

# Implementing Criterion: Initial Findings

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## クライテリオンの導入：第1回結果報告

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### Abstract

Learning to write clearly and develop an ability to evaluate one's own writing are key ingredients to becoming successful student writers. These skills do not happen naturally but are developed both inside and outside classrooms. Thus, students need support to become proficient writers. To provide such support, in April 2004 Osaka Jogakuin College (OJC) expanded the number of hours its writing center is open, and in April 2005, we obtained accounts for all students to Criterion, an online essay evaluation service. Students can access Criterion from any computer with internet access allowing students to evaluate their drafts anywhere and anytime. This article highlights the process by which OJC decided to obtain Criterion accounts, the decisions made in setting up the Criterion system, and students' initial responses to using Criterion for course assignments.

**Key words :** Criterion, ESL/EFL, writing evaluation, CALL,  
Educational Testing Service (ETS)

(Received September 28, 2005)

### 抄 録

明快に書くことを学習し、自身の書いたものを評価する能力を向上させることは、学生としてよい書き手になれるための主要な要素である。これらのスキルは、自然に得られることはなく、教室の内外で向上するものである。従って、熟達した書き手となる為に、学生にはサポートが必要となる。そのようなサポートを提供するため、大阪女学院大学、短期大学では、2005年4月、ライティングセンターが開いている時間を延長すると共に、クライテリオンというエッセイ評価のオンラインサービスを導入した。学生は、クライテリオンにどのコンピューターからでもアクセス出来ることから、いつでも、どこからでも自分のエッセイをチェックすることが出来るようになった。本稿では、大阪女学院がクライテリオンのアカウント取得を決定した過程、クライテリオンシステムの設定の決定について、そして、教科の課題のためにクライテリオンを使った学生の初期の反応について、特に述べる。

**キーワード：**クライテリオン、第二言語としての英語学習／外国語としての英語学習、  
ライティングの評価、コール、教育的試験のサービス

(2005年9月28日 受理)

## **Introduction**

At Osaka Jogakuin College (OJC) writing is an integral component of the curriculum (Swenson, Chihara, & McKay, 2001). After taking a year-long English writing course as first-year students that focuses on rhetorical patterns and culminates in a persuasive essay complete with citations, students write between two and four research papers as second-year students. Making the leap from essays to research paper in the course of one year is challenging for many students (Cornwell & McKay, 1998). Thus, OJC has had to develop ways to support student writers. The main method of supporting writers outside of class has been through expanding the Writing Center from two days a week in 2004 to six days a week (Johnston & Swenson, 2005). In addition, from April 2005 OJC provided students with accounts in Criterion, an online essay evaluation service created by Educational Testing Services (ETS), the makers of TOEFL and TOEIC tests. Criterion, its implementation, and students' use of it are the focus of this paper.

## **What is Criterion?**

Criterion is a “web-based application that evaluates a student’s writing skills and within seconds provides score reporting and diagnostic feedback to both writing instructors and students. Students draft and submit essays and receive immediate feedback in the form of a holistic score and diagnostic annotations within each essay that guides instruction” (ETS, n.d.). Thus, when OJC students copy their drafts into Criterion, they get immediate feedback on areas such as grammar, usage, mechanics, style, and organization and development. In addition, Criterion offers categories of topics from fourth grade to the second year of college, as well as GRE and TOEFL topics. These topics are also evaluated holistically with scores between one and six. Since many of our students will be studying abroad, the TOEFL Writing Essay prompts are very useful for them covering a range of topics such as Hometown Changes, Resources Disappearing, and Why Study Abroad.

## **Acquiring and Implementing Criterion**

While some faculty at OJC were aware of Criterion and its purposes, it was not until the summer of 2004, as OJC opened a four-year university, that acquiring Criterion for students' use was seriously considered. (See Appendix A for a timeline showing how Criterion was acquired). At that time the English program coordinator, the acting president, and the writing liaison visited a private high school in Wakayama to observe a class using Criterion. Actually observing students correct and revise papers with immediate feedback online was the stimulus to begin seriously considering introducing Criterion at OJC, and in December Criterion was tested in two first-year writing classes. During this pilot program,

we discovered some challenges that would need to be overcome before Criterion could be introduced to the entire OJC student body.

Although Criterion can be used anywhere with a computer that has an internet connection, all of the information online is in English. Thus, our students would need a great deal of support to use Criterion since they would need to learn to revise their English writing using a system that provided feedback only in English. While in the long run, this is an ideal way of learning English and using English, for students who are writing their first research papers with deadlines looming, it appeared to be a bit overwhelming. For example, some students' comments in an early survey indicated that Criterion was hard to use and missed many mistakes. Others stated that they did not understand the feedback that Criterion provides. However, in spite of these shortcomings, Criterion seemed to provide an alternative format for developing writing and at 1400 yen per student per academic year, it seemed to be a reasonable investment. Thus, we moved ahead with implementing it.

We received 30 demonstration accounts on April 4, 2005 from the Council for International Exchange of Scholars Japan (CIES Japan) to use while we were waiting for our account to be activated. These were used at the teachers' orientation on April 6<sup>th</sup> and the second-year students' Criterion orientations on April 7<sup>th</sup> and 11<sup>th</sup>. Not having the students' own accounts at this time proved to be a major shortcoming because once the accounts arrived students had to go through the log in process on their own. This further complicated an already complex procedure. Though we encouraged teachers to help students sign into their courses after the accounts arrived, many classes and students never did log in, even though support was available.

### **Initial Concerns**

Initially we had many concerns about how students would use Criterion and whether they would understand the feedback. We wondered which classes should use it and how it would work for our students in our particular school context. It was clear from the pilot program that students would need time to work with Criterion in order to understand both how to use it and how to interpret its comments. Since students in the pilot indicated that Criterion was complex, it would be necessary to carefully consider how to make the best use of the software.

The teacher that we visited in Wakayama, who was in charge of Criterion, suggested that we pilot Criterion with a small number of classes to begin with. She indicated that students would need support when beginning to use Criterion. She also felt that first-year students might be too preoccupied with just writing at the sentence and paragraph level to really obtain the full benefit of Criterion. Thus, faculty discussed the pros and cons of

getting accounts for all students. Some faculty were somewhat reluctant to get accounts for all students during the first year. However, others thought it would help second-year students who had a grounding in writing essays, and that it might even be helpful for first-year students who did not know much about writing. In addition, using Criterion would force students to type their assignments earlier (first-year students were not required to type their assignments until their last essay). Faculty also considered obtaining some “floating” accounts which could be shared by several students; however, a downside to that idea was that students’ assignments would be lost when someone else used that account. We finally decided that all students could benefit either through their classes or on their own once they knew how to use Criterion. In addition, since Criterion is made by ETS, the maker of TOEFL, the TOEFL prompts are similar to the writing tasks our students will face when taking TOEFL tests. In our four-year college, many students will be participating in semester abroad and will need good scores in TOEFL. Thus, Criterion would allow our students to practice these tests on their own.

After many extended discussions, we ordered accounts for all students, but decided that only the second-year students would get accounts during the first semester. We also decided that teachers could develop their own approach towards the use of Criterion during the first year of its implementation. However, we requested that all three sections of Academic English Writing, a new second-year course, use Criterion in order to evaluate its effectiveness.

It was not only students that needed time to become accustomed to Criterion. Indeed, for teachers and staff, Criterion was a new innovation. While some teachers seemed enthusiastic about its use, others suggested they preferred not use it. Reasons to not use it mirrored those presented in other studies on Criterion’s use such as the need for training and the fact that Criterion appeared to miss many types of mistakes (Otoishi, 2005). It was clear that it would take more time to make everyone comfortable with Criterion.

### **Training Faculty and Students**

The authors of this paper were the administrators of Criterion. In this capacity, we became familiar with all aspects of Criterion and set up accounts for teachers. Much of the work involved on-the-job learning and time-consuming input. For example, having ordered accounts for all students (804) plus seven extra accounts, we had to input all the students into the Criterion system for OJC. We created the following master groups: first-year students by school<sup>(1)</sup>, second-year students by school, and transfer students. Next, the administrators created all the second-year courses with English writing components and assigned the appropriate instructor to the course. The instructor then had access to that course and could add assignments, read students’ papers, etc. In addition to assigning

instructors to the courses, students also had to be added. Since this included the possibility that students would need to sign up for multiple classes, for example, if they were taking two or three classes that involved writing papers, we asked instructors to hand out a form explaining to students how to log into their courses. We also asked teachers to take their students to a computer room if possible, and assist students with signing into their courses. As is apparent, this involved a great deal of time in setting up the accounts and courses.

### **Evaluating Criterion after One Semester**

We used two means to evaluate Criterion's use during the first semester: a) the administrative statistics that are automatically compiled as part of Criterion and b) a questionnaire that was administered to all second-year students. Both means provide useful feedback on how Criterion could better be used; both also show some of the shortcomings that need to be overcome in order to integrate Criterion into the OJC writing program.

#### ***Criterion Statistics***

We examined several statistics in the Criterion administrative data: the number of students that actually registered, the number of classes that actually used the program, and the average number of submissions made by each student.

Even though 436 students were eligible to use Criterion, only 183 students registered to use it. Out of 38 second-year classes eligible to use Criterion, 74% had fewer than eight students register—there were 11 classes with no students registering and 17 classes with less than eight students registering.

When a student finished writing her essay, she would submit it to Criterion and receive feedback. She could then revise the essay and resubmit it. For most of their assignments, students could submit their drafts as many times as they felt necessary. Only six classes had more than three average submissions per student. These classes included two of the Academic English Writing classes (averages of 9 and 6) and one each of the following: a Computer Assisted Composition class (11), a Supervised Reading and Research I class (7), a Supervised Reading and Research II class (5), a Topic Studies I class (6), and a Topic Studies II class (6)<sup>(2)</sup>. It is not surprising to note that two of these courses were taught by the authors who, as administrators of Criterion, actively promoted its use. In addition, as mentioned earlier, all of the Academic Writing teachers promoted Criterion's use as part of their classes. It is not possible to comment on whether or not proficiency affected Criterion usage as all of the Academic Writing classes were filled with advanced students in the spring semester. However, even within the Academic Writing classes there were some students who used Criterion many times (15+) and others who used it minimally (1-2).

### **Student Questionnaires**

One hundred eighty-seven students filled out the Criterion Questionnaires at the end of the first semester. The first question asked about use: 110 reported using Criterion 0 to 1 times, 46 reported using it two to four times, 18 reported using it 5 to 7 times, and 13 reported using it 8 or more times.

Table 1 indicates usage information provided by the students.

**Table 1. Criterion usage questionnaire**

	SA	A	D	SD	Total
3. Criterion was easy to use	26 (17%)	57 (37%)	54 (35%)	17 (11%)	154
4. It helped me write better	18 (12%)	60 (40%)	59 (39%)	14 (9%)	151
5. Grammar feedback was useful	14 (9%)	46 (31%)	76 (51%)	13 (9%)	149
6. Usage feedback was useful	14 (10%)	61 (41%)	62 (42%)	10 (7%)	147
7. Style feedback was useful	16 (11%)	55 (37%)	66 (44%)	12 (8%)	149
8. Organization feedback was useful	24 (16%)	60 (41%)	56 (38%)	8 (5%)	148
9. I will use it from October	20 (13%)	31 (20%)	76 (50%)	26 (17%)	153

SA=strongly agree, A=agree, D=disagree, SD=strongly disagree

The data is hard to interpret. Over 53% of the students responding agreed or strongly agreed that Criterion was easy to use, and 52% of them felt that it would help them write better. However, only 33% felt they would use Criterion during the fall semester. Possible reasons are almost 60% of the students felt that the grammar feedback was not useful; however, 56% of the students felt that the organization feedback was useful. In order to really interpret these descriptive statistics, students will need to be interviewed.

Tables 2 shows how students responded when asked to list two things they liked, Table 3 depicts how they responded when asked to list two things they did not like about Criterion, and Table 4 provides students' comments on how Criterion could better be used. We decided to show only categories that had two or more responses.

**Table 2. Two things students liked about Criterion**

Grammar check	26
Can use by myself anytime	21
Spell check	15
Quick evaluation	13
Feedback reliable and visual	11
Easy to use	6
Find vocabulary mistakes	2
Helps with thesis and introduction	2
Helps me write better	2

(27 students replied with some multiple answers)

**Table 3. Two things students did not like about Criterion**

Hard to use/complex	44
Marks mistakes, but doesn't tell how to fix	16
Don't understand feedback or there is not enough	9
Hard to see words	5
It makes mistakes/cannot be trusted	5
All in English	5
Comments on organization always come up. It's confusing	4
Criterion answers are different than the teacher's	3
Criterion does not know Japanese words	2
Cannot use at home	2
Works too slow	2
Did not help with grammar	2

**Table 4. Suggestions to improve the use of Criterion**

Tell us how to use it	14
Explain in Japanese (words and guide)	8
Teach us why words/phrases are marked wrong and how to fix them	6
Make it easier to access	3
Do not make us use it in classes (Academic English Writing)	2
Have more computer room free time	2
Teach us how to use it in class more	2
Prefer help from the teacher or Writing Center	2

From the above data we can see that students liked the grammar check and the ability to use the program anytime by themselves. The spell check, speed of evaluation, and visual feedback were also in the top five reasons students liked Criterion. Some students even mentioned that they found the feedback reliable which seems to run counter to other students who mention that one of the reasons they do not like Criterion is that it makes mistakes.

We can also see from the above data that the top three suggestions to improve Criterion were the students felt they had not been told how to use it, they wanted an explanation in Japanese, and they wanted to know how to fix the mistakes that Criterion highlighted. All of these seem to be legitimate concerns.

In addition, we have seen that many classes did not use Criterion at all. After talking to some teachers, we feel that some of the lack of use is due to some teachers' reticence. Some teachers feel that our students cannot use it (echoing students' concerns that they be better trained); while others feel that Criterion makes too many mistakes to be of use. We

have already seen that some students were frustrated when using the program. Even in the classes that did use Criterion, the usage is not balanced. In other words, some students appear to use Criterion a lot, submitting essays many times while others seldom use it. The questionnaires and statistical reports provided a lot of interesting, though sometimes contradictory data. Additional qualitative research is necessary focusing on understanding why students used or did not use Criterion. Interviews or focus groups with students and teachers would reveal their thinking about Criterion and their perspectives on using it as a tool for improving writing.

### **Future Recommendations**

The analysis of this data suggests several recommendations to consider. The recommendations are listed as follows:

#### ***Integrate Criterion into the Writing Program***

In order for Criterion to effectively work, it needs to be integrated into OJC's writing program as one component, and not left as an optional add-on to writing classes. Such integration will require that we change teachers' perceptions of Criterion and help them understand its benefits to students. This can be achieved through ongoing training.

#### ***Conduct Ongoing Training***

Ongoing in-service meetings must be arranged to discuss problems and overcome teacher resistance. These programs need to be organized so that teachers' input is incorporated in reconceptualizing the use, benefits, and problems surrounding Criterion. Currently, many teachers have focused on the grammar feedback function of Criterion; their objections to using Criterion revolve around the grammatical mistakes that Criterion misses. Part of an effective teacher development program needs to show that in addition to grammar, Criterion provides feedback on usage, style, and organization. In fact, the constant reminders to check the organization of an essay may be the most influential form of feedback Criterion offers. However, students and instructors must view these reminders as supporting their writing, and not as "repetitious" and "bothersome" comments.

A balanced approach that equally emphasizes the various forms of feedback may help teachers understand that Criterion is not just a grammar checker. In addition to this reconceptualization, teacher development must also have a practical element. Teachers must feel comfortable using Criterion; they must be able to answer students' questions about how to use the program. This has been an issue mentioned by some students.

In addition, ongoing "refresher" sessions with students could also help OJC increase the benefit of Criterion. These sessions might be part of a series of seminars presented on brainstorming, drafting, and polishing their writing or the sessions could involve meetings with Writing Center staff or Study Center tutors. These staff members and tutors need to be



well-versed in how to use Criterion, and their duties should include promoting Criterion's use among students.

### ***Schedule Time in Computer Room***

If teachers understand the usefulness of Criterion, this will lead to more student use. A first action by instructors would be to take their classes to a computer room, to help students learn how to log on and use the program. Teachers may even need to go three or four times over the course of a semester (twice at the beginning, twice at the end).

### ***Develop Support Materials in Japanese***

Related to promoting Criterion's use among students is the development of some support materials in Japanese. Several students commented on the need to know how to fix the mistakes Criterion identifies as well as understanding the feedback comments. Indeed, sometimes students do not know what to do once a mistake is highlighted. OJC could write some basic handouts on Criterion usage (both how to use it and how to interpret it) in Japanese. Such worksheets could be made available to students in their classes, in the Writing Center, and in the CALL center. In addition, as more students are trained and become experienced in using Criterion, third-year and fourth-year students could help orient users and lead a support group for its ongoing use.

### ***Require Criterion for First-year Students***

Finally, it may help if Criterion is required for second-semester, first-year students. First-year students should be required to use Criterion while working on their unit four essays—a persuasion essay that must be typed and include citations from reference sources. If Criterion is required for first-year students, less time will be needed to orient these students in their second year. An added benefit would be that as students enter their second-year classes, Criterion workshops could focus on interpreting feedback rather than on how to use the program. Requiring first-year students to use Criterion means that they would need to be oriented at the beginning of the fall semester (September/October).

### ***Conduct Additional Research***

In addition to the above recommendations, additional qualitative research is necessary. This should focus on understanding why students used or did not use Criterion. Interviews or focus groups with students would reveal their thinking about Criterion and their perspectives on it as a tool for writing.

In conclusion, Criterion is a tool that if properly implemented could support students in the process of becoming good writers. It provides students with an autonomous method of checking their writing that makes possible better first drafts. As a result, teachers could focus on issues of content and organization rather than on issues of form. However, as this article illustrates, the process of implementing this innovation at OJC involves gaining the support of numerous shareholders—students, teachers, and staff. This ongoing

communication between students, instructors, and the administrators of Criterion at OJC is essential if Criterion is to become a tool that is utilized effectively.

### Notes

- ( 1 ) OJC consists of two schools: a two-year college and a four-year college.
- ( 2 ) Supervised Research and Reading I & II and Topic Studies I & II are one-semester second-year content-based courses that involve independent research and the writing of a research paper. Computer Assisted Composition is a course for first-and second-year students to learn how to use computers in the writing process.

### Appendix A

#### Time Line

Action	Date
Visit school in Wakayama	End of September 2004
Present at OJC meeting	October 2004
Two teachers pilot Criterion	November-January 2004-2005
Begin discussions with ETS	March (March finalize costs)
Order accounts for all students	March 30, 2005
Receive 30 demonstration accounts from CIES Japan for practice	April 4, 2005
Conduct teacher orientation	April 6, 2005
Student orientations for second-year & four-year college students	April 7, 2005
Receive official accounts for all students	April 8, 2005
Conduct student orientations for second-year two-year college students	April 11, 2005
Create master groups	Beginning April 13, 2005
Teachers use in classroom	From the middle of April 2005
Academic English Writing courses use as part of course	Spring 2005 (April-end of July)
Students sign up for courses	From the middle of April 2005
Conduct ongoing orientations with teachers as required (visit some classes)	Ongoing

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