the home is very important. Most of the rich and middle class African parents, who form a significant proportion of the total population, are bilingual to a point where they can carry out a conversation in English. There is a great chance, therefore, that their children will be exposed to English in the home. In addition to that, because English is perceived as being synonymous with education, and every parent is keen to have his/her child learn English as early as possible, most of these rich and middle class parents make it a point to speak to the child in English at least occasionally, right from birth, and to send the child to a preschool that emphasizes communication in English. They want their child to learn English and be competitive in life. This of course is the wish of every parent from rich to poor; the difference is the ability to translate the wish into reality. The result is a range of abilities in English reflecting social classes.

### Education and social class

Like abilities in English, the type of education a child receives depends on the type of school the child goes to which depends on the

social class of the parents or associates. Barring other factors, Group A schools are generally for the rich and the upper half of the middle class, Upper Tops for the rural poor, and Group B schools for the urban working class and the lower half of the middle class. Group B schools therefore represent a half way point between the very low and the very high sections of the society and have the characteristics of both Group A schools and Upper Tops, and their students have to some extent, characteristics of the students in the other two types of schools. Thus findings of a study carried out in these schools might be a pointer to findings of a study carried out in a cross-section of all the schools in the country.

#### Elise Gledhill Secondary School

Elise Gledhill Secondary School, the school selected for this study, is a Group B school situated in the city of Mutare on the border with Mozambique. Like all other Group B schools, it draws its student population from a variety of backgrounds, has large classes, problems of limited material resources, shortage of teaching staff, and a high rate of staff turnover. It therefore to some extent, is typical of the Group B schools and arguably, a high proportion of all the secondary schools in Zimbabwe.

Summary of the chapter This chapter establishes two major points that relate to the teaching of writing in Zimbabwe. On the one hand, the students generally have large amounts of exposure to

English in varieties of situations out of class, which should be fertile ground for the successful teaching of writing. On the other hand, class sizes and the availability of money and materials vary with the type of school, with Group A schools in the best position and Upper Tops in the worst position, an obvious case of inequality. In both situations, however, the success of the teaching of writing depends on two things, among others: (i) the teachers that staff the schools and, in a way, their preparation in the teachers' colleges; and (ii) what society in general, and the schools in particular, regard as the goals of writing, and what constitutes good writing. Thus, the potential for high standards of writing is there; how far that potential is realized will become evident in the succeeding pages.

## CHAPTER 3: LITERATURE REVIEW

This chapter will briefly discuss the various studies done in the area of writing assessment. The chapter will be divided into sections. Research studies that tried to define and describe writing quality or proficiency, that is what it is that researchers and teachers look for in a piece of writing will be discussed first, followed by two methods of assessing writing quality: holistic assessment and objective assessment.

### Writing Quality

Although a lot of research has been done on what constitutes writing quality, this writer is not aware of any that has ever tried to define, or at least explain what that writing quality is. The closest attempt to an explanation comes from Perkins (1983) who says that "by universal consent, writing quality has a necessary connection with the communication of meaning." In other words, a piece of writing must succeed in communicating the writer's message if it is to be regarded as of high quality. This section therefore discusses research studies and/or papers that examine those aspects of writing that enable, enhance, or hinder communication in writing.

The question as to what constitutes writing quality has been a subject of research for decades now. According to Witte and Faigley (1981), a question of continuing interest for researchers in writing is what internal characteristics distinguish essays ranked high and low

in overall quality. Some of the major contributors to this study, they say, are M.A.K. Halliday and R. Hasan who extensively discuss the concept of text cohesion in their book Cohesion in English. In their study, Witte and Faigley analyze essays of college freshmen rated high and low in quality using two taxonomies of cohesive ties developed by Halliday and Hasan in order to find out what purposes the taxonomies can serve in composition research and what purposes they cannot.

Witte and Faigley applied Halliday and Hasan's taxonomies to ten of 90 essays which had been rated holistically by two readers on a four-point scale. Five of the ten essays had been given the lowest scores by both raters, and the other five had been given the highest scores. Witte and Faigley found that the high rated essays were longer and contained larger T-units and clauses, more nonrestrictive modifiers, and fewer syntactic and mechanical errors. They also found out that the high rated essays were much more dense in cohesion than the low rated essays. On the various cohesive devices, the researchers found out that the better writers used more immediate cohesive ties, and more reference and conjunctive cohesive devices. An analysis of cohesion and invention suggested that better writers have a command of invention skills that allow them to elaborate and extend the concepts they introduce. The researchers conclude that their findings suggest that analysis of cohesion may be potentially useful in distinguishing between stages of writing development.

Witte and Faigley acknowledge, however, that cohesion alone cannot completely account for writing quality because, they say, the quality of a text depends a great deal on factors outside the text itself. Some of these factors are the reader's contributions: what he/she knows about the current context and about the world in general, and what he/she assumes the writer's intentions might be. Lexical collocations in the text are understood through the cues which the writer provides and through the reader's knowledge of general discourse characteristics and of the world to which the discourse refers. This relates more to coherence than to cohesion. To this end, they share the view of their contemporaries de Beaugrande and Dressler who say that coherence results from cognitive operations that are influenced by both the writer's textual cues and the reader's knowledge of those cuing systems, as well as shared knowledge of the world (Golden and Vukelich, 1989). For coherence to occur therefore, both the writer and the reader must above all, share and observe the rules of discourse.

The significance of the writer-reader relationship in the attainment of coherence and therefore communication is re-emphasized by Phelps who, as Connor (1987) says, sees coherence as "the experience of meaningfulness correlated with successful integration during reading, which the reader projects back into the text as a quality of wholeness in its meanings" (p. 680). The problem however, is the definition of 'successful integration.' According to Lautamatti, successful integration refers to the semantic

relationships that exist between sentence topics and the discourse topic (Connor, 1987:682). Coherence, therefore, is reader-based but writer-dependent to the extent that the writer has to assist the reader in achieving that experience of meaningfulness.

Therefore, to achieve communication through the written word, there must be a meeting of the minds between writer and reader. The reader comes with a knowledge of the world and of the various types of discourse and discourse structures. He/she expects the writer to follow certain rules, to provide enough cues to enable the reader to recreate what the writer wants to communicate. The writer should therefore assist the reader by giving enough relevant cues in the right sequence, and by avoiding or removing all the obstacles that might impede the reader. Some of these cues appear to be larger T-units and clauses, and cohesive ties, while some of the impediments to be removed are grammatical and mechanical errors.

Bamberg (1983) took up the notion of coherence by trying to find out what makes a text coherent. She reanalyzed 800 essays written by thirteen- and seventeen-year-olds for the 1974 National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP). NAEP's analysis of the essays had identified coherence as a major problem, but could not determine what difficulties in the essays could be described as lack of coherence. In rescoring the NAEP essays, Bamberg used a scoring scheme that assessed coherence at both local (sentence) and global (discourse) levels. In this way, she could look for the presence or

absence of certain linguistic features or rhetorical structures to identify features that result in coherence/incoherence.

Generally, Bamberg found out that essays with low coherence scores lacked coherence both between sentences and through the whole discourse. At the sentence level, she found that mechanical and grammatical errors interfere with a reader's attempt to construct a text and integrate details into a coherent whole. Not only do the errors interfere with the reader's processing of sentences, they also force the reader to focus on individual words and letters, thereby distracting his/her attention from global cues that are important to the reader's understanding of the whole passage. On the global level, failure to identify the topic of the essay, to tell the reader who or what the essay is about, made the essay incoherent. Those essays in which the writers not only provided the topic but also provided an introduction that orientated the reader to the situation and placed the subject in context by identifying time, place, and circumstances were judged highly coherent. The other determining factor at global level was the organizational plan of the essay. Failure to use some kind of strategy to order the details of the essay, for example cause-effect, produced essays that were lists of unordered details which, needless to say, were very difficult for the reader to process and understand.

In this study, therefore, Bamberg identified three features that go to make coherence in an essay: mechanical and grammatical accuracy, announcing a topic and establishing a context, and an

adequate organizational plan. She therefore re-emphasizes what Witte and Faigley found in their study: announcing a topic, establishing a context, and adopting and sticking to an organizational plan are the cues that enable and enhance communication, while mechanical and grammatical errors are the obstacles to communication that should be removed or avoided. The more cues and the less errors, the greater the writing quality.

Following from her 1983 research, and on the premise that coherence is essential if writing is to communicate its intended meaning to the reader, Bamberg (1984) carried out a study to develop a valid method of assessing coherence, and to reanalyze the "Describe" essays, that is, essays where students are asked to describe something, written by the 13- and 17-year-olds for the 1969, 1973-74, and 1978-79 NAEP assessments. One of her three major research questions was whether there was a relationship between essay coherence and essay quality. Using a holistic coherence scale that she developed, three raters rescored 2,698 essays. The scale was designed to assess coherence holistically in terms of features that create both global and local coherence.

The results of the study showed that a fairly strong relationship exists between essay quality and essay coherence. There were correlations of .64 and .65 for 13 - and 17-year-olds respectively between writing quality and coherence. Further analysis by age level showed that 68% of good essays by 13 year olds also received high coherence scores, while almost all (91.9%) of good

essays by 17-year-olds received high coherence scores. From these results, Bamberg concluded that this high correlation between essay quality and essay coherence demonstrates that coherence is usually a necessary although not sufficient, condition for effective writing.

In her 1983 study, Bamberg found that local/sentence level coherence was determined by the degree of grammatical and mechanical accuracy, and that global/discourse level coherence was determined by discourse level rhetorical cues that enabled and helped the reader to recreate the writer's intended message. Earlier on in this report, writing quality has been shown to necessarily imply the communication of an intended message. This implication explains Bamberg's findings in this study. However, although the correlation between coherence and writing quality found by Bamberg seem to give some indication, the question that remains to be answered is the extent to which coherence contributes to writing quality.

An attempt to answer this question was made by McCulley (1985) in a study involving a re-evaluation of NAEP essays. Lamenting that little research had been conducted to determine the relationship between writing quality and coherence despite the fact that coherence was often used to identify the strengths and weaknesses in student writing, McCulley carried out a study to determine which specific textual features of writing contribute to judgments of coherence and writing quality. In the study, scores from a primary-trait measure of persuasive writing quality were

correlated with scores on the primary trait coherence measure, and the Halliday and Hasan cohesion frequencies. McCulley had 493 papers from the 1978-79 NAEP assessment evaluated for the study.

On persuasive quality, coherence and cohesion, McCulley found a partial coefficient of .64 between scores on the primary-trait persuasion and coherence measures, showing, he concluded, that when manuscript length is held constant, coherence is an important element of writing quality. McCulley also concluded from the study that some of the Halliday and Hasan indices of textual cohesion represent valid constructs of writing quality: demonstrative reference; noun substitution and ellipsis; and lexical synonym, hyponym and collocation. To McCulley the study also shows that textual cohesion is a sub-element of coherence in manuscripts of the same length. And, as if to reiterate Witte and Faigley (1981), McCulley deduced from the relationships he found between the number of synonyms hyponyms and collocations, and scores on the primary-trait persuasion and coherence measures that these may be the specific cohesive features in writing that contribute most to judgments of writing quality and coherence in the essays he studied.

Based on the findings of this study, McCulley concluded that the following interrelationships exist between writing quality, coherence and cohesion:

Coherence accounts for 41% of the variance in Writing quality;  
Cohesion accounts for 15% of the variance in Writing quality;  
and

Coherence accounts for 53% of the variance in Textual Cohesion. He depicted these interrelationships in the form of a diagram composed of three intersecting circles, with the circle representing coherence coming in between the other two circles, such that the greater portion of the coherence circle is shared with the writing quality circle on the one side, and the cohesion circle on the other side, with a portion shared by all three circles in the middle. In this way, McCulley shows how writing quality, coherence, and cohesion are intertwined. His study therefore shows that although coherence is not synonymous with writing quality, it is a major factor; it also shows that cohesion is a major factor in coherence.

McCulley's study establishes two points that are very important to composition teaching, assessment, and research: an estimate of the extent to which coherence contributes to writing quality, and those cohesive ties that contribute directly to writing quality. Teachers can therefore teach and assess for writing quality, and researchers can get closer to finding out what constitutes writing quality, and how best to assess it.

The relationship between cohesion and coherence was further investigated by Fitzgerald and Spiegel (1986). The two researchers examined the relationship between cohesion and coherence in children's writing, and the degree to which that relationship varied with quality of writing. Defining cohesion as "the linguistic features which help to make a sequence of sentences a text" (p. 263), they pointed out that while cohesion is text based, coherence is not

entirely located in a text; rather it is at least partially constructed from the reader's own knowledge and expectations, a view shared by de Beaugrande and Dressler (1981) (cited in Cooper, 1988). The same view is also expressed by Steffensen (1986) in her discussion of the relationship between cohesion and coherence when she said: "A text may have a low level of cohesion but still be highly coherent *if it draws on a shared domain of knowledge and allows for a high level of inferencing*. ... a high level of cohesion does not ensure coherence *when the text reflects a misunderstanding of real-world events*" (p. 72 emphasis added). All this re-emphasizes the fact that coherence links the piece of writing to factors external to the text, to the socio-physical context of the communication process. Coherence therefore subsumes a document's meaningfulness and usefulness in context.

In scoring for coherence, the raters in the Fitzgerald and Spiegel study judged the extent to which the writer did each of the following: (a) identified the topic/theme; (b) stayed on the topic or theme and did not digress; (c) oriented the reader by creating a context or situation; (d) organized details according to a discernible plan and sustained it throughout the composition ; (e) used cohesive ties to link sentences and/or paragraphs together; (f) concluded with a statement that created a sense of closure; and (g) ensured that the discourse flowed smoothly as indicated by the lack of grammatical and/or mechanical errors. Each dimension was rated holistically on a four-point scale.

Like coherence, quality was also scored using a holistic rating scale for narrative writing ranging from 1 for an inadequate composition to 6 for an excellent one. This scale was applied to the following aspects of the text: (a) a clear sequence of events which was an appropriate response to the prompt, and which was introduced at the beginning of the composition; (b) clear development of the story, with little or no irrelevant description or exposition; (c) good organization, with a clear beginning, middle, and end; (d) fresh, vigorous word choice; (e) a variety of interesting details; (f) correct sentence structure; and (g) correct punctuation, capitalization, and spelling.

Fitzgerald and Spiegel (1986) found a relationship between cohesion and coherence in children's writing; they also found that the relationship varied with the text content. However, they found out that the relationship did not vary with quality of writing, that is, cohesion and coherence scores varied similarly regardless of the changes in the writing quality scores. On cohesion and coherence, they found that shorter distances between ties and their references were characteristic of writing judged to be more coherent, suggesting that a more coherent story is "tighter" and more explicit up to an optimal point, making fewer demands on the memory and knowledge base of the reader.

These were very interesting findings. That the relationship between cohesion and coherence did not vary with quality should make sense after McCulley's confirmation of composition teachers

and researchers' intuition that cohesion contributes substantially to coherence and coherence to writing quality. It is therefore highly probable that all else being equal, the better the cohesion, the better the coherence, and the better the writing quality. It is also interesting to note that Fitzgerald and Spiegel's characterization of coherence resembles in large measure that of Bamberg (1983, 1984), suggesting some consensus of what coherence is in the field of composition assessment and research. However, of greatest interest is how Fitzgerald and Spiegel's characterization of quality subsumes that of coherence. That is, quality here is described in more or less the same terms as coherence save for probably one element that filters through several descriptors: content. This seems to imply that the other major element of writing quality is content, which should make sense because if, according to McCulley's estimate, 41% of successful writing is the manner of communication, then at least the greater element of what remains of the communication process should be the content to be communicated. This observation is very important in the context of the present study because it has a bearing on the methods used to assess the writing to be studied.

Summary. This section has established cohesion as a major element of coherence, and coherence and content as the major elements of writing quality which has been shown to subsume effective communication. Correctness has been seen to be important only as it aids cohesion and coherence. Unfortunately the students in this study have yet to be stronger in these areas.

### Assessment Techniques

According to Cooper (1977), there are two basic approaches to composition evaluation: holistic scoring and frequency-count marking. Holistic scoring, Cooper says, is "any procedure that stops short of enumerating linguistic, rhetorical, or informational features of a piece of writing" (p. 4). In holistic evaluation, readers base their judgements on their impression of the whole composition, while in frequency-count marking the raters tally or enumerate certain elements in the composition, such as the number or type of words, clauses, T-units, cohesive devices, misspelled words, misplaced commas, or sentence errors. This section will discuss research studies and articles on some of these techniques in order to come up with those that best measure writing quality and those that were used in this study.

#### Holistic evaluations

Holistic evaluation involves reading, in the real sense of the word, the essay through. The reader reads for meaning, trying to judge the extent to which the writer succeeds in communicating his/her message. According to Cooper (1977:3), in holistic evaluation,

[t]he rater takes a piece of writing and either (1) matches it with another piece in a graded series of pieces or (2) scores it for the prominence of certain features important to that kind of

writing or (3) assigns it a letter or number grade. The placing, scoring, or grading occurs quickly, impressionistically, after the rater has practiced the procedure with other raters. The rater does not make corrections or revisions in the paper. Holistic evaluation is usually guided by a holistic scoring guide which describes each feature and identifies high, middle, and low quality levels for each feature.

The most popular form of holistic assessment is the general impression marking. Using this procedure, "the rater simply scores the paper by deciding where the paper fits within the range of papers produced for that assignment or occasion" (Cooper, 1977:11-12). Cooper says that Britton and his colleagues at the University of London Institute of Education achieved reliabilities as high as .82 between teams of three raters who were experienced English teachers but who were given only minimal instructions, no training, and no chance to discuss among themselves, the standards they would use for evaluation. This suggests that it is possible to achieve higher reliabilities by giving the raters a training exercise and the chance to discuss the standards of evaluation prior to rating the essays.

Another commonly used form of holistic assessment that Cooper (1977) refers to above is analytical scoring. Instead of looking at the whole piece of writing at once as in general impression marking, analytical scoring involves breaking down the composition into its component parts, and giving a score for each part, such that the total score for the composition is arrived at by adding up the scores for the individual aspects of the composition. These aspects of

the composition are often the skills which the writers are expected to display in the particular writing assignment. This kind of holistic assessment is generally believed to be more reliable than general impression marking.

Holistic scoring, both general impression marking and analytical scoring, has been found to be a very valid measure of writing ability. According to Perkins (1983), it has the highest construct validity when overall attained writing proficiency is the construct to be assessed. And according to Cooper (1977), holistic evaluation gets closer to what is essential in communication than say, frequency-count marking. He goes on to say that it is the most valid and direct means of assessing writing and rank-ordering students by writing ability. Because of its validity, holistic evaluation is used by many schools, researchers, and testing agencies for, among other things, certification, placement, proficiency, and research testing.

However, in spite of its widely recognized validity, and its demonstrable capacity for reliability, the technique is still susceptible to what Perkins (1983) calls threats to reliability. The evaluation, Perkins says, can be highly subjective due to bias, fatigue, lack of internal consistency, previous knowledge of the student, and/or shifting standards from one paper to the next. This is especially so in general impression marking where the reader, awarding a single grade based on the total impression of the composition as a whole text or discourse, can focus on any number of several aspects of the composition, for example whether a thesis has

been clearly stated, developed, and supported, instead of focusing on all of them. Because of this element of subjectivity, published research on holistic scoring in terms of reliability and concurrent validity has yielded contradictory findings. To illustrate this point, Perkins says that while on the one hand Braddock, Lloyd-Jones, and Schoer and Follman and Anderson have reported interrater reliability coefficients as high as 0.90, on the other hand Diederich noted from his study that:

out of the 300 essays graded, 101 received every grade from 1 to 9, 94 percent received either seven, eight, or nine different grades; and no essay received less than five different grades from fifty-three readers (p. 653).

Fortunately, Perkins says, there is a way to reduce the subjectivity in scoring compositions. This is through the use of analytical scoring techniques, which, as shown above, are another form of holistic evaluation. In one of the techniques, the researcher should (a) draw a behavior-specific rating schedule; (b) insist on rater competence and expertise; (c) use multiple independent raters; and (d) elicit multiple writing samples to control for the fact that attained writing ability may vary with topic and time of day. In the other technique suggested by Jacobs et al. (1981), the researcher should (a) establish criteria to focus readers' attention on significant aspects of the compositions; (b) set a common standard for judging the quality of the writing; (c) select readers from the same backgrounds; (d) train readers until they can achieve close

agreement in their assessments of the same papers; (e) obtain at least two independent readings of each composition; and (f) monitor the readers periodically during the evaluation to check their consistency in applying the standards and criteria of evaluation. The latter technique uses a set of guidelines called the ESL Composition Profile (Jacobs et al., 1981).

The ESL Composition Profile is an analytical scale which was developed to guide readers in holistic evaluations of ESL compositions. The profile is a list of several features or characteristics of writing in a particular mode, with each feature described in some detail and with high-middle-low points identified and described along a scoring line for each feature. These features are typically content, organization, vocabulary, language use, and mechanical accuracy. This is a very widely used technic of writing assessment, and is generally believed to greatly reduce the subjectivity in holistic assessment.

However, although generally undesirable, the subjectivity in holistic evaluation is not necessarily a weakness; rather it has come to be considered a strength. For as Oller, quoted in Jacobs et al. (1981:29) says:

...subjective judgements are indispensable in decisions concerning whether a writer has expressed well his intended meaning and, of course, in determining what that intended meaning is. There is no escape from subjective judgement in the interpretation of normal expression in natural language.

That is, although for research purposes the subjectivity in holistic evaluation is undesirable, it is part of the normal daily reading in real life. On reflecting from Oller's observation, Jacobs et al. say that in spite of (or perhaps because of) this subjectivity, holistic evaluations have been shown to be capable of producing highly reliable assessments.

Oller's observation is very important to researchers and teachers alike: holistic evaluation is a very valid and indispensable way of assessing for writing ability in what is close to a real life situation. The observation by Jacobs et al. is also very important, for it addresses an aspect that has always been considered the major weakness of holistic evaluation. Thus because it has validity, and is capable of producing highly reliable assessments when used properly, holistic evaluation is a very good technique. This standpoint is also supported by Cooper (1977) when he says "where there is commitment and time to do the work required to achieve reliability of judgement, holistic evaluation of writing remains the most valid and direct means of rank-ordering students by writing ability" (p. 3).

### Frequency-count marking

One frequency-count marking technique that has been extensively researched is the T-unit. Formulated and defined by Hunt as "a single main clause (or independent clause) plus whatever other subordinate clauses or nonclauses are attached to, or

embedded within, that one main clause," the T-unit is a measure of syntactic complexity that has been shown to discriminate learners at various levels of proficiency (Perkins 1983:661). This subsection will discuss some of the studies carried out using the T-unit, and some of the strengths and weaknesses of the technique that surfaced from those studies. It will also point out how this technique works together with holistic evaluation.

Larsen-Freeman (1978) reported on a study carried out by her group of researchers at the University of California-Los Angeles (UCLA) as part of a series of studies to try to establish a second language acquisition index of development, "an independent yardstick by which we can expediently and reliably gauge proficiency in a second language" (p. 439). In an earlier study, the researchers had divided a group of 48 compositions into five groups (poor, fair, average, good, and excellent), tried to identify the features that made each group of compositions unique, and found that the best discrimination measures were the average number of words per T-unit., and the total number of error-free T-units per composition. In a similar study, Farhady had also found a significant correlation between the length of T-units and five independent measures of writing ability based on a subjective evaluation of the same compositions by three judges (Larsen-Freeman 1978).

In the 1978 study, Larsen-Freeman and her group of researchers analyzed 212 compositions from the ESL program at UCLA. The essays were placed into five groups depending on how

the writers had performed overall on the placement test, Group 1 being the lowest, and Group 5 the highest. The researchers found out that the mean T-unit length, i.e. - the average number of words per T-unit, increased from Group 1 through Group 5 compositions. They also found "an unmistakable linear trend towards higher percentage of error-free T-units as subjects exhibit a higher proficiency" (p. 445). For example, Group 1 compositions had 11.4% error-free T-units while Group 5 had 49.6% of their T-units error-free. The researchers also calculated the average lengths of error-free T-units for each group, and found that on average, error-free T-units tend to increase in length with proficiency, for example from 4.61 words in Group 1 compositions to 13.20 words in Group 5 compositions. The researchers concluded that the two measures applied in the analysis - the percentage of error-free T-units and the average length of error free T-units - proved to discriminate well among the five levels of ESL proficiency represented in the population studied.

According to this study therefore, the better the writer, the more and longer the error-free T-units. This tallies well with an earlier discussion of writing quality which showed that the smaller the number of grammatical and mechanical errors (which are impediments to coherence), the better the coherence, and hence, all else being equal, the better the writing quality. Larsen-Freeman's findings therefore help specify the aspects of the text that are crucial to writing quality.

Larsen-Freeman's findings on the usefulness of error-free T-units as a measure of writing proficiency were corroborated in a study by Perkins (1980). Perkins set out to find among other things, those objective measures of composition that discriminate between various levels of attained writing proficiency. He began with all the objective measures he found discussed in the literature on the subject: "words per composition, sentences per composition, words in error-free T-units per composition, number of errors, T-unit length, clause per T-unit ratio, a syntactic complexity formula developed by Botel, Dawkins and Aranowsky (1973), and a complexity index influenced by Endicott (1973) and developed by Flahive and Snow (in press)" (p. 62).

Perkins found out that objective measures which do not take the absence of errors into account are of no use in discriminating among holistic evaluations at one advanced level of proficiency in his study. That is, those objective measures that reckon with the absence of errors (error-free T-units per composition, number of words in error-free T-units per composition, errors per T-unit, and total errors) discriminate among holistic qualitative judgements of compositions.

Perkins's findings support and extend those of Larsen-Freeman in terms of the number of measures. However, of greater importance is the fact that the significance of error in writing assessment is emphasized, which again tallies with my earlier discussion of coherence and writing quality.

The usefulness of T-unit analysis in writing assessment was further underscored by Witte (1983) and Connor and Farmer (1985) (quoted in Johns 1986) in studies that utilized the technique. These researchers found out that passing essays have fewer topics and more T-units per topic than do failing essays. This means that the more T-units there are per topic the more information is given about that topic; the topic is developed and expanded on. Johns concluded that the studies demonstrate that topic support is one of the most important features of coherent essays. This observation points to a probable relationship between coherence and syntactic complexity as a reflection, or an indicator, of proficiency levels in language learning.

Attractive though the T-unit might be as a measure of syntactic complexity, it has not gone without criticism. According to Gaies (1980), one of the criticisms to T-unit analysis is whether an index based on syntactic complexity alone, divorced from consideration of appropriateness and stylistic effectiveness, and of communicative effectiveness in general, can be a valid measure of overall language proficiency. Another criticism was to do with the relative significance of error, especially in second language situations, in the judgement of proficiency, as a result of which the basic index was modified from length of T-units to length of error-free T-units. However the question of what constitutes an error arose. Vann (1979) suggested a widely accepted requirement that a T-unit make sense in the given context, and be free of morphosyntactic and lexical

errors. The third criticism that Gaies identified was how communicative strategies such as circumlocution should be evaluated in an assessment of an individual's overall proficiency.

In answer to all these criticisms, Gaies said:

All that is claimed by T-unit analysis-based research is that learners considered to be at an advanced level by other criteria tend to produce longer error-free T-units and a higher ratio of error-free T-units to total T-units. In other words, these studies simply claim that the ability to subordinate and to reduce clauses to non-clause embeddings is a characteristic of proficiency, and that the growth in this ability provides an index of development in the target language. (57)

Thus, with the above provisos, T-unit analysis provides an objective and reliable method of determining the overall syntactic complexity of language samples.

Gaies articulated one very important point that many other researchers constantly alluded to: the high positive correlation between T-unit analysis and holistic evaluation. The studies discussed earlier have shown that essays judged good holistically have more and longer error-free T-units than those judged poor. This suggests that both techniques of assessment are effective measures of writing quality, implying that since good essays have more and longer error-free T-units, the reverse should also be true, that is, those essays with many and long error-free T-units should be good (the next question would of course be the definition of 'how many' and 'how long'). The suggestion referred to above also implies that each technique can be used separately with the same results.

Given this premise therefore, using both techniques should act as a validating mechanism that makes the findings of the study more accurate and plausible.

### Conclusion

In this chapter, the intention was to establish what research and literature in the field of composition assessment regard as writing quality, what it comprises, and the best methods of assessing it. That writing quality necessarily implies effective communication, that is, a piece of writing judged high in quality must successfully communicate the writer's message, has been established.

Consequently, that the two major elements of writing quality are coherence and content has been established. On assessment techniques, the chapter has established that holistic and frequency-count marking are the best methods of assessment for the present study, and that a combination of these two should yield highly reliable results since they complement one another since holistic assessment looks at the composition as a whole (both content and coherence), while frequency-count marking looks primarily at aspects of the essay that cause coherence/incoherence. It is these techniques, therefore, that were used in this study to assess the writing of the Zimbabwean students for writing quality/proficiency.

## CHAPTER 4: METHODS

This chapter discusses how the data used in this study were collected. For this purpose, the chapter is divided into three main sections: Background to the data collection, which describes the selection of the subjects and the collection of the writing samples; Preparation for assessment, that is, for the data collection, which describes the selection of methods of assessment, and of the readers; and the assessments, that is, the data collection itself, which describes how the compositions were evaluated.

### Background

#### Getting the writing samples

Because the study involved analyzing the writing of Zimbabwean students in a Zimbabwean school, I had to obtain the writing samples from Zimbabwe. In order to do so, I borrowed two topics from previous English Placement Examination papers at Iowa State University, typed them onto a form that I designed, and mailed 32 copies of the form to my former workmate at Elise Gledhill Secondary School in Zimbabwe. Accompanying the forms was a letter containing the instruction to choose one of the topics for the whole group of students selected for the study. That is, the whole group was supposed to write on the same topic chosen by the teacher. (See Appendix for copies of the letter and the form.)

I also asked the teacher to choose 30 of his best students from his form four classes. This was the best I could do under the

circumstances because even if I had not stipulated "best", the teacher could still have chosen the best he could get, knowing that the students were going to write for a foreign audience in a foreign country. Besides, I did not want to use random sampling techniques because the process would have been too involving and cumbersome for the teacher; I did not feel it right to ask too much of a free service. So I had to make do with what was feasible under the circumstances.

### Sample size

On the size of the sample, although I asked for thirty scripts from Zimbabwe, I used only 20 of those in the study. I asked for more than I actually wanted in case some of them would go bad somehow. And eight of them did: the students wrote on a different topic, so those papers were automatically out of the study. The ninth paper was dropped because I could not get it transcribed in time for the first round of assessment. I removed the tenth from the study by random selection. Given the constraints of time, money, and geophysical circumstances, a sample size of 20 was reasonable as well as easy to work with.

### Transcription

All the copies of the compositions used in the study were based on the transcribed versions of the original scripts, that is, the scripts that were used in the assessments in this study were not in the

handwriting of the students that wrote the compositions. The reason is that after the scripts from Zimbabwe had already arrived here, the ESL coordinator at Iowa State University agreed to use exactly the same topic as that chosen by the Zimbabweans, for the Spring 1990 English Placement Test. I decided to have the scripts from Zimbabwe assessed together with those from the English Placement Test. This would give the papers a more realistic evaluation in answer to one of the hypotheses. So, to make the papers look like authentic English Placement Test papers, all the essays from Zimbabwe were transcribed onto the same type of paper as that used for the English Placement Test, and the form used in the placement examination was attached to each paper. Each student was given an "undergraduate status," but without specifying college or department.

### **Preparation for Assessment**

#### **Choosing methods of assessment**

In the assessment of the compositions, the study employed two holistic methods: general impression marking and the ESL Composition Profile, the former 'non-analytical', and the latter generally regarded as analytical in nature. From now on in this report, the term holistic marking shall refer to general impression marking only, while the ESL Composition Profile assessment shall also be referred to as analytical marking, for the sake of economy.

Since in general impression marking the reader just reads through the text in search of meaning, the grade awarded should be

a reflection of the overall quality of writing the writer exhibited; that is, it should indicate the extent to which the writer put in enough and relevant content, cued it properly for the reader to comprehend, and avoided or removed impediments to communication (errors) as discussed earlier under Writing Quality.

The ESL profile has just the same effect as general impression marking, only that it functions inductively, arriving at the rater's total impression of the composition from impressions about particular aspects of the composition. In the words of Jacobs et al. (1981): "The five component scales [of the profile] thus are intended to be regarded as five different windows or viewpoints from which to judge the writer's overall communicative effect" (32). A close look at the profile (see Appendix) shows that it splits writing quality into its two major components: content, and coherence, and further subdivides coherence into organization, vocabulary, language use, and mechanics, the very aspects discussed earlier as comprising writing quality. The profile therefore helped determine how the various aspects of writing quality contributed to the students' scores on the two holistic assessments: ESL Placement and Freshman English Placement.

The study also employed one frequency-count technique, the T-unit analysis. The case for the T-unit analysis technique is clear from an earlier discussion of it. Results of the T-unit analysis helped characterize passing and failing essays as a way of trying to account for the grades awarded the students in the two holistic assessments:

ESL Placement and Freshman English Placement. For effective discrimination, the dimension of error was utilized because, according to the literature reviewed, it was found to be effective for this purpose.

### Choosing the readers

Readers for the ESL Composition Profile assessment were chosen in accordance with the guidelines for selecting readers put forward by Jacobs et al. (1981): use ESL/English teachers; use experienced teachers of composition; select readers from similar backgrounds; select readers who are knowledgeable about the standards of the school programs for which the testing is conducted; select readers who have not recently taught students in the test group. Not only did both the readers chosen meet these requirements, they also had a lot of experience using the profile.

Although the ESL Placement readers were not chosen as such by the researcher, they turned out to be experienced ESL teachers and readers, both graduate students and professors. Regarding Freshman assessment, the researcher asked for experienced English 104/105 teachers, and got two professors. All the readings were, therefore, done by the best readers possible.

### **The Assessments**

Four different assessments of the essays were carried out by four groups of readers at Iowa State University, each using a

different method of assessment. 1) Six members of the ESL faculty in the English Department used the general impression technique following the ESL Placement Test set of guidelines. 2) Two Freshman English teachers also used the general impression marking technique, but following a set of guidelines used in the Freshman English program (see Appendix). 3) A third group of readers, two other ESL teachers in the English Department selected by the researcher, used the Iowa State University version of the Jacobs et al. ESL Composition Profile (see Appendix). 4) The fourth assessment was done by the researcher himself using the T-unit analysis technique.

#### ESL Placement Test assessment

First, the raters discussed the standards they were going to use to evaluate the essays, practiced with a few and discussed their ratings, and then did the rating in the same room. Each rater read through the essay as quickly as possible, without making any marks in the text, and gave one of three grades: Pass, B, or C/D. That is, he/she either passed the candidate, or assigned him/her to one of the ESL composition skills improvement classes: English 101B or C/D (English 101 B is more basic than C or D, and C is for undergraduate students while D is for graduate students). Each essay was read independently by two raters, and if they disagreed on the rating, the essay was read by a third rater who made a decision as to the classification of the student.

The placement of each student influences his/her program of studies in the University. Passing the ESL Placement Test is taken to mean that the student has enough writing ability in English to be able to write at the level required in the various disciplines in the University. So, those who pass are allowed to proceed with their programs as required by their departments. For undergraduates, this means taking Freshman composition classes with the rest of the incoming undergraduate students in the University as required by their departments; graduate students are exempt from this course. Meanwhile, those who do not pass are required to take composition skills improvement courses (the English 101 series) in addition to a limited course load in their fields of study.

#### The Freshman English Placement Test assessment

In the Freshman English Placement assessment, the aim is to place the students in either English 104 or English 105, where the former is more basic. Those students who are found to be deficient in the basic skills are advised to take a remedial class before enrolling in English 104. The raters use a six-point scale, where the higher the score, the lower the rating, that is, a score of 1 means better competence than a score of 6. Using this scale, a student scoring a 1 or 2 is assigned to English 105, and one scoring a 3 or 4 to English 104; one scoring a 5 is judged to be deficient in basic composition skills, and a score of 6 means that the reader could not make a judgement so the paper has to be re-read by another reader.

For the Freshman English Placement assessment, photocopies of the transcribed papers used in the ESL placement assessment were made, and a copy of each paper given to each of the two raters such that each composition was read by each of the two raters. Each rater worked independently, but following the same guidelines. The ratings were tabulated, and compared; those papers where the ratings varied so markedly as to place the same student into two different categories were re-read by a third reader whose rating helped place the paper into a single category.

#### The ESL Composition Profile

For the assessment of the compositions using the ESL Composition Profile, photocopies of the transcribed scripts used for the ESL Placement assessment were given to the two raters such that each composition was read by each of the two raters. Attached to each copy of the compositions was a copy of the profile for the raters' scores. To avoid having to train the raters as Jacobs et al. suggest, which was not feasible under the circumstances, the raters chosen were experienced English teachers who were also experienced in using the ESL composition profile. Both readers were also from similar backgrounds, in keeping with Jacobs et al.'s guidelines for choosing readers discussed earlier.

The readers were instructed to evaluate the compositions in strict accordance with the requirements of the composition profile. In addition, they were instructed to mark all morphosyntactic and

such other errors as defined by Vann (1979) for the purposes of the application of the T-unit analysis technique discussed below. In this context, "error" was defined as "a flaw in the language which interferes with the understanding of the text." According to this definition, spelling and punctuation errors were disregarded unless they made a difference in the interpretation of the text. The readers were free to use their marking signs, but were required to furnish a copy of the interpretation of those signs. This was necessary for comparing the errors identified by each reader when it came to counting the errors in T-unit analysis. (See Appendix for a copy of the instructions.)

### T-unit analysis

The purpose of the T-unit analysis was to determine the syntactic complexity of the compositions, and the degree to which they were error-free, as a way of trying to estimate their communicative effectiveness. The interplay between syntactic complexity and mechanical accuracy, it was hoped, would help shed light on the grades the papers were awarded in the holistic assessments. This interplay was expressed in average number of errors per T-unit, error-free T-units and average lengths of error-free T-units.

In order to arrive at these figures, a series of steps were taken. The first step was to determine the lengths of the compositions, in words and in T-units, and to determine the mean T-unit length of

each composition. To do this, all the words in each composition were counted; then all the sentences were divided up into T-units, and the T-units counted. Dividing up the total number of words by the total number of T-units gave the mean T-unit length of each composition.

The second step involved determining the number and distribution of errors in the compositions. First, all the significant errors (according to Vann 1979) as identified by the ESL Composition Profile raters were transferred onto the T-unit analysis copies. Since there were two raters, the errors they identified in each composition were compared very carefully; where they differed, a decision was made on the basis of the raters' description of the error, and the researcher's understanding of the situation and his knowledge of Zimbabwean English. When the transfer of the errors was completed, the errors, the error-free T-units, and the words in the error-free T-units, were all counted up. Dividing up the total number of errors per composition with the corresponding number of T-units gave the average number of errors per T-unit for each composition, and dividing the total number of words in the error-free T-units by the total number of error-free T-units gave the average length of the error-free T-units for each composition.

## CHAPTER 5: RESULTS

This chapter is a brief layout and description of the results of the procedures described in the Methods chapter above. For the sake of space and convenience, some of the labels of the statistics shown below, especially those from T-unit analysis, will be in short forms or abbreviations coined by the writer for the purpose of this study. The following are the abbreviations and what they stand for:

* TOTWDS	total number of words
* TOTTUS	total number of T-units
* TOTERRS	total number of errors
* EFTUS	error-free T-units
* WDSEFTUS	words in error-free T-units
* MNTUL	mean T-unit length
* MNERRPT	mean errors per T-unit
* MNEFTUL	mean error-free T-unit length

Table 1 below shows the distribution of the scores obtained by all the subjects in all areas of assessment in the study. In the Freshman column, the scores shown are those where either both readers agreed, or where a third reader agreed with one of the first two readers. In the columns that show the scores for the Composition Profile assessment, the scores shown are averages of the scores given by the two readers for each aspect on the profile. The last three columns show "scores" from the T-unit analysis carried out

by the author. Selected for this table are only those scores that take into account the dimension of error.

TABLE 1: A summary<sup>a</sup> of the results showing the individual scores of each subject

A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	I	J	K
1	C	5	17.5	18.0	16.0	15.0	66.5	7	1.60	9.57
2	P	3	15.5	16.0	20.5	20.0	72.0	17	0.43	14.1
3	P	5	19.5	19.5	18.5	18.0	75.5	5	1.39	20.8
4	C	5	17.5	17.0	16.5	14.5	65.5	5	1.46	10.6
5	C	4	17.0	16.5	16.0	16.5	66.0	4	1.89	10.5
6	C	5	19.5	20.0	18.0	17.0	74.5	7	0.95	13.1
7	P	4	22.0	21.0	21.5	21.0	85.5	11	0.38	15.8
8	C	4	21.0	19.0	20.5	21.0	81.5	1	1.79	14.0
9	C	4	20.5	22.0	21.0	19.5	83.0	9	0.96	11.8
10	C	4	22.0	19.5	20.5	21.0	83.0	15	0.69	10.5
11	C	5	18.5	18.0	17.5	17.5	71.5	6	1.00	14.0
12	C	4	19.5	20.5	18.0	19.0	77.0	10	0.95	11.5
13	C	4	21.0	20.0	17.0	17.0	75.0	2	1.53	18.5
14	C	4	20.5	20.0	17.5	15.0	73.0	7	1.43	9.00
15	C	4	20.5	21.5	20.5	17.0	79.5	8	0.73	15.6
16	C	5	16.5	17.5	16.5	14.5	65.0	4	1.46	10.0
17	C	3	17.5	18.5	18.5	16.5	71.0	9	0.95	11.9
18	C	5	17.5	17.0	16.5	15.0	66.0	9	1.00	1.44
19	P	4	18.0	17.5	20.0	17.5	73.0	10	0.89	18.0
20	C	4	18.5	18.0	17.5	17.5	71.5	7	1.20	12.9

<sup>a</sup>Column Labels:

A - Subjects	B - TESL	C - Freshman	D - Content
E - Organization	F - Expression	G - Correctness	H - Total
I - EFTUS	J - MNERRPT	K - MNEFTUL.	

There are several things of interest to note in this table. One of them is that on the one hand the ESL assessors passed only four students, and placed the other 16 in English 101C, while on the other hand the Freshman English assessors failed only seven and passed the other 13. In other words, there was some contradiction: the ESL assessors said that 16 were not good enough to take English 104, while the Freshman English assessors judged 13 students suitable enough for English 104. The two groups of assessors agreed nine times only (on six fails and three passes), and disagreed 11 times, where the Freshman assessors passed 10 students failed by the ESL assessors, and failed one passed by the ESL assessors. Another interesting thing to note is that subject No. 3 who was passed by the ESL assessors, but failed by the Freshman English assessors has the longest mean error-free T-unit length at 20.8 words, and that, of the four who were graded pass by the ESL assessors, he/she has the second best total score on the composition profile assessment. A third thing to note is that three of the four (except subject No. 3) who were passed by the ESL assessors had ten or more error-free T-units, together with two of those who were graded Cs, but passed by the Freshman English assessors. The fourth thing of interest is that subject No. 7 who passed both holistic assessments has the highest total score on the composition profile assessment, and the lowest mean errors per T-unit. And the fifth thing to note is the wide range (20.5) in the profile scores which seems to show that the sample was very heterogenous.

Table 2a below shows the means and standard deviations of the total scores for the 20 subjects on each aspect of the Composition profile. Since each aspect of the composition profile was worth 25 points, it should be clear from the table that on average, the whole group of students performed best in the content area, followed by organization, expression, and finally correctness. Thus, on the whole, the students performed least well on correctness. A look at the standard deviation on correctness shows that there was great variability between the individual scores, which means that some performed very well, others very poorly. The scores were most bunched up together on organization which means that the students' performance did not vary as much as on correctness.

TABLE 2a: Mean and Standard deviation scores for all subjects on the ESL Composition Profile

	Mean	Standard Deviation
Content	19.00	1.871
Organization	18.85	1.710
Expression	18.43	1.830
Correctness	17.50	2.164
Total	73.78	6.313

Like Table 2a above, Table 2b below shows the mean scores and the standard deviations for all the 20 subjects in the frequency-

count marking (T-unit analysis). Of particular interest here is the degree of variability among the subjects, especially in the amount of writing they were able to produce in 30 minutes as measured in words (SD = 74.056). This high variability establishes itself into a pattern down the table, perhaps with the exception of the last three entries. This seems to show that these subjects are in no way a homogeneous group.

TABLE 2b: Mean and Standard Deviation scores for all subjects from T-Unit Analysis

	Mean	Standard Deviation
TOTWDS	343.400	74.056
TOTTUS	21.300	4.943
TOTERRS	23.700	8.898
EFTUS	7.650	3.911
WDSEFTUS	97.850	56.160
MNTUL	16.656	2.972
MNERRPT	1.134	0.423
MNEFTUL	12.981	3.440

Table 3 shows the means and Standard Deviations of the scores of the 20 subjects in the profile assessment and the T-unit analysis separated into two groups based on the TESL ratings (p, c). That is, the four students that were awarded a "p" form one group, while the rest (16) that got a 'c' form another. Following from the TESL

assessment, one would expect the four students to outscore the other 16 in at least a clear majority of the aspects considered in this table. This seems to be the case. In the composition profile, the Cs better the Ps only on content and organization where they have higher means and lower standard deviations than the Ps. The Ps do better on expression and correctness, and end up with a better mean of the total scores. In T-unit analysis, the Ps do better in all the features that reckon with the absence of error: total errors, words in error-free T-units, error-free T-units, mean errors per T-unit, and mean error-free T-unit length. Although some of these differences are slight, the overall picture seems to be that those features in which the Ps excel played a significant role in influencing the TESL assessments. (Because of the small number of Ps, no statistics were calculated to determine the significance of the differences.)

Freshman English assessment divided the 20 subjects into three groups according to their ratings. Table 4 shows the three groups, and the means of each group for each aspect of the composition profile, and of the T-unit analysis. The reader should note that although those subjects rated 3 and those rated 4 are dealt with separately here, they fall into one broader category, English 104, and the two ratings share the same descriptors on the assessment guide sheet. In addition, since only two subjects were given a 3 rating, comparisons involving the 3s might not be as meaningful as those between the 4s and the 5s.

TABLE 3: Means and Standard Deviations of TESL 'p' and 'c' scores

	TESL 'p'		TESL 'c'	
	Mean 1	SD 1	Mean 2	SD 2
Content	18.750	2.723	19.063	1.711
Organization	18.500	2.198	18.938	1.642
Expression	20.125	1.250	18.000	1.722
Correctness	19.125	1.652	17.094	2.123
Total	76.500	6.178	73.094	6.354
TOTWDS	402.000	91.488	328.750	64.250
TOTTUS	21.000	4.967	21.375	5.097
TOTERRS	16.250	9.674	25.563	7.941
EFTUS	10.750	4.924	6.875	3.364
WDSEFTUS	174.250	55.259	78.750	37.929
MNTUL	19.307	3.228	15.994	2.600
MNERRPT	0.772	0.471	1.224	0.372
MNEFTUL	17.170	2.907	11.934	2.730

TABLE 4: Freshman English Assessment: Differences between the passes and the fails

	3 (n = 2)	4 (n = 11)	5 (n = 7)	TOTAL
Content	16.5000	20.0455	18.0714	19.0000
Organization	17.2500	19.5909	18.1429	18.8500
Expression	19.5000	19.0909	17.0714	18.4250
Correctness	18.2500	18.3636	15.9286	17.5000
Total	71.5000	77.0909	69.2143	73.7750
TOTWDS	354.5000	340.3636	345.0000	343.4000
TOTTUS	21.0000	20.8182	22.1429	21.3000
TOTERRS	14.0000	23.0000	27.5714	23.7000
EFTUS	13.0000	7.6364	6.1429	7.6500
WDSEFTUS	173.0000	100.3636	72.4286	97.8500
MNTUL	16.7900	16.7273	16.5071	16.6565
MNERRPT	0.6900	1.1309	1.2657	1.1340
MNEFTUL	12.9750	13.4655	12.2214	12.9810

Like in Table 3, one would expect the 3s and the 4s (Table 4) to do better than the 5s. This is generally so. Of note, however, is the content mean for the 3s which is substantially lower than those of both the 4s and the 5s; so is the mean on organization. On the other hand between the 4s and the 5s, the pattern is largely uninterrupted, except on TOTWDS and TOTTUS, where the 5s have higher means. However, as shall be shown later in the analysis and discussion of the results, this is not necessarily an advantage for the 5s.

Table 5 shows the results of comparing the TESL scores with the results of the profile assessments and the T-unit analysis. The purpose of this computation was to determine the significance of the relationships between the TESL and Composition Profile scores, and the TESL scores and the T-unit analysis scores as a way of estimating the extent to which the features on the profile and the T-unit analysis can be said to account for the scores given in the TESL assessment. Since, in doing this comparison the underlying null hypothesis is that the two variables being compared are independent, the hypothesis cannot be rejected because none of the observed significance levels is smaller than the critical value (probability = .05), that is, the variables are independent of each other. None of the aspects in this table, therefore, seems to have influenced the TESL assessments.

TABLE 5: The significance of the relationships between TESL scores and Composition Profile scores, and TESL scores and T-unit analysis scores

	Chi Square	Significance
Content	12.70833	0.1763
Organization	13.75000	0.3170
Expression	12.18750	0.2029
Correctness	11.66667	0.2328
Total	16.87500	0.3264
TOTWDS	16.87500	0.4629
TOTTUS	20.00000	0.0952
TOTERRS	12.70833	0.3906
EFTUS	13.75000	0.2471
WDSEFTUS	20.00000	0.3328
MNTUL	20.00000	0.3946
MNERRPT	20.00000	0.1719
MNEFTUL	20.00000	0.3328

Like Table 5, Table 6 shows the results of an analysis of variance between Freshman assessment scores and TESL scores, and Freshman assessment scores and T-unit analysis scores. The purpose of this computation is to determine the extent to which scores from analytic assessment and T-unit analysis can help explain the scores from the holistic Freshman assessment. Thus, figures in this table are intended to show what aspects of the profile and the T-unit analysis can be said to account for the scores on the Freshman English assessment. If the observed probability exceeds the critical value ( $p = .05$ ), then the two variables under consideration are said to be independent, that is, that they do not influence one another. In

Table 6, only three observed probabilities (on three of the four aspects of the composition profile) fall below the critical value. The total score also has a correlation with freshman assessment. Thus, content, expression, correctness, and overall effectiveness of the composition (total) can be said to have influenced the Freshman English assessments.

TABLE 6: Analysis of variance to determine the relationships between Freshman assessment scores and Composition profile scores, and Freshman assessment scores and T-unit analysis scores ( $p = .05$ ).

	F Ratio	F Probability
Content	7.2269	0.0054*
Organization	3.0471	0.0740
Expression	3.8997	0.0404*
Correctness	3.6264	0.0488*
Total	4.9000	0.0209*
TOTWDS	0.0299	0.9706
TOTTUS	0.1435	0.8674
TOTERRS	2.1043	0.1526
EFTUS	2.8599	0.0850
WDSEFTUS	3.0668	0.0729
MNTUL	0.0125	0.9876
MNERRPT	1.5214	0.2476
MNEFTUL	0.2578	0.7757

## CHAPTER 6: ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION OF RESULTS

The basic argument of this study as pointed out in the introduction was that the students used for the study were supposed to be good enough for Freshman English, that is, the two hypotheses were expected to be upheld. If the students were found to be not good enough, then the question would be, what was wrong with their writing? In order to answer this question, attempts would be made to find out what aspects of the compositions distinguished the passes from the fails, that is, what did the passes do right that the fails did wrong, and/or what did the former do more of that the latter did less of, and vice versa? In order to do this, attempts would have to first be made to identify those aspects of the compositions that could be said to have influenced the holistic assessments, to have played a significant part in determining the holistic ratings. It is these specific features that one could in a way say the subjects could well have been advised to take care of in order to pass. And finally, attempts would also be made to determine how good even those students that passed were, that is, how far they were from the perfect scores, and whether the differences were statistically significant. In other words, therefore, four questions would have to be addressed in this chapter:

- i) Were the hypotheses rejected or not?

- ii) Whether or not the hypotheses were rejected, what aspects of the compositions most influenced the assessors so that future pedagogy would emphasize those aspects?
- iii) If the hypotheses were rejected, were there any students who passed, and if any, what did they do better than those who failed, or what did they do differently from those who failed?
- iv) If there were any students who passed, did they perform as well as they should have?

In order to answer all these questions, use would have to be made of scores from the composition profile assessment, and from the T-unit analysis, as well as those from the holistic assessments. In this chapter, therefore, the results will be analyzed and discussed to provide probable answers to the above questions.

### The Hypotheses

Following from the tables of results in the previous chapter, it should be clear that both hypotheses that this study sought to test were rejected. It is readily clear that not all of the students passed the assessments. The first hypothesis said that all of the 20 students would be assessed a passing grade by the English Placement assessors, which would allow them to proceed to Freshman English. However, only four, a mere 20%, were deemed good enough for Freshman English. Similarly, the second hypothesis said that all the 20 students would be assessed a passing grade that would allow them to take Freshman English 104 or 105. However, like in the first

hypothesis, only a fraction--13/20 or 65%--were passed. This means that according to the TESL assessment, 80% of the subjects were not good enough to proceed to English 104 or 105, and according to the Freshman English assessment, 35% were not good enough for English 104 or 105.

The difference between the percentages is noteworthy because of its size; it is also noteworthy because it seems to be an inversion of the expected: one would have expected the TESL assessment to pass more than the freshman assessment, because since the TESL assessors are used to a lot of foreign English, they would tend to understand it more easily, and to be more lenient, than the freshman assessors. Perhaps the reason for the discrepancy is that the purpose of the ESL Placement Test is to screen the incoming International students, hence the inclination of the TESL assessors in this study towards passing/failing the students, while the purpose of the Freshman English Placement Test is not so much to fail students as simply to place them into either English 104, or English 105, hence the disinclination of the Freshman assessors in this study towards failing the students. However, in spite of the anomaly, the two holistic assessments were agreed on the major point, that some of the students were not good enough for unconditional admission to Iowa State University. Thus both hypotheses were rejected, the first one by a very big margin, the second one by a smaller, but equally significant, margin.

### **Factors that Influenced the Ratings**

While it is very clear that the two hypotheses were rejected, it is not as readily clear why some of the students passed and why others failed. According to Table 5 in the previous chapter, none of the aspects of the composition profile were deemed to be related to the TESL assessment; neither were the aspects of the T-unit analysis. This means that none of these features had an overriding influence, or even any possible influence at all, for better or for worse, on the TESL ratings. Thus one can say with a very high degree of confidence that the TESL assessors were not looking for such individual things as content, organization, expression; nor were they unduly influenced by such things as syntactical complexity, the number and frequency of errors, or the length of the compositions. Thus, one could hypothesize that they were looking for total communicative effectiveness.

On the other hand, however, Freshman English assessors seem to have been influenced by, or looking for, some features that are identified in the composition profile. According to Table 7 below (adapted from Table 6), these features are correctness, expression, and content. They were also influenced by the overall effectiveness of the compositions as reflected in the total score on the composition profile. This finding seems to support Bamberg's (1983) view on writing proficiency that the more the cues the writer gives the reader, and the less the errors which interfere with the reader's processing of the material, the greater the writing quality. However,

the assessors seem not to have been influenced by the specifics of syntactic complexity as revealed by T-unit analysis. As shown in Table 7, only EFTUS and WDSEFTUS came very close to influencing the ratings. Yet, that these two come close to significance in their relationship to freshman assessment makes sense because both the number of EFTUS and WDSEFTUS contribute to correctness, to the fluency and clarity of expression, and to the completeness of the content of the piece of writing, the three aspects of the composition profile that have been shown to be significantly related to freshman assessment.

TABLE 7: Factors that influenced Freshman English assessment ( $p = 0.5$ )

	F Ratio	F Probability
Content	7.2269	0.0054
Expression	3.8997	0.0404
Correctness	3.6264	0.0404
Total	4.9000	0.0209
EFTUS	2.8599	0.0850
WDSEFTUS	3.0668	0.0729

Thus, while according to the TESL assessment it is not clear what the students should have paid more attention to in order to perform better, it seems that they could have performed better in

freshman assessment if they had paid particular attention to correctness, expression, and content. In effect, these two seemingly different positions come down to the same thing: effectiveness of communication. The TESL assessors were looking for total communicative effect as pointed out earlier; likewise, the freshman assessors seem to have been looking for total communicative effect also, because what they emphasized is what goes to make writing quality, which subsumes effective communication: the subject of the discourse (content), effective cuing for the reader (expression, and also organization), and minimum impediments to coherence (correctness). It seems, therefore, that overall effective communication is a very important element in judgments of writing proficiency.

### Differences between the Passes and the Fails

Because the features that seemed to influence freshman assessment were identified, one expects that those who passed did better, in at least those aspects of the compositions, than those who failed. The picture is, however, a little different with the TESL assessment, because no single feature came out to be dominating, in which case one expects those who passed to do better, or at least as well as, those who failed, in all the aspects of the compositions as identified in the composition profile and the T-unit analysis. If these two speculations turn out to be correct, then one could say that those features that the passes were good at are the most important ones

which student writers must pay special attention to when composing. And for TESL assessment, one could also conjecture that these are the features that they were subconsciously looking for, or the features that dominated their assessments.

When grouped according to the results of the TESL assessment, those students who passed (the Ps) on the whole outscored those who failed (the Cs) in the composition profile assessment, and in the T-unit analysis. On the composition profile, the Ps outscored the Cs in expression and correctness, and ended up with a higher mean overall score. Even though the Cs seem to have outdone the Ps in content and organization, a t-test of the means shows that the difference is not statistically significant. Thus, correctness and expression seem to have had the power to discriminate the passes from the fails. One might, therefore, say that expression and correctness had greater influence on the TESL assessment than did the content and organization of the compositions (see Table 8 below for the results of the t-tests).

This likelihood seems to be reinforced by the results of the T-unit analysis. As also shown in Table 8, the Ps outperformed the Cs in all features, except perhaps in TOTTUS. However, even in TOTTUS, the difference between the Ps and the Cs is shown to be statistically non-significant, which means that the Cs were no better than the Ps in this aspect. Even if they were, it would not be a real advantage at all, because when one considers the TOTWDS, and the MNTUL, one realizes that this seeming advantage is not, because the resulting

short sentences give the composition a choppy rhythm that interferes with coherence, and therefore with the writing quality. The corollary of this seems to be that the Ps have better control of the T-units, that is, of syntactic structures, hence more fluency and clarity of expression.

TABLE 8: A t-test for the TESL 'p' and 'c' mean scores (alpha = .05; d.f. = 18; critical value of t = 1.73)

	TESL 'p'	TESL 'c'	observed t score
Content	18.750	19.063	- 0.66
Organization	18.500	18.938	- 1.40
Expression	20.125	18.000	19.46
Correctness	19.125	17.094	4.68
Total	76.500	73.094	2.14
TOTWDS	402.000	328.750	3.15
TOTTUS	21.000	21.375	- 0.29
TOTERRS	16.250	25.563	- 3.77
EFTUS	10.750	6.875	3.10
WDSEFTUS	174.250	78.750	6.81
MNTUL	19.307	15.994	4.02
MNERRPT	0.772	1.224	- 3.77
MNEFTUL	17.170	11.934	7.01

The Ps' better control of syntax is further shown by the fact that although they have lower mean TOTTUS than the Cs, they have a higher percentage of EFTUS to TOTTUS (51%) than the Cs (32%). This seems to echo Larsen-Freeman (1978) who observed a linear trend

towards a higher percentage of EFTUS as subjects exhibit a higher proficiency (from 11.4% for Group 1 to 49.6% for Group 5 in her study). Of particular note too is the difference in MNEFTUL (17.170 words for Ps, 11.934 words for Cs). This also echos Larsen-Freeman's conclusion that, on average, EFTUS tend to increase in length with proficiency (for example, from 4.61 words for Group 1 compositions to 13.20 words in Group 5 compositions in her study). If Larsen-Freeman's figures are anything to go by as a gauge of proficiency (which is what she was trying to develop), then one might be tempted to say that the subjects used in the current study were generally very proficient. But when one considers the fact that these students had had at least 10 years of English as a subject of instruction and as a medium of instruction in most of the subjects of their curriculum, these figures are not high enough, as will be discussed in the next subsection.

The point of prime consideration here is that the Ps came out better at handling mechanical accuracy and syntactical accuracy and complexity than did the Cs. This too is in line with Perkins's (1980) observation that those objective measures that reckon with the absence of errors discriminate well among holistic qualitative judgments of compositions. This finding from T-unit analysis reinforces the better overall performance of the Ps on expression and correctness in the composition profile assessment. Error is, therefore, an important dimension of writing proficiency.

More or less the same picture emerges when the subjects are grouped according to their ratings in the Freshman English assessment. For the purpose of this analysis, the two 3s shown in Tables 1 and 4 were combined with the 4s; this reorganization did not sacrifice overall accuracy because according to the assessment guide sheet, grades 3 and 4 fall under one category, English 104, and share the same descriptors, such that the Freshman assessment scores in Table 1 basically fall into two categories, pass (English 104), and fail for those judged to be deficient in basic skills. (See Appendix for a copy of the guide sheet.) In fact, therefore, it is more problematic and less accurate to deal with the 3s and the 4s separately as was shown in Chapter 5, than to deal with them as one group.

On the composition profile, the 4s outperformed the 5s on all the aspects of the profile. As shown in Table 9 below, the differences in the means of the two groups on all the four aspects of the profile are statistically very significant. This wide gap also shows itself in the means of the totals. Thus, the differences between the two groups are much clearer here than in the TESL assessment where those subjects who were failed almost outperformed the passes in two aspects on the profile. Perhaps the reason is that in the TESL assessment, one of the groups is only a quarter as big as the other, which makes its statistics less stable than those of the other group. On the other hand in the Freshman assessment, the two groups are not very different in size, such that their statistics are more or less

equally stable. Whatever the explanation, Freshman assessment seemed to have better separated the passes from the fails as judged on the basis of the composition profile scores, where the passes clearly did better than the fails in all aspects of the profile. Thus, it seems that control of content, organization, expression, and correctness is a very important factor in the judgment of writing proficiency.

Similarly on T-unit analysis, the 4s outperformed the 5s. Note that on average, the 5s wrote slightly longer compositions, whether measured in terms of words or T-units. Yet this is not necessarily a plus for them, because they have fewer WDSEFTUS (72.43 vs. 111.5), and a lower percentage of EFTUS to TOTTUS (27.7% vs. 40.6%) than the 4s. After all, as shown in Table 9 below, the differences in TOTWDS and in TOTTUS between the 4s and the 5s are so slight as to be insignificant, which means that the 5s are not better than the 4s at all. What these sets of figures mean is that the 5s made a lot more errors than the 4s, which seems to agree with the differences in the means of the correctness scores discussed above. This is clearly reflected by the high t-test scores on all of the other statistics that reckon with the absence or presence of error. The 4s are, therefore, clearly different from the 5s, and T-unit analysis successfully discriminates between the passes and the fails from Freshman English assessment. Thus, error, as it interferes with expression, coherence, and therefore, writing quality, again emerges as a very important element in the judgment of writing proficiency.

TABLE 9: t-test scores on the difference between the passes and the fails from Freshman English assessment (alpha = .05; d.f. = 18; critical value of t = 1.73).

	4s	5s	observed t value
Content	19.50	18.07	6.50*
Organization	19.23	18.14	4.95*
Expression	19.15	17.07	10.95*
Correctness	18.35	15.93	8.96*
Total	76.23	69.21	6.95*
TOTWDS	342.54	345.00	- 0.17
TOTTUS	20.85	22.14	- 1.63
TOTERRS	21.61	27.57	- 4.41*
EFTUS	8.46	6.14	5.40*
WDSEFTUS	111.54	72.43	6.63*
MNTUL	16.74	16.51	0.70
MNERRPT	1.06	1.27	-70.00*
MNEFTUL	13.39	12.22	1.75*

When both holistic assessments are taken into consideration, there are some common features that differentiate the students who passed from those who failed. In both assessments, error as it interferes with fluency and clarity of expression, and with coherence, seems to be a very important discriminating factor between the passing and the failing compositions. The next important feature is expression, then finally content and organization. Writing proficiency, therefore, at least at Iowa State University, seems to mean saying well what one has to say.

### Differences between the Actual and the Possible Scores

Although four of the students passed the TESL assessment, and 13 passed the freshman assessment, none of them did as well as was possible in both the holistic assessments and the analytical scoring and the frequency-count marking.

In the TESL assessment, it is difficult to say how much better the four students could have performed than they did, because no scores were given, neither were the passing grades staggered to show the degrees of passing. In freshman assessment on the other hand, while no scores were given, at least the passing grades were staggered such that one can say whether or not the 13 students did the best possible. The best of the passing grades was a 1, and the least a 4. Only two of the students got a 3, and the rest a 4. None got a 2, or a 1. This means that although 13 students did well enough to pass the freshman assessment, none did as well as was possible.

In the composition profile, the four students who passed the TESL assessment, and the 13 who passed the freshman assessment, did not do the best that was possible, nor did they come very close. The best possible was 25 points for each aspect of the profile, giving a total of 100 points. None of the students got a perfect score, or a near perfect score, on any of the aspects, or overall. The best student got 85.5 points, which was 14.5 points below the best possible, while only four students got above 80 points. On the whole, therefore, the students were far from what one expected, especially given the fact

that these students were regarded as the best writers in the school by their teachers.

Unlike in the composition profile, in T-unit analysis there was no absolute against which to compare the actual scores. However, the aspects of the analysis divided themselves into roughly two groups, the totals and the fractions of those totals, except TOTERRS and MNERRPT where the desired "total" is a zero. For example, EFTUS is a fraction of TOTTUS. Comparing these two figures would show how far the fraction was from the whole, with the whole taken as the possible, and the fraction as the actual. Using this technique, a t-test of pairs of means for both the 4 TESL passes and the 13 freshman passes computed separately showed that the differences between the means in each pair were statistically significant. As in the composition profile, this means that the students failed to get all their T-units error-free not by chance, but because they could not, that is, they could not rid their compositions of error so that EFTUS would equal TOTTUS, MNEFTUL would equal MNTUL, WDSEFTUS would equal TOTWDS, and MNERRPT and TOTERRS would both equal zero. Thus one could say that the scores that the students got in this analysis were probably a correct reflection of their writing proficiency at that point.

Summary of the chapter The hypotheses that this study was testing were both rejected. The reason is that some of the students failed the assessments. Perhaps the students could not have done

much better because, it seems, they did their best which, unfortunately, did not meet the expectations of the assessors. This has been shown to be so by the big difference between the actual scores of those who passed, and the possible scores. Since the differences in performance between those who passed and those who failed were shown to be statistically significant, it means that those who failed could not have done better either in comparison with the perfect scores. The aspects of the compositions that the assessments seemed to emphasize, or at least be influenced by, were shown to be error as it affects expression and coherence, clarity and fluency of expression, content, and organization. These aspects, it was also shown, boil down to effective communication. Both passes and fails should, therefore, improve their overall communication.

## CHAPTER 7: CONCLUSION

The findings of this study can be summarized as follows:

- a) Neither of the two hypotheses--that the students in the sample would pass the Iowa State University ESL placement test, and that they would meet the Freshman English placement test requirements--was upheld, because there are some students who failed each of the two holistic assessments.
- b) Error as it interferes with expression and coherence was found to be a very important factor in judgments of writing proficiency.
- c) Expression and correctness were invariably found to be effective discriminating features of the passes from the fails.
- d) A significant difference was found to exist, on average, between the passes and the fails on holistic assessments.
- e) Even those who passed were found to not have done the best possible, to have just put up a mediocre performance.
- f) Marked differences exist between TESL and Freshman English assessments.

These findings are expanded on below.

Following from the discussion above, the students who were judged unsuccessful would have to work on those features that were shown to influence holistic grading. But since these features have been seen to make up effective total communication, it means that the students would have to improve on their all round

communicative abilities. Thus, generally, this subgroup of the students displayed a somewhat low overall writing proficiency.

However, it was also shown that even those who passed performed far below expectation, and that the gap between the actual and the possible was wide enough to mean that they should not have done much better. The performance of the best of this sample of students was, therefore, not much better than just mediocre. This means that, if the assumptions of the normal curve hold true in this case, the pattern of performance exhibited by these students can be generalized to the student population from which this sample was drawn, implying that there are probably much fewer good writers in the population than one would like to see. This would be very surprising, given the fact that each of the students had had at least 10 years of English, both as a subject of instruction, and as a medium of instruction for most of the other school subjects.

If the above speculations are correct, and given the minimum of ten years of English, the students are not the only ones to blame; one would also blame the teachers for not teaching the students how to be good writers. But, considering the findings of the Morrison (1988) report on the training of teachers of English in the teachers' colleges, part of the blame shifts from the teachers to the teachers' colleges. Tracing this blame-shifting process to its final conclusion ends up in a vicious cycle, which, come to think of it, leads this writer to think that the whole system of education as it impinges on, and

the society's attitude towards, and expectations of, the teaching of writing, might be partly accountable for the results of this study.

The following description of the teaching of writing in Zimbabwe might help clarify issues. The writing class is, by and large, a class hated by both teachers and students, especially in the secondary schools. The major reason seems to be that neither of the two parties understands the "why" of the writing. That is, writing is not seen as a knowledge-making process, something that should be meaningful to the writer, an opportunity for the writer to explore and discover oneself, or to communicate something to the outer world. Writing assignments are seen as an opportunity for the students to display their basic grammatical incompetencies, and for the teacher to show the students how incompetent they are, but without really helping them out of those incompetencies. The focus is on mechanical accuracy, and the grading of papers is in large measure an act of justifying an arbitrary grade by indicating as many spelling, syntactic, and such like surface problems as the teacher has the time and energy to hunt down. No wonder why there never seems to be progress--indeed the progress is very slight, given the narrow focus--for errors continually show up; the students continue to make errors, and the teacher continues to laboriously bleed the students' papers in search of the errors. Thus the class cannot help but be dull, boring, and even intimidating, for both teacher and students.

Given the unrelenting focus on errors by the system in which the students in this study learned to write, and the focus on overall effective communication by the TESL and freshman assessors, there was a mismatch. Ironically, the errors, the dimension of the compositions that was supposed to be the students' strength, came to interfere very seriously with the little of content, organization, and expression that the students had managed to drum up. As a result, although not very bad, the students' performance was below expectation. Of course one might say that this low performance was justified, given the mismatch in focus. The question then comes to be which of the two views of writing proficiency represented by these two foci is better and would be better for Zimbabwe. Effective communication! English is learnt in Zimbabwe not in order to be correct, but in order to communicate; correctness is secondary to communication. Communication should be the goal, with correctness coming in only to clear the way. The society cannot afford the luxury of correctness at the expense of communication.

If the above statement accurately represents the general feeling in the society, then the teaching of English in general, but especially writing in English, in the schools negates the needs and wishes of the society that the schools must reflect and serve. This issue would, therefore, need to be re-examined.

Yet, the results of this study should not be taken to mean that the teaching of writing in Zimbabwe is hopeless, that things are falling apart. Rather, they should be taken to mean that there is

something wrong in the system, and that, therefore, the system needs to re-examine itself and make amends. The system has the capability both to re-examine itself, and to institute the necessary changes. The sooner these things happen, the better.

### Limitations

Yet, one cannot make sweeping generalizations based on this study, because there are limitations. One obvious limitation is the fact of the different Englishes, that of the students, and that of the assessors. If British and American English are noticeably different, then more so are Zimbabwean and American English. Although Zimbabwean English is molded along British lines, it has evidence of the influence of the local languages to the extent that some of the Shona idioms and sayings that have been translated into English are now acceptable in Zimbabwean English (Ngara 1982). So, for example, it is highly probable that the students in this study were penalized for some of the grammatical patterns and expressions that would be acceptable in Zimbabwe. For example, "school leaver" in Zimbabwean English translates to "high school graduate", not "dropout", in American English. Thus there is a very real danger that some of the scores and ratings that the students obtained were a function of this difference in the varieties of English.

Another limitation of this study is the sample size. Only 20 Form 4 students were used for the study, out of thousands of the students who were in Form 4 that year. This sample is therefore of

negligible size in comparison to the size of the population. In addition, although it was argued in Chapter 2 (Background) that the school chosen from which to draw the sample is representative of the schools in Zimbabwe, it is only one of thousands, each with its own peculiarities. Thus both the sample size, and the fact that the subjects were drawn from one school, make it difficult to generalize the findings without caution.

Another limitation is that only one writing sample for each student was used. According to Jacobs et al., at least two writing samples are needed for a more accurate assessment of one's writing ability. This is based on the view that the one sample might not give the best reflection of the writer's abilities. Thus because this study used only one sample for each student, it is not statistically safe and professionally proper to overgeneralize the significance of the findings. In order to minimize the effects of this limitation, and increase the reliability of the findings, a lot of tests of significance were used. Therefore, in spite of the limitations, the findings from this study are at least a good pointer to the reality out there.

### **Implications for Pedagogy and Research**

#### **Pedagogy**

Since, as pointed out above, the society needs communication more than it needs correctness, the schools must respond to this need. The teaching of writing must devise a system of relative emphasis between the two. For example, since writing is taught from

Grade 1 through Form 4, communication would receive greater emphasis than correctness in Grades 1 to 4 (Phase 1); in grades 5 through Grade 7 to Form 1 (Phase 2), there would be more emphasis on correctness; then from Form 2 to Form 4 (Phase 3), greater emphasis would be on communication again.

This structure of staggered emphases would enable the students to develop a high degree of communicative ability, and a reasonable-to-high degree of control of the mechanical aspects of the language. Phase 1 would be the acquisition stage, when students are encouraged to learn to communicate in English without being bogged down by undue attention to correctness which can be inhibiting; Phase 2 would be the rule-learning stage when the students, now confident with their ability to express themselves in English, learn the correct rules of grammar as a way of improving their communicative ability; and Phase 3 would be the application stage when the students apply their communication skills in writing about a variety of topics. Thus in their later school years, students would concentrate on communication without having to pay too much attention to mechanics. Research has corroborated the commonsense view that poor writers overload their short term memories with the basics and are therefore unable to deal with the more important issues of content, organization, and expression. Thus the suggested strategy would free the students' secondary school years, and also the teachers of those students, to concentrate on the more important issues of communication.

The strategy suggested above calls for a shift in the philosophy of teaching writing, especially in the secondary schools, from a concentration on correctness to a concentration on communication. This would necessitate a change in the current teacher training programs in order to produce a teacher who will be able to cope with the new ways of teaching. It will also mean that those teachers already in the field would have to be retrained, or at least reorientated through refresher courses, workshops, and teachers' meetings.

Accompanying the above reorganization is a redefinition of writing proficiency. Currently, both the teachers and the students, in the majority of cases, believe that writing proficiency is synonymous with correctness, hence the focus on errors in the grading of the students' papers. The society in general also believes likewise, parents expecting their children to be told where they are wrong, the focus being on mechanical errors. Thus, apart from re-educating the teachers, the students and the wider society need to be clear that what constitutes successful writing is effective communication of the writer's message, and that mechanical accuracy is only a part of that communication process.

Another point to consider very seriously is the teaching of writing beyond Form 4, in Forms 5 and 6, and in teachers' colleges, for example. If the teaching of writing is reorganized as suggested above, such that it becomes effective up to Form 4, there might be no need to teach it in Forms 5 and 6. However, whether or not it

becomes more effective in the secondary schools, student teachers in the teachers' colleges should be required to take some writing courses regardless of their subjects of specialization. The reason for doing this is quite obvious with regard to those training to be teachers of English. Requiring the other student teachers to take it as well would help promote the idea of writing across the curriculum, and therefore ensure an all-round writing instruction for the students in the schools, thus increasing their chances of becoming good writers.

### Research

Because of the sample size, because all the subjects in the sample were drawn from one school, and because only one writing sample was used per subject as discussed under Limitations above, this study can be viewed as just a pilot study of a bigger study. That is, there is need to carry out a similar but bigger study to find out if the results of this study will be corroborated. The study would have to involve a bigger sample, selected by a stricter random sampling method to ensure representativeness; it would have to cover a bigger sample of schools, also selected by random sampling from all the three groupings of schools identified in Chapter 2, and drawn from all over the country; and it would also better involve readers familiar with Zimbabwean English in order to minimize the effects of different Englishes. Generalizations from the results of such a study would be more accurate than those from this study.

A related research possibility is finding out from the teachers how they teach writing and what they think about it, and from the students how they are taught writing and what they think about it. This can also bring in a survey of correctness versus communication as a measure of writing ability--this can be done with teachers, students, other people involved with education, and also others outside the education system, in order to see how close together society and the education system are. Such a study would identify problem areas and the probable causes of the problems, and possibly suggest solutions and strategies to solving the problems.

Many other research possibilities could stem from this study. Just to mention two, one could study the writing of students regarded as poor writers by their teachers; one could also study the writing of students in tertiary education by major or regardless of major. What is particularly important, arising from this study, is that the practices of writing and of teaching writing in Zimbabwe, and the attitudes towards these, be closely studied and critically analyzed. This writer hopes that if this study, preliminary though it is, is not a milestone in the research on writing and the teaching of writing in Zimbabwean schools, it is at least an important contribution to an understanding of the treatment of this skill (of writing) which is one of the most important skills education in Zimbabwe, and indeed all over the world, should impart to its students.

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Bamberg, Betty. (1983). "What Makes a Text Coherent?" College Composition and Communication 34, No. 4, 417-427.
- Bamberg, Betty. (1984). "Assessing Coherence: A Reanalysis of Essays Written for the National Assessment of Educational Progress, 1969-79." Research in the Teaching of English 18, No. 3, 305-317.
- Connor, Ulla. (1987). "Research Frontiers in Writing Analysis." TESOL Quarterly 21, No. 4, 677-696.
- Cooper, Allene. (1988). "Given-New: Enhancing Coherence through Cohesiveness." Written Communication 5, No. 3, 352-367.
- Cooper, C. R. (1977). "Holistic Evaluation of Writing." Evaluating Writing: Describing, Measuring, Judging. Ed. C. R. Cooper and Lee Odell. Urbana, Illinois: National Council of Teachers of English.
- Fitzgerald, Jill & Spiegel, Dixie Lee. (1986). "Textual Cohesion and Coherence in Children's Writing." Research in the Teaching of English 20, No. 3, 263-280.

- Gaies, Stephen J. (1980). "T-Unit Analysis in Second Language Research: Applications, Problems and Limitations." TESOL Quarterly 14, No. 1, 53-60.
- Golden, Joanne M. & Vukelich, Carol. (1989). "Coherence in Children's Written Narratives." Written Communication 6, No. 1, 45-65.
- Jacobs, Holly L., Zinkgraf, Stephen A., Wormuth, Deanna R., Hartfiel, V. Faye, & Hughey, Jane B. (1981). Testing ESL Composition: A Practical Approach. Rowley, Massachusetts: Newbury House Publishers.
- Johns, A. (1986). "Coherence in Academic Writing: Some definitions and suggestions for teaching." TESOL Quarterly 20, No 2 , 247-266.
- Larsen-Freeman, Diane. (1978). "An ESL Index of Development." TESOL Quarterly 12, No. 4, 439-447.
- McCulley, George. (1985). "Writing Quality, Coherence, and Cohesion." Research in the Teaching of English 19, No. 3, 269-281.

Morrison, J. W. (1988). "Consultancy to Advise on Programme to Enhance Communication Skills in Teacher Education." An Overseas Development Agency (ODA) Financed Consultancy for the Ministry of Education, Zimbabwe.

Ngara, Emmanuel A. (1982). Bilingualism, Language Contact and Language Planning: Proposals for Language Use and Language Teaching in Zimbabwe. Gweru, Zimbabwe: Mambo Press.

Perkins, Kyle. (1980). "Using Objective Methods of Attained Writing Proficiency to Discriminate among Holistic Evaluations." TESOL Quarterly 14, No. 1, 61-69.

Perkins, Kyle. (1983). "On the use of Composition Scoring Techniques, Objective Measures, and Objective Tests to Evaluate ESL Writing Ability." TESOL Quarterly 17, No. 4, 651-671.

Steffensen, Margaret. (1986). "Register, Cohesion, and Cross-cultural Reading Comprehension." Applied Linguistics 7, No. 1, 71-85.

Vann, Roberta. (1979). "Oral and Written Syntactic Relationships in Second Language Learning." On TESOL '79: The Learner Focus. Ed. Carlos A. Yorio, Kyle Perkins, and Jacquelyn Schachter. Washington, D. C.: TESOL.

Witte, Stephen P. & Faigley, Lester. (1981). "Coherence, Cohesion, and Writing Quality." College Composition and Communication 32, No. 1, 189-203.

**APPENDIX**

NAME: \_\_\_\_\_

COMPOSITION

INSTRUCTIONS.

Your TEACHER will choose one of the following topics and ask you to write a well organized composition on it. You will be allowed thirty (30) minutes to think about the topic, organize your ideas, and write the composition. Write as much as you can in the given time - there is no limit to the length of the composition.

Topic 1.

Think of an important problem that exists in your country today. Describe the problem briefly and then discuss:

- What caused the problem.
- What the effects have been.
- What is being done to solve the problem.

Topic 2.

The last twelve months have produced many news stories about natural disasters (floods, fires, droughts, earthquakes), man-made disasters (aeroplane crashes, explosions, etc), wars, signs of peace, sports events, elections, court decisions, scientific discoveries, etc. Select one news story on any topic that you are familiar with--from your city, your country or elsewhere in the world. Describe what happened, and then discuss the importance of the event. You might want to write about

- the cause(s) of the event
- the immediate effects of the event
- the possible future effects of the event
- opinions of the event by various groups of people.

oooooooooooooooooooooooooooo

Start Writing Here :

---



---



---



---



---



---

Write a well organized composition on the following topic. You have 30 minutes to think about the topic, organize your ideas, and write a composition. You may make notes on the paper and you may ask for additional paper if you need it. You may not use a dictionary. Your composition will be graded on content, organization, and language use.

Think of an important problem that exists in your country today. Describe the problem briefly and then discuss:

What caused the problem.

What the effects have been.

What is being done to solve the problem.

FRESHMAN ENGLISH ASSESSMENT

Instructions to Readers

Readers will assess the compositions exactly as they assess real Freshman English papers.

Due: Friday 3/9/90

NB: There are 21 scripts numbered 1-22; No. 8 is not there.

Addresses prompt perceptively.  
 At least a page long.  
 Develops topic with interesting examples.  
 Competent organization, sense of development is present from beginning to end.  
 Language is appropriate to audience.  
 Has command of vocabulary and syntax.  
 Grammar, punctuation, spelling are correct, though may have occasional problem.

Addresses prompt inappropriately.  
 Half page long or less.  
 Undeveloped idea.  
 Random organization.  
 Narrow language range.  
 Tangled syntax.  
 Recurrent grammatical problems.  
 Punctuation errors suggest problems with sentence boundaries.  
 Major spelling problems.

Addresses prompt appropriately.  
 Close to a page long.  
 Includes pertinent content and is aware of need for example or illustration.  
 Discernible pattern of organization with occasional digression.  
 Occasional awareness of audience.  
 Command of syntax assures clarity of expression.  
 Writer controls punctuation.  
 Spells common words with accuracy but has trouble with demons and other words occasionally.  
 Some grammatical problems:

Off topic.  
 Dialect interference beyond BSD.  
 So brief, cannot judge competence.

## ESL COMPOSITION PROFILE ASSESSMENT

## Instructions to Readers

## Readers will:

- \* assess the compositions exactly as they assess real English 101 papers
- \* indicate errors in the text
- \* use their own marking symbols, and supply a copy of their interpretations.

## Indicating Errors

For the purposes of this study, 'error' shall be defined as a flaw in the language which interferes with the understanding of the text. The following are the major categories:

- \* syntactic
- \* lexical
- \* spelling, if it makes a difference in meaning or grammatical correctness
- \* punctuation, if it affects meaning or grammatical correctness.

Due: Friday 3/9/90

NB: There are 21 scripts numbered 1-22; there is no No. 8.

**CONTENT**

- 25 EXCELLENT: authoritative, perceptive treatment of topic: clear purpose: appropriate for reader: clearly focused thesis: thorough development with relevant, substantial support
- 22 GOOD: topic thoughtful but not as complex or perceptive as in an excellent paper: clear purpose: appropriate for reader: clearly focused thesis: good development with relevant support
- 19 FAIR: clear topic but may be too general or obvious: purpose may be unclear: may not address a particular reader: thesis may be unfocused or not clearly stated: development fair but needs to be more complete or specific
- 16 POOR: topic superficial or incomplete: unclear purpose: not appropriate for reader: no clear thesis: development weak or illogical: generalizations made without supporting evidence
- 13 UNACCEPTABLE: no clear topic, purpose or thesis: paper does not fulfill assignment: development unsatisfactory: too short to evaluate

**ORGANIZATION**

- 25 EXCELLENT: very effective plan: logical sequence: main ideas clearly emphasized: unified: all paragraphs support thesis and contribute to total effect: paragraphs have clear controlling ideas: coherent: relationship of ideas clear: transitional devices used skillfully: interesting introduction clearly foreshadows paper: effective conclusion
- 22 GOOD: fairly clear plan: most ideas in logical sequence: unified: all paragraphs support thesis and have clear controlling ideas: fairly coherent: relationship of ideas usually clear: transitional devices used accurately: introduction foreshadows paper: relevant conclusion
- 19 FAIR: plan may not be complete: ideas not always in logical sequence: not totally unified: some paragraphs need clearer relationship to thesis or controlling ideas: coherence weak or awkward in places: transitions may be missing or inappropriate: introduction may not attract reader's attention or foreshadow paper clearly: conclusion may be weak
- 16 POOR: weak plan: ideas hard to follow: illogical sequence: may ramble or jump around: not unified: paragraphs may not have controlling ideas or may not support thesis: poor coherence: incomplete explanations or inappropriate transitions: introduction and conclusion missing or inappropriate
- 13 UNACCEPTABLE: no plan: ideas confused: paragraphs arranged illogically: no unity or coherence: too short to evaluate

**EXPRESSION**

- 25 EXCELLENT: vocabulary precise, economical, vivid: register consistently appropriate: sentences varied in length and structure: language used skillfully to emphasize meaning
- 22 GOOD: vocabulary usually accurate, but not as precise or vivid as an excellent paper: register usually appropriate: sentence structure used to emphasize main ideas: language effective, but occasional non-native word order or usage
- 19 FAIR: vocabulary fairly accurate but limited or imprecise: errors of word choice: wordy: register sometimes too informal or formal: sentence structure not used skillfully for emphasis: short, choppy sentences: stilted, unnatural language
- 13 UNACCEPTABLE: little knowledge of English vocabulary: language extremely limited and confusing: does not communicate

**GRAMMATICAL CORRECTNESS**

- 25 EXCELLENT: native-like grammatical proficiency
- 22 GOOD: considerable grammatical proficiency
- 19 FAIR: adequate grammatical proficiency
- 16 POOR: weak grammatical proficiency
- 13 UNACCEPTABLE: little grammatical proficiency

**PROBLEM AREAS**

- verb forms    verb tense agreement
- word order    word form number
- pronouns    prepositions articles
- fragments    run-ons
- sentence structure
- spelling    punctuation

Subject 1.

Unemployment

In our country Zimbabwe there has been established the most affecting problems of unemployment. The government in turn has/is trying to solve this problem by encouraging people to open up business in order to cater this effective problem. Most school leavers are wander in town trying to seek for job but chance cannot present although he might have got out with flying colors.

Job shortage have been made here because of various cause. As it can be seen there has been lack of understanding each other in the country. people cannot treat each otherhance they cannot open up co-operatives societies. They only want to reliar with the Government's help in which case the Government cannot create jobs to cater each and everyone's problem.

Corruption is one of the magor factor deterioration of job creation is a very think practised in Zimbabwe. Some school leavers have passed cannot geta job because he or she does not have a brother, sister, uncle in the company. Some high position man in a company did to give a job to some by being bribed while on the other hand regionalism, nepotism, nationalism, sexual favor, fraud contribute to the unemployment problems.

Due to this various factors distant can be an outbreak in a country. Prostitution to get money can be practised and hence increase the badness of the killer disease aids.

The countries capital is lost through wanting to buy chamental and madicine to try and cure these sexual transmited diseases.

Crime will be at a high rate since each and everyone want to have money so he will try by evil means to get it.

There will also be a reduction in skilled labour because some knowledged man will fled away to countries with enough infrasture.

The government is desparately trying by all means to solve this problem. It is providing capital to those who want to open up shops.

School leaver are also engaged in self job and hence they will reduce this problem. Co-operatives are encouraged everwhere.

%%%%%%%%%

## Subject 2

During the liberation war, it happened that many rural areas were affected by the war. The freedom fighters spent most of the time during the war operating in the rural areas, so as a result the Rhodesian soldiers asked the rural inhabitants about the whereabouts of the freedom fighters. When they refused to answer homes were burnt, cattle killed and people were bashed to death. At times the freedom fighters organised some meetings with villagers and if the soldiers of the Rhodesian army heard about it they called for helicopters and bombarded the whole area. People left villages and found shelters in towns.

Now when the war was over the villagers and others who did not stay in the villages flocked back to rebuild their homes but they found their places already occupied by some people, so people had nowhere to live. The government established some resettlement schemes where people were allocated to a particular portion of land and they will be supplied with seeds, building materials and some facilities such as clinics, schools and good water. These resettlements contain a population of about a hundred families. These people, with the aid of the government are able to make use of the land and other natural resources around them. They plant trees, making woodlots, thus preserving the vegetation and preventing soil erosion.

Before this plan of resettlement schemes towns like Mutare was having a very high population because people from nearby villages had left them and had started building shanty town within the sphere of influence of the town. The inhabitants of these shanty towns did not work and most of them spent the time roaming the streets, examining the weak points of the areas and at night they rob the places. They made their living out of robbery and smuggling goods from nearby countries.

As a result of the shanty towns diseases broke out and spread throughout the town. This was due to lack of health facilities and good water and sanitary systems. So the government relieved such towns when the programme of resettlement schemes was established. It also helped some of the citizens who had been unable to have a piece of land in the rural areas. Those who could work and raise their families but had no job were helped because now they are being able to use the land they are given for various purposes and produce enough for the family and profit.

%%%%%%%%%