

Approaches to Writing Evaluation

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英語論文作成評価の方法

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Abstract

This paper examines how teachers evaluate writing. Ten teachers of Core Studies I: Academic Writing at Osaka Jogakuin College evaluated four pieces of writing from students. The evaluations were then examined to determine the type of evaluation each teacher made. Results indicate that teachers evaluate essays in a wide variety of ways but generally reach scores that are similar.

Key words: writing, evaluation

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抄 録

本稿では、教師がどのように英語論文作成を評価しているのかを考察する。大阪女学院短期大学の授業のひとつ、Core Study I: Academic Writingを担当する10人の教師が、学生が書いた4つの英語論文の評価を行った。各教師による評価を分析した結果、評価の方法は教師によって多種多様であるにも拘わらず、最終的には類似したスコアに達することが明らかになった。

キーワード：作文、評価

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Introduction

Academic Writing is one component of the Osaka Jogakuin College integrated first-year English curriculum. (See Swenson, Chihara, and McKay, 2000 for details on the curriculum.) Students are separated into classes on the basis of a placement test administered before classes begin each year. (See Chihara, Swenson, and Cornwell, 2000, for an explanation of the placement test.) While the entry level of the students varies between classes at different levels, each section of the course is expected to complete the same required materials. More importantly, students in all sections of the course, at all levels of entry-level English ability, are expected to write the same required paragraphs and essays.

A concern in any program where multiple sections of a class are taught by a number of teachers is that of consistency in evaluation. While differences in evaluation are, of course, inevitable, there is a definite need to maintain consistency in grading. One way this is done in the Core Studies I: Academic Writing course at Osaka Jogakuin College is a yearly meeting with all of the course teachers. During this meeting, teachers review the course requirements and discuss ways to teach the materials. Teachers also discuss evaluation procedures and are given the opportunity to explain how they evaluate their students.

Prior this meeting in 2002, I asked teachers to evaluate several essays by students in one writing course and prepare to discuss these essays during the session. This was a valuable meeting, and teachers were able to see how their colleagues had evaluated the same essays and consider using various suggestions for their own evaluations. However, no detailed analysis of the types of evaluation was made at that time. In reviewing these materials, I felt that an analysis of how teachers evaluate student essays would be beneficial not only to the writing course teachers, but also to those teaching other courses with multiple sessions.

I examined the evaluations of the four essays in order to determine how teachers of the Academic Writing course at Osaka Jogakuin College evaluate student writing and the types of evaluations they do.

The Study

Procedure

The selection of writing samples materials for teacher evaluation was made from papers submitted by students in one Academic Writing course. The papers were typed to eliminate any effect that difference in handwriting or formatting might have on teacher evaluations. All errors in grammar, punctuation, spelling, or style were accurately

reproduced. Headers and other identifying information were removed to assure the students' anonymity.

After reviewing the essays I had on file, essays written by students in one section of Academic Writing during the 2001 academic year, I decided to select the samples submitted at the beginning of the school year (Unit 1) and the end (Unit 4) to provide a broad understanding of how teachers evaluate materials at different points in the curriculum without being too burdensome a task in the time available. I then selected four writing samples from those available. Two samples had been submitted for Unit 1 paragraphs following the illustration pattern of rhetorical development. One sample had been submitted for a Unit 1 paragraph following the process pattern. One sample had been submitted as a Unit 4 persuasive essay. (See Appendix A for copies of the four writing samples.) The samples were labeled A through D for identification purposes.

Teachers were given one week to evaluate and return the samples. The directions asked them to evaluate the papers as they would those submitted by their students (see Appendix B). Ten evaluations were completed and brought with teachers to the April 2002 teachers' meeting for discussion.

Following the meeting, I examined the 10 evaluations to determine the teachers' general approach to evaluating the essays. When necessary, teachers were asked individually to clarify aspects of their evaluations.

Then, scores given by each teacher for each of the four essays were recorded and the specific ways in which they evaluated the essays examined for the following:

- 1) The number of errors identified
- 2) The number of corrections made
- 3) The number of questions asked
- 4) The number of comments made in the body of the paper
- 5) The number of words written by the teacher in the body of the paper
- 6) The number of words written in comments at the of the paper

In addition, I then asked whether errors identified, corrections made, questions asked, and comments given were form focused or meaning focused. Each evaluation was then examined to see if the types of comments and corrections made focused on form (e.g. grammar, word choice, spelling, writing conventions) or meaning for each of the above six categories. These were then totaled for Essays A through D for each teacher. Data was entered on evaluations sheets for each teacher (see Appendix C), then recorded in an Excel worksheet (Microsoft, 2000) to ease comparisons.

Results and Discussion

The 10 teachers showed three different approaches to assigning an overall score to the

papers. Two teachers gave letter grades (A, A-, B+, etc.) to the essays. Six gave a single numerical score on a 100-point scale. Two gave a numerical score on a 100-point scale, but sub-divided this score into various subcategories. One followed the categories on the Newbury ESL Composition Profile (1981). This scale separates grading into five components and assigns points based on a detailed description of each section. The five components are content (30 points), organization (20 points), vocabulary (20 points), language use (i.e. grammar) (25 points), mechanics (i.e. spelling and writing conventions) (5 points). The other teacher that separated scores in separate components reported that the components had been modified from the Newbury scale to reflect the type of writing students do at Osaka Jogakuin College. This scale had three separate components: content (50 points), organization (30 points), mechanics and grammar (20 points).

The evaluations were also examined for comments to the researcher that would not have been included in comments returned to the students. One teacher wrote:

I have trouble giving grades to these without knowing what other essays/paragraphs the class turned in. I wouldn't give 100 to 90, but I would give a few a 60. I definitely compare the papers with each other. (Personal communication, April 2002)

In conversations with various teachers, many indicated that not knowing the students and the work they had done made it difficult to evaluate the essays, even as "first drafts". Three said that they would probably hesitate from giving Essay B and Essay C any score and simply indicate that the paper was unacceptable at this time. Two teachers made similar comments about Essay D. Most felt that they would have asked students to revise all four sample essays to one degree or another.

After consideration of the general evaluation style used by each teacher, the actual results from the data entry worksheet were compared.

The 10 scores given for each of the four essays appear in Table 1. As mentioned above, two teachers gave letter grades for the essays. These scores were converted to numerical scores to ease comparison. The conversions, A- = 80; B+ = 79; B = 75; B- = 70; D = 55; F = 49, follow the college's scoring guidelines. The score of 49 was selected for the "F" grade because it is the first numerical grade that indicates complete failure.

Table 1: Scores given by teachers on the four essays

Teacher #	1*	2*	3	4	5	6	7	8	9**	10**	Avg.
A. Illustration A score	80	70	86	75	90	70	75	78	72	73	76.9
B. Illustration B score	49	55	40	55	25	50	55	75	64	37	50.5
C. Process Paragraph score	49	75	65	50	15	55	68	68	71	60	57.6
D. Process Paragraph score	49	79	85	76	85	55	83	70	68	76	72.6

Notes: *Teachers 1 and 2 gave a letter grade to the essay. These were converted to numerical grades. **Teachers 9 and 10 separated scores into component parts and totaled these scores. Totals are reported here.

As can be seen from Table 1, Essay A received the most consistent marks, with scores ranging from 70 to 90. Essay B was failed by all but one of the teachers. Essay D was failed by two teachers. However, Essay C received scores that varied considerably, ranging from 15 to 71. Six of the teachers gave this essay a passing score, two a score indicating it was a poor quality essay, and two a failing score.

For essays at a generally acceptable level of writing (Essay A), teachers show the most agreement. All felt the essay was acceptable, though only two felt it deserved scores of 80 or above. Similarly, the longest essay, Essay D, was judged acceptable by most of the teachers, though two did indicate they would prefer not to grade the essay at this time and simply ask the student to revise and resubmit it.

When the essay is of questionable quality, however, the grading varied widely. Essay B scores, ranging from 25 to 75, showed the widest variation, but only two teachers gave the essay a passing score. One of these, following the Newbury scale which has a minimum total score of 34, gave the essay “fair to poor” scores in three categories (18 for content, 12 for organization, and 12 for vocabulary) and good to average scores in language use and mechanics. These resulted in a score just above the pass level. The other teacher, when asked about the score, said it was scored high because the teacher would be trying to encourage students on the first essays they completed (Personal Communication, April, 2002). As the directions had indicated that teachers should grade the essays as they would those submitted by their students, the teacher felt the score was appropriate.

Following examination of overall scores, the individual approaches to evaluation were examined.

The number of errors identified in the essays, as well as the total number of form focused and meaning focused errors identified appears in Table 2. The number of errors identified by teachers showed some variation between teachers, however, most of the errors identified were those focused on form rather than meaning.

Table 2: Errors Identified

Teacher #	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	Sum	Avg.
A. errors identified	18	15	10	18	12	20	15	18	18	11		15.5
B. errors identified	9	9	0	8	4	6	2	10	9	6		6.3
C. errors identified	11	6	4	10	3	11	4	9	12	9		7.9
D. errors identified	50	73	49	59	74	27	16	75	82	72		57.7
A-D. form focused errors	88	103	63	95	91	71	32	109	111	78	841	84.1
A-D. meaning focused errors	0	0	0	0	2	2	5	3	10	20	42	4.2

Similarly, the types of corrections made (Table 3) were also focused on form. This is not surprising as the errors identified were primarily errors in form. Only teachers 5 and 10

made any meaning focused corrections. Further examination of these evaluations showed that all four meaning focused corrections by Teacher 5 were made in Essay B. These corrections made specific suggestions for how the student could improve and clarify the content of essay by addressing the lack of safe homeland, food, and education for refugees. Other teachers made similar suggestions in comments at the end of the text for Essay B. Teacher 10 made meaning focused corrections for Essay A (1), Essay B (1), and Essay C (2). Overall, however, suggestions for ways to correct the essays were overwhelming focused on the form.

Surprisingly, Teacher 9 identified the highest number of total errors for the essays, but made the fewest number of suggestions for change. Errors identified by Teacher 9 were marked with abbreviations such as 'ww' (wrong word), 'wf' (wrong form), and 'sf' (sentence fragment). The teacher identified the errors but left it to the student to determine how to correct them. In contrast, most teachers marked words for deletion, made

Table 3: Number of corrections made

	Teacher #	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	Sum	Avg.
A. # corrections		4	15	8	10	8	2	11	5	0	1		6.4
B. # corrections		5	8	0	0	4	1	0	6	0	1		2.5
C. # corrections		4	6	2	1	1	2	0	6	2	2		2.6
D. # corrections		43	73	43	18	58	13	10	38	9	57		36.2
A-D form focused corrections		56	102	53	29	67	18	21	55	11	57	469	46.9
A-D meaning focused corrections		0	0	0	0	4	0	0	0	0	4	8	0.8

suggestions for insertion, or provided alternative ways to reword.

In contrast, while the total number of questions asked was small, more than 60 percent were meaning focused (see Table 4). When teachers asked questions, they tended to ask questions about the meaning of various parts of the essay. All teachers asked questions for at least one of the four essays. However, Teacher 10 asked more than 25 percent of these questions. Together, Teachers 8 and 9 made most of the questions focused on form with more than 50 percent.

Table 4: Number of questions asked in the body of the paper

	Teacher #	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	Sum	Avg.
A. questions		3	2	0	1	0	2	3	4	0	2		1.7
B. questions		0	0	0	1	0	1	1	1	1	2		0.7
C. questions		0	0	0	0	0	2	5	2	4	2		1.5
D. questions		5	0	4	4	4	2	3	6	6	7		4.1
A-D form focused questions		5	0	0	2	0	2	2	9	7	0	27	2.7
A-D meaning focused questions		3	2	4	4	4	5	6	4	3	13	48	4.8

Similarly, most comments appearing in the body of the paper were meaning focused (see Table 5). Teacher 9 made the highest number of comments (41). However, most of these were form focused. Other teachers made far fewer comments, ranging from three to 28, but overall their comments focused more on clarifying the meaning of the essay than on correcting errors in form. Teachers 1, 3, 5, 6, and 7 made only meaning focused comments. Not surprisingly, Essay D, the only essay more than one paragraph in length, received the highest number of comments, an average of 8.8. The other three received 1.5, 1.4, and 2 comments on average respectively.

Table 5: Number of comments appearing in the body of the paper

Teacher #	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	Sum	Avg.
A. comments in text	0	0	0	6	1	1	0	0	4	3		1.5
B. comments in text	0	1	0	3	1	0	2	0	5	2		1.4
C. comments in text	0	1	0	4	5	1	5	0	2	2		2
D. comments in text	3	5	3	15	4	1	13	3	30	11		8.8
A-D form focused comments	0	4	0	11	0	0	0	2	31	3	51	5.1
A-D meaning focused comments	3	3	3	17	11	3	20	1	10	15	86	8.6

The number of words appearing in the body of the paper, in both questions and comments, is given in Table 6. Teacher 4 wrote nearly an equal number of form and meaning focused words. Six teachers, Teachers 1, 2, 5, 8, 9, and 10, wrote more words focused on form, while three focused more on meaning in the comments in text.

Table 6: Number of words appearing in the body of the paper

Teacher #	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	Sum	Avg.
A. words in text	5	23	0	10	6	8	16	3	12	12		9.5
B. words in text	1	5	0	17	2	3	37	2	10	6		8.3
C. words in text	14	17	1	26	1	14	53	9	14	14		16.3
D. words in text	71	98	57	144	73	15	40	36	87	119		74
A-D form focused words	61	110	17	99	62	16	11	40	115	93	624	62.4
A-D meaning focused words	30	33	41	98	20	24	135	10	8	58	457	45.7

In contrast, if comments appeared at the end of the text, they were overwhelmingly focused on meaning (Table 7). For all teachers, only 80 words at the end of the text were form focused while 975 were meaning focused. However, Teachers 7, 8, and 9 made no comments at the end of the text. This in itself shows an incomplete picture of how teachers evaluate, however. Teacher 7 wrote 146 words in comment in the body of the text (11 form focused, 135 meaning focused) but none at the end of the essay. Teacher 8 wrote 50 words (40 form, 10 meaning) and Teacher 9 wrote 123 (115 form, 8 meaning). In other

words, all teachers provided some type of feedback to students, either in the body of the essay or at the end.

Table 7: Number of words appearing in comments at the end of the paper

Teacher #	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	Sum	Avg.
A. words in end comments	2	57	12	54	14	0	41	0	0	39		21.9
B. words in end comments	7	40	41	67	77	8	30	0	0	41		31.1
C. words in end comments	30	27	30	64	79	27	0	0	0	49		30.6
D. words in end comments	13	16	36	80	50	54	0	0	0	41		29
A-D form focused end words	33	10	7	0	0	17	0	0	0	13	80	8
A-D meaning focused end words	19	130	112	265	220	72	0	0	0	157	975	97.5

However, the quality of feedback for the different essays varied widely. Comments such as “very good” or “good job” were the only feedback provided by a few teachers for some of the essays. Other instances of limited feedback included “topic sentence?” “conclusion transition?” “developing sentences,” and “try again.” These types of feedback point out problems but fail to give direction to the types of improvement the student could make in the essay.

The most interesting aspect of the data collected is the difference in the number of form focused and meaning focused comments between teachers. The types of feedback that teachers provide, whether it be form focused or meaning focused, determines how students revise papers. Students receiving more form focused error identification and comments are likely to make more changes in these aspects of their essays. Those receiving more feedback focused on the meaning they are trying to convey are likely to make more changes in the content of the essays.

More importantly, the types of feedback provided may be indicative of the teacher’s approach to teaching writing: text-oriented, writer-oriented, or reader-oriented. Focus on text, also labeled *product-oriented writing* or *current-traditional* (Matsuda, 2003), treats writing as a set of rules to be used correctly by writers (Hyland, 2002). “From this view, training in propositional explicitness and accuracy is an appropriate goal of writing instruction” (Hyland, 2002, p. 7). Writer-oriented approaches view the writer as a central component, with the issue being understanding how good writers deal with writing tasks and seeking “to formulate the methods that will best help learners acquire these skills (Hyland, 2002, p. 24–25). This approach encourages the use of techniques that stimulate the writer’s thinking and self-discovery (Hyland, 2002), in other words one that is focused on the process of writing. Unfortunately, because of its orientation on the writer, this approach gives teachers little advice on how to evaluate writing (Hyland, 2002). The third approach, reader-oriented, expands the context of writing to include the “purposes, goals

and uses that the completed text may eventually fulfil (*sic*)” (Hyland, 2002, p. 33). In other words, writing is, in this perspective, an interaction between writer and reader.

Most of the teachers evaluating essays for this project used the process approach to writing. Their evaluations were focused on improving the writing by providing feedback through questions or comments directed at discovering what the writer’s intended meaning. This does not mean that they ignored sentence-level, or product-oriented, feedback. A few provided this type almost exclusively.

Conclusion

The most effective way to respond to student errors in L2 writing remains an area where additional research is necessary. According to Leki (1990), the effect of different teacher response approaches remains inconclusive. Grabe and Kaplan (1996) recommend avoiding exclusive attention to “surface conventions” as well as “commentary or notation” (p. 394). Truscott (1996, 1999) is far more certain, and takes the approach that correcting errors is useless. However, Ferris (1999) takes the opposite stance. Recently, determination of the current “interlanguage” used by student writers and addressing the writing from the writer’s perspective has received attention (Yates & Kenkel, 2002, p. 31). In their evaluation of how teachers respond to sentence-level errors, Yates and Kenkel (2002) propose a framework for evaluation where the errors are situated within the students “developing skill in constructing target-like texts” (p. 29). In other words, a definitive way to respond to problems in student writing has yet to emerge.

Further research on how teachers respond to writing and the effect that different response approaches have on student revisions is needed to understand what types of evaluation are most effective for improving students writing. Knowing how teachers evaluate is the first step in this. Understanding how students react to different types of evaluation is next. Together, this information will provide a more complete picture of the writing process for students in the OJC Academic Writing course.

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Appendix A: Essays A through D

Essay A Illustration paragraph

A place dedicated to peace

The Atomic Bomb Memorial in Hiroshima is one place dedicated to peace. This place promotes peace in three ways. First there are many photos in the Atomic Bomb Memorial in Hiroshima. It is very cruel. Photos convey people about the horrors of war. Secondly, many people visit in the Atomic Bomb Memorial on every August 6. That day is that the atomic bomb was dropped by American. There is devotion that day, and everyone remembers the war. Finally Hiroshima area suffered the most damage in the Second World War, so the Atomic Bomb Memorial is symbolic of peace. It needs to tell all over the world people about the horrors of war. We never forget the war.

Essay B Illustration paragraph

Difficulties Refugees Face

Today refugees face many problems. In short, according to the UNHCR, there are about 21 million people in need of its aid, including about 12 million refugees aren't able to return to their homeland safely. For example, there were disputes in Mozambique. Mozambicans were greatly influenced because there was a lack of safe homeland, food and education. For these reasons, they are called refugees and face many difficult problems.

Essay C Process paragraph

AIDS among refugees

During war many people become sick because they don't have money for medicine. AIDS refugees exist because of poverty in many parts of the world. Because of poverty, there is not money for AIDS relief. AIDS spreads because infected people have unprotected sex. During war, AIDS spreads faster because HIV infection spreads by sex, transfusions, medicine, from blood products, and shared needles. They avoid dangerous areas, and they come to safe areas. However, as many sick people are also there AIDS spreads to them also. As refugees lack money for condoms, and safe medicine, AIDS easily spreads. To conclude, AIDS victims aren't tested for HIV so they raise up complications other than sick.

Essay D Persuasive essay

(Note: Please ignore the lack of headers and the inclusion of the Works Cited immediately following the body of the essay.)

Global Warming

The energy from the sun is reflected by land after it hits the earth. However, CO₂, the

methane gas, and Freon gas in the air catch a part of this heat, so it warms the earth instead of being reflected. Because of this, the temperature of the earth is increasing year by year because there is too much CO² in the atmosphere. This phenomenon is global warming. The National Snow and Ice Data Center headquartered at CU-Boulder reports "Global mean temperatures have risen one degree Fahrenheit over the past 100 years, with more than half of the increase occurring in the last 25 years (Earth's). We should control the production of CO₂, methane gas and Freon gas in order to stop global warming.

To begin with, global warming is caused by the 'greenhouse gas' such as CO₂, the methane gas, and the Freon gas. Greenhouse gas means the gas, which promotes rising temperature. Burning woods, coal, and oil causes these gases. For example, slash and burn agriculture, in order to make new farms the vast forests were burned. If many forests disappear, CO₂ will increase more than now. Moreover, photochemical smog such as car fumes, the Freon gas such as air conditioners and hair sprays causes global warming (Takano). In conclude, we should control greenhouse gases.

Secondly, world population has increased rapidly, so the world has been developed by us. The world population is about four times as many as 1950. Human breathe in O₂, so they breathe out CO₂. In short, if world population increases, CO₂ will increase because many people have to breathe.

One of global warmings effects is rising the surface of the sea. If Arctic and Antarctic ices melt, many countries will be damaged. According to IPCC, in 2030 is about 20 cm, in 2090 is about 65 cm will rise the surface of the sea (Wada). Examination of springtime ice thickness in the Arctic Ocean indicates that the mean ice thickness decreased 1.5 meters (4.8 feet) between the mid-1980s and early 1990s (Earth's). In Holland, one part of four territories is reclaimed land. In order to built many bank, so their government need much money. In Bangladesh, more than 40 million people live low ground. So, they was often damaged the flood. Three parts of four territories were covered by flood in 1986. In summary, we have to stop greenhouse gasses.

Next, one of global warming effects is increasing size of desert. If increasing desertification continues, we will not be able to grow enough foods. In Africa, rain was decreased since the 1960's, so it often suffers from drought. They cannot do agriculture, so many people died for hunger. In Europe, large forests fires occurred in many territories, because these areas were by drying without rain. This will causes shortage of food in the world. In short, we must stop global warming in order to provide shortage of foods.

Then, one of global warming effects is abnormal outbreak of insects. The change of whether was damaged our health by many kinds of insects (Surry). Because the earth is warmed by global warming, so areas of temperature change from cold to warm. Thus these areas occur some kinds of insects, so the areas were damaged and their countries became

shortage of foods. Also, the mosquitoes of female carry malaria, yellow fever and dengue into our bodies. In Africa and Asia, many locusts attack agricultural products. These countries have to take some measure about insects. In summary, we protect the earth in order to save us from insects.

To conclude, we must control the greenhouse gasses in order to stop global warming. We should stop global warming, but every country cannot do it alone such as the US. The Bush administration says the Kyoto Treaty on global warming would be too costly (Quinn). However, the Kyoto Treaty would cut emissions of greenhouse gasses. Therefore, we have to act to support it. We have to go easy on energy use and have to promote many reforestation projects. Moreover, we should study about the environment more than now. In summary, we should control the production of greenhouse gasses in order to save ourselves.

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Appendix B: Directions to teachers

Please "mark and grade" these papers as you would those submitted by your students. Please assume you have seen an earlier draft and that this version has been submitted for a "grade." Mistakes are duplicated from drafts I received from my students. I want to ensure that we are all grading similarly and ask for your cooperation in doing this. Please bring your evaluation to the Academic Writing course teachers' meeting.

Appendix C: Data entry worksheet

Check sheet for teacher evaluations: Teacher # _____

A. Illustration Paragraph A _____ score

ff / mf

_____ errors identified or marked

_____ specific suggestions for corrections (instances of insertion or deletion)

_____ individual questions in text (single or multiple words)

_____ comments or suggestions in text (single or multiple words)

_____ words in comments in text

_____ words in comments at end of text (including abbreviations)

B. Illustration Paragraph B _____ score

ff / mf

_____ errors identified or marked

_____ specific suggestions for corrections (instances of insertion or deletion)

_____ individual questions in text (single or multiple words)

_____ comments or suggestions in text (single or multiple words)

_____ words in comments in text

_____ words in comments at end of text (including abbreviations)

C. Process Paragraph _____ score

ff / mf

_____ errors identified or marked

_____ specific suggestions for corrections (instances of insertion or deletion)

_____ individual questions in text (single or multiple words)

_____ comments or suggestions in text (single or multiple words)

_____ words in comments in text

_____ words in comments at end of text (including abbreviations)

D. Persuasive Essay _____ score

ff / mf

_____ errors identified or marked

_____ specific suggestions for corrections (instances of insertion or deletion)

_____ individual questions in text (single or multiple words)

_____ comments or suggestions in text (single or multiple words)

_____ words in comments in text

_____ words in comments at end of text (including abbreviations)