

GAINS IN ACHIEVEMENT WITH ACCESS TO THREE TYPES OF  
SCRIPTED ACTIVITIES ON ELABORATION IN A FRESHMAN  
COMPOSITION CLASS

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GAINS IN ACHIEVEMENT WITH ACCESS TO THREE TYPES OF  
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COMPOSITION CLASS

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DISSERTATION ABSTRACT

GAINS IN ACHIEVEMENT WITH ACCESS TO THREE TYPES OF  
SCRIPTED ACTIVITIES ON ELABORATION IN A FRESHMAN  
COMPOSITION CLASS

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This study investigated associations between pair and group scripted revision activities and the outcome variables of holistic scores and elaboration criterion scores on a high-stakes community college writing exam. The research was designed as a quasi-experimental study using students in five freshman composition classes during one semester. The purpose of the study was to explore whether access to peer review through scripted revision activities before and then during a high-stakes writing exam may be a valuable pedagogical method.

Data were collected from pretests and posttests, student observations, whole class observations, and debriefing questions. Across the 110 students in the five classes that participated in the study, two of the classes participated in pair scripted peer revision

activities; two of the classes participated in group scripted peer revision activities; and one of the classes conducted only self-review scripted activities. All scripts were designed to focus on increasing the presence of indicators of elaboration within participant essays through problem-solving prompted by the script.

Statistical data demonstrated that no significant differences were present among the scores of the groups. However, a correlation did exist between the rate of specific talk about writing and holistic and elaboration scores, and the majority of participants responded favorably to scripted revision activities.

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## TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF TABLES .....	xiii
LIST OF FIGURES .....	xiv
CHAPTER I. INTRODUCTION.....	1
Overview.....	1
Scope of the Problem .....	4
Background .....	4
Need to Study the Problem .....	7
Conclusions from Literature .....	9
Gap in Empirical Literature .....	10
Restriction of the Problem .....	11
Research Questions .....	11
Strengths .....	12
Limitations .....	13
Definition of Terms .....	13
CHAPTER II. REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE .....	15
Overview.....	15
The Nature of Writing .....	15
Writing Process .....	17
Revision .....	20



Collaborative Learning through Peer Groups .....	22
Benefits of Collaboration .....	23
Benefits of Feedback during Collaboration .....	25
Effects of Group Size in Collaboration and Feedback .....	27
Effects of Group Size on Writing Quality .....	29
Providing Feedback through Scripted Collaboration during Revision .....	31
High-Quality Scripts .....	35
Effectiveness of High-Quality Scripts .....	36
Elaboration .....	39
Formulaic Writing .....	42
Formulaic Writing Instruction in the High School and Freshman Year of College .....	42
Elaboration as an Ill-structured Problem in Formulaic Writing .....	43
Assessing Student Writing .....	52
Direct Assessment Practices .....	53
Collaboration during Testing .....	55
High-Stakes Testing .....	56
High-Stakes Impact on Composition Instruction .....	58
Conclusions from Literature .....	59
Theoretical Framework .....	60
<b>CHAPTER III. METHODS AND PROCEDURES .....</b>	<b>67</b>
Overview .....	67
Research Questions.....	67

Treatments.....	68
Variables .....	72
Research Design .....	73
Selection .....	75
Instructor Training .....	76
Participants within Groups .....	77
Setting .....	79
Strengths .....	79
Limitations .....	80
Instruments .....	81
Procedures .....	84
Training Instructors .....	84
Training Observers and Raters .....	91
Conducting the Study .....	91
Data Sources .....	96
Data Analysis .....	96
Design Schematic .....	98
CHAPTER IV. DISCUSSION .....	99
Overview .....	99
Statistical Tables and Interpretations .....	99
Reliability Statistics .....	99
Rigor of Implementation .....	100

Fidelity in Implementation .....	103
Research Question 1 Discussion .....	105
Research Question 2 Discussion .....	107
Research Question 3 Discussion .....	108
Talk as Related to Elaboration and Writing Achievement .....	110
Participant Debriefing .....	174
Instructor Debriefing .....	130
CHAPTER V. CONCLUSIONS .....	133
Overview .....	133
Implications for Collaboration in Composition Studies .....	135
Implications for Scripted Revision Activities in Composition Studies .....	136
Implications for High-Stakes Collaboration Opportunities in Composition Studies .....	138
Recommendations .....	138
Conclusions .....	140
REFERENCES .....	142
APPENDICES .....	157

## LIST OF TABLES

Table 1. Treatment and Comparison Assignments .....	73
Table 2. WCC's Student Body Characteristics .....	78
Table 3. Reliability Coefficients for Pilot Testing .....	83
Table 4. Reliability Coefficients for Diagnostic Essays .....	93
Table 4. Reliability coefficients for Interrater Agreement .....	100
Table 6. Aggregated Data for Rigor of Implementation A (SPR) .....	102
Table 7. Aggregated Data for Rigor of Implementation B (GPR).....	102
Table 8. Aggregated Data for Rigor of Implementation C (SPR) .....	103
Table 9. Aggregated Data for Rigor of Implementation D (GPR) .....	103
Table 10. Fidelity in Implementation .....	104
Table 11. Descriptive Statistics Pre-test/Posttest Variables .....	105
Table 12. Multivariate and Univariate Analysis for Achievement .....	105
Table 13. Multivariate and Univariate Analysis for Scripted Talk.....	107
Table 14. Multivariate and Univariate Analysis for Scripted Talk on Elaboration .....	110
Table 15. Effects of Scripted Talk about Elaboration for Signs of Elaboration .....	111
Table 16. Effects of Specific Talk on Exit Exam Scores, Control for Pre-test Scores ..	113
Table 17. Random Group Means for Diagnostic/Exit by Rate of Talk .....	115
Table 18. Random Group Elaboration Means for Diagnostic/Exit by Rate of Talk .....	115
Table 19. Random Pair Elaboration Means for Diagnostic/Exit by Rate of Talk .....	116
Table 20. Random Pair Elaboration Means for Diagnostic/Exit by Rate of Talk .....	116

Table 21. Benefits of Pair or Group .....	118
Table 22. Response Rate for Collaboration Benefits Pairs .....	121
Table 23. Response Rate for Collaboration Benefits Groups .....	122
Table 24. Response Rate for Collaboration Negatives Groups/Pairs .....	123
Table 25. Benefits of Script .....	123
Table 26. Response Rate for Scripted Talk Benefits in Pairs .....	125
Table 27. Response Rate for Scripted Talk Benefits in Groups .....	126
Table 28. Response Rate for Scripted Talk Negatives in Groups/Pairs .....	127
Table 29. Benefits on Exit Exam .....	127
Table 30. Response Rate for Exit Exam Benefits in Pairs .....	129
Table 31. Response Rate for Exit Exam Benefits in Groups .....	130

## LIST OF FIGURES

FIGURE 1. Environment Conducive to Development of Elaboration in Writing .....	10
FIGURE 2. Task Environment .....	17
FIGURE 3. Design Schematic .....	98
FIGURE 4. Interaction Plot for Exit Exam.....	112
FIGURE 5. Interaction Plot for Elaboration.....	113

CHAPTER I  
INTRODUCTION

Overview

In the summer of 2000, I became employed as an English instructor for a community college in southeast Alabama. As I became familiar with the requirements for both instructors and students in the freshman composition classes, I began to have concerns over the current traditionalist methods used to teach some classes and to test all classes (i.e., instruction in these classrooms tends to take place as lectures or question and answer sessions and uses instructional methods that reinforce teacher-centeredness, while de-emphasizing student interactions). The instructional environment is somewhat rigid. All classes use the same textbooks, teach the same types of formulaic essays, and exit test all students with a pass/fail timed writing exam that is graded by an individual other than the students' instructor. As an instructor, I found this standardized form of composition instruction contradictory to theory-based writing research, so I began looking for ways to help my students create their own composing styles within this standardized setting. I encouraged my students to view and practice writing as a recursive process (e.g., Hayes & Flower, 1981), gave my students opportunities to revise their drafts (e.g., Beach, 1979; Cooper, 1991; Nystrand & Brandt, 1989), and implemented pair and groupwork (e.g., Baldwin, 2003; Beason, 1993; Bruffee, 1999) as ways of organizing the classroom.

Based on student surveys and my own observation, it was apparent that most of my freshman composition students preferred the classroom organization that fostered recursiveness, revision, and the social nature of writing instead of the classroom which stressed writing as a product and as a solitary endeavor. With this information in mind, I began to research the nature of cooperative/collaborative learning and how to promote not merely interaction in groups but joint problem-solving in groups. This research led me to consider the times and phases in the writing process and the ways in which my groups worked together. Typically, my peer response/review groups were most active during the revision of completed first drafts, so I began to focus on ways to utilize this phase to increase opportunities for joint problem-solving among group members as they worked to improve their drafts. Also, my students used question sets to guide their revision activities, and I surmised that if I could find or create a *script* to foster joint problem-solving during revision, my students' scores on essays could increase. Additionally, since one of the most basic shortcomings associated with freshman composition writing is the lack of specific detail (e.g., Judy & Judy, 1981) or what instructors in my institutional setting refer to as *elaboration*, I decided to narrow my focus to identifying or creating a script that might increase opportunities for joint problem-solving, encourage writers to increase the presence of signs of elaboration in their essays, and result in higher scores on their essays and ultimately on their high-stakes course exit exam.

Following the development and pilot testing of several scripts, I designed three scripts to use as part of a quasi-experimental study. The study, designed to explore



whether writing achievement may be enhanced by increasing opportunities for joint problem-solving using these specific scripts as elements of certain classroom work arrangements, took place during three months of one academic semester. In addition to the quasi-experimental comparison of paired to small group scripted group work that was the heart of the study, I also analyzed the pre-test and posttest scores and rate-of-talk data of the participants in five separate English Composition I classes to determine if students in scripted pair work arrangements or scripted group work arrangements demonstrated higher scores on writing exams than students with no opportunities for peer review. To test the hypotheses I had derived, I identified two treatment groups with a third group used for comparison purposes. Two classes constituting one treatment group used a script designed for pairs; two classes constituting a second treatment group used a script designed for groups of four to five; and one class used a script designed for self-review only and was used as the comparison group. Pre-test (diagnostic) essays and posttest (Exit) essays were scored and recorded by two raters based on a holistic writing scale for overall achievement and on an analytic scale for the specific criterion of signs of elaboration. In addition, throughout the semester observational data were collected from randomly selected pairs and groups in the treatment classes to analyze the rate of types of talk that occurred. These data were used to determine whether they might validate a robust finding in the group processes literature as defined by Foschi & Lawler (1994) that under the condition in which members of small task groups see their tasks as an ill-structured problem, group members' rate of talk related to the task predicts the productivity of the group (Whyte, 2007). Specifically, I analyzed the association

between the rate of specific talk about elaboration and the scores on the posttest (Exit Essay) both for holistic quality of the writing and for signs of elaboration. Results indicate that while no significant difference was identified among the five classes, pairs and groups with high rates of talk specific to elaboration did make gains in their scores.

### Scope of the Problem

Each academic term in community colleges and universities across the nation, tens of thousands of students enroll in what is considered a rite of passage in collegiate academic life: freshman composition. This course, typically claimed to be an intensive study of and practice in effective expository and argumentative writing, is generally proclaimed to serve as the foundation on which students build their collegiate writing. This rather daunting task is then coupled with the diversity inherent in each class. Students bring to these composition classes their unique experiences, beliefs, opinions, and writing histories. Some come with a wealth of writing experiences while others have little or no formal training in writing. To address both ends of this experience spectrum, composition instructors need instructional methods that will provide all students with access to make real gains in their writing ability over a short period of time.

### Background

This instructional “seeking-out” of the most appropriate teaching methods has been especially voluminous in the 25 years following Hayes and Flower’s (1981) landmark study substantiating writing as a recursive process and not simply as the

production of a product. They conclude that writers use a combination of cognitive processes, which come to the foreground when and as needed. The findings of Hayes and Flower (1981) have given rise to much inquiry into the overall process of writing and further into subprocesses such as generating ideas, drafting, and revising. One subprocess that has received and continues to receive much focused attention is the process of revision, or the revisiting of drafts for the purpose of changing, rearranging, or enhancing content. Research into revision has covered a wide range of topics including the methods students use to revise (e.g, Beach, 1979; Nystrand & Brandt, 1989), classroom organizations surrounding revision (e.g., Cooper, 1991; Hogan & Barnett, 1991, Zellermeier & Cohen, 1996), and various instructional procedures used regarding the revisiting of drafts (e.g, Coleman, 1987). Scholarly and practitioner studies have ranged across academic levels, various ways of formally organizing the classroom, and various revision procedures; however, within the body of revision research, results have indicated that students can exhibit increased achievement when they receive oral and/or written feedback regarding their drafts (e.g. Bennett, 1991; Carifo, Jackson, & Dagostino, 2001; Hull, Rose, Fraser, Castello, 1991; Wei Zhu, 1995), collaborate with peers during revision (Dale, 1994; Higgins, Flower, & Petraglia, 1991), and engage in activities that promote the process of working together to create new knowledge (Whyte, 2007), referred to in the group processes literature (Cohen & Cohen, 1991) as joint problem-solving.

One type of revision activity that may offer students the opportunity to receive feedback, collaborate, and engage in joint problem-solving is working in pairs or small

groups to complete a writing task. Though the procedures studied have varied for each activity, empirical studies have indicated that students can increase achievement when these particular conditions for productive small groups are met (e.g. Beason, 1993; Whyte, 2007). Classroom arrangements that allow students to work together to complete tasks have demonstrated positive results across the curriculum (Deering & Meloth, 1993; Guity, 2004; Hiltz, Coppola, Rotter, & Turoff, 1999) and have been noted in high school and college writing classes as well (Albertson and Marwitz, 2001; Hooper, Ward, Hannafin, & Clark, 1989; Sailor, 1996).

One method with documented positive results across disciplines is the use of some type of script (Dale, 1994; Hall & Sidio, 1996; Webb, Troper & Fall, 1995). What I am defining as a *script* has been referred to in composition studies by a variety of names such as “guide” (Dale, 1994, p. 339), “agenda” (Whyte, 2007)<sup>1</sup>, and “planner’s blackboard” (Higgins, Flower, & Petralia, 1991, p. 5). For this study, the defining characteristic of a script is that the script contains a set of instructions within a specific task. Further, to incorporate the aspects of feedback, collaboration, and joint problem-solving needed for this study, a high-quality script is required. A high-quality script is a set of instructions within a specific task with features that promote attentiveness from members, that promote spoken interaction among all members, and that foster joint problem-solving, and their use in groupwork has been associated with achievement in writing (Barnes, 1990; Mancine, Hall, Hall, & Stewert, 1998; Whyte, 2007).

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<sup>1</sup> I argue that the Whyte’s (in press) term “agenda” falls within the definition of a script as it guides writing instruction and am thus reframing the Whyte study as a study of two contrasting types of scripts.

While revision activities, in varied forms and shaped by varied instructional procedures, have been the subject of inquiry, one of the most demanding and uncertain aspects of generating and then revising writing, elaboration, has not been as studied. Elaboration is defined for the purpose of this study as features of writing and of oral communication that support, refute, explain, or cite beyond a statement. Elaboration is also generally referred to by practitioners as the quantity and quality of specific supporting detail that a writer offers as evidence for claims. No previous research has inquired into what way or ways of organizing the freshman composition classroom specifically foster elaboration to increase achievement.

#### Need to Study the Problem

Educational psychologists and sociologists have long discussed and investigated ways of organizing classroom work that promote and increase student achievement. One approach to organizing work in the classroom has been to identify the nature of the work to be completed and how the nature of the task connects to work arrangements (Cohen, 1992). Extensive theory and applied research have considered what are productive classroom work arrangements for the kind of task that is referred to as an “ill-structured problem.” Cohen (1992) defines ill-structured problems as ones that do not have clear-cut answers or procedures, and Kitchner (1983) defines ill-structured problems as those for which there can be multiple solutions, different pathways or procedures to reach a solution, or no solution at all. Many types of school writing can be classified as ill-structured since even in highly constrained single-mode, formulaic school genres of

writing, focusing on more engaging prose versus superficial and mechanical writing in these school genres does constitute ill-structured problem-solving. Additionally, there is not a fixed sequence of subtasks and steps that consistently and unfailingly lead to a high-quality text. Even writing that is taught through a formula approach such as a five-paragraph essay format with strict guidelines for essay organization and time constraints has elements that can be considered ill-structured. This study relied on the claim that skilled writers' composing processes during formulaic writing involve some recursiveness and allow individual student paths to the end product that cannot productively be pre specified. Therefore, a formulaic essay qualifies as involving an ill-structured task.

During the composing process of a formulaic essay, skilled writers may move back and forth between ideas and drafts before the final version is completed (Albertson, 2000; Baines, 1999). The end product may be decidedly different with each version, especially considering style, language, and content. Additionally, the decisions writers make about the best ways to elaborate their ideas are difficult to fit into a formula. Writers may identify more than one possible way to elaborate their ideas that creates an opportunity to determine the most appropriate path. Therefore, the ill-structured task of writing, specifically the manner in which writers incorporate the element of elaboration during the development of a formulaic essay, lends itself to investigation.

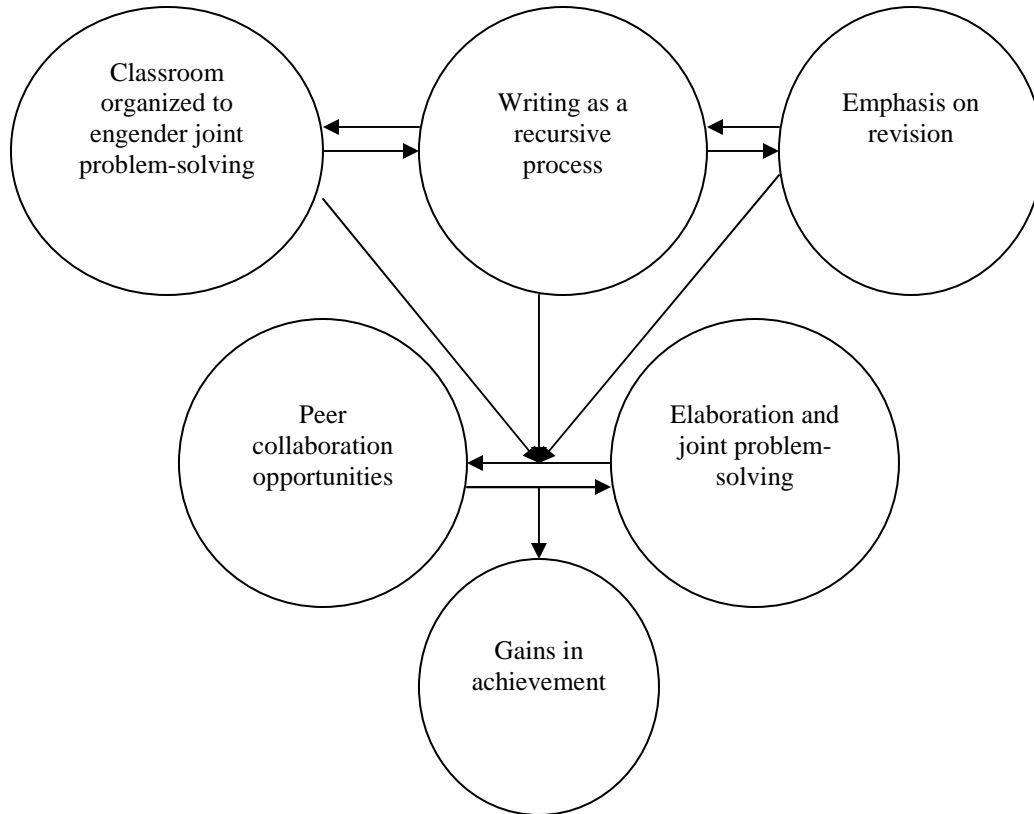
Alongside focus on the nature of the work in the tradition in the social sciences of group processes research, approaches to organizing work patterns have been identified and investigated by researchers and practitioners in the field of composition studies.

These further studies indicate that establishing writing classroom arrangements that promote recursiveness and provide opportunities for revision activities through peer response (e.g. Beason, 1993; Hogan & Barnett, 1991) can result in gains in writing achievement. This same type of classroom organization with structures added to enhance elaboration can also improve achievement (Stein, 1990). Additionally, some of these studies have focused on small group organization as a type of classroom organization that has demonstrated gains in writing achievement (e.g., Dale, 1994; Deering & Meloth, 1993; Higgins, Flower, & Petraglia, 1991). This study investigated how the organization of small group work relates to writers' success on elaboration as an ill-structured element of timed, formulaic writing.

#### Conclusions from Literature

Based on findings from the past three decades, certain conclusions may be drawn regarding environments conducive to increasing the opportunities for developing signs of elaboration in student essays through the experience of scripted collaboration. Figure 1 illustrates the relationship that may exist between *writing classrooms* that encourage joint problem-solving, promote writing as a recursive process, emphasize the subprocess of revision, provide opportunities for peer collaboration, and foster opportunities for joint problem-solving to enhance elaboration and *achievement in writing*.

Figure 1: Environment conducive to development of signs of elaboration in writing



Gap in empirical literature

There is no existing research reporting achievement following participation in peer revision activities prior to and then during a high stakes writing exam when a high-quality script results in joint problem-solving to increase elaboration. Additionally, one dimension of the design of high-quality scripted elaboration that has not previously been isolated as a variable is the size of the peer task group. It is these gaps in the literature on college writing instruction that I sought to address.



### Restriction of Problem

Since empirical research on skillful writing indicates composition should be taught as a process that results in a product, what influence does a switch from the process-oriented teaching method to a product-centered final exam assessment method exert on the grades of freshmen composition students? Specifically, what is the difference between the scores of students with access to multiple peer opinions of what good writing should be and the scores of students who have limited or no access to peer feedback on signs of elaboration in students' writing?

To study effects of access to multiple peer opinions on high-stakes test scores, I implemented a quasi-experimental study, between-class design.

### Research Questions

What are the gains in achievement in writing including on the criterion of elaboration of freshman college students who have had access to multiple peer opinions? Does scripted talk with two or more peer respondents produce greater achievement than students who work alone? Does scripted talk with three or more peer respondents produce greater gains in holistic scores and in scores for the criterion of signs of elaboration than those who work with only a partner?

This study tested the following hypotheses:

Null Hypothesis: There is no difference in the gains in overall writing achievement or on the criterion of signs of elaboration of the three groups taking the exam. Comparison Class, Pair Peer Review (PPR) Treatment, Group Peer Review (GPR) Treatment.

Alternate Hypothesis 1: Students in Pair Peer Review (PPR) with a script to foster joint problem-solving will show greater gains in writing achievement and elaboration than the comparison group.

Alternate Hypothesis 2: Students in Group Peer Review (GPR) with a script to foster joint problem-solving will show greater gains in writing achievement and elaboration than the pair response group.

Alternate Hypothesis 3: Students in Group Peer Review (GPR) with a script to foster joint problem-solving will show greater gains in writing achievement and elaboration than the comparison group.

### Strengths

Since a true experiment is not possible in the College's educational setting, a quasi-experimental design was the most appropriate design to use. The posttest design that I employed allowed for control of threats to internal and external validity to be addressed by randomly assigning the treatments and selecting participants from the entire English Composition I population. Campbell and Stanley (1996, p. 205) remark that quasi-experimental designs are "well worth employing where more sufficient probes are unavailable." Through the debriefing questions and observation notes, I substantiated that participation in revision activities did occur. Also, all instruments were identical throughout the study.

### Limitations

The limitations of the study include that it was not a true experiment with random selection; therefore, group comparability regarding student characteristics cannot be assured. Further, the treatments and comparison class conditions were deliberately not randomly assigned among all possible composition instructors. Also, the sample size is somewhat small.

History of the participants was a limitation in that the participants entered the study with varied composition backgrounds. Finally, the study took place over only one academic semester, and it can be difficult to determine gains in writing achievement or predict future gains in achievement over such a limited time period (Applebee, 2000).

### Definition of Terms

1. Early in Course writing- Three-hour writing exam near the beginning of the term written on a topic not announced before the exam.
2. Elaboration- Oral and/or written communication that supports, refutes, explains, or cites beyond a statement.
3. End of Course writing- Three-hour writing exam near the end of the term written on a topic not announced before the exam.
4. High-quality script- A set of instructions within a specific task that has features that promote attention from members, encourage interaction among all members, and foster joint problem-solving.

5. Ill-structured task- Tasks for which there can be multiple high-quality solutions, different pathways to reach a high-quality solution, or no solution at all.
6. Joint-problem solving- The process of students working together to construct new knowledge in the pair or group.
7. Low-quality script- A set of instructions within a specific task that requires participants check off a list for completion and/or provides merely for simple exchange of resources, not fostering joint problem-solving.
8. Peer review- The exchange of student drafts for the purpose of providing feedback which can be both oral and written.
9. Productivity- (In the context of achievement). Development of rhetorical proficiency in school genre writing as indicated by scores on direct tests of writing.
10. Reciprocal interdependence- Students within a pair or group provide input to each other and individual outcomes can be affected by the actions of the others.
11. Revision- Revisiting of drafts for the purpose of changing, rearranging, or enhancing content.
12. School genre writing- Writing that is based on personal experience and includes types of writing such as explanation, definition, classification, division, comparison/contrast, and/or description.
13. Script- Any set of instructions within a specific task.

## CHAPTER II

### REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

#### Overview

The literature review for this study is broad in scope as several key areas involving the teaching of writing must be addressed to provide a foundation for the context of this particular study. Each area connects with the others and serves as a part of the whole. The review begins with a discussion of the nature of writing in school genres, followed by a brief historical perspective, and then characterizes current trends in conceptualizing the writing process as it relates to instruction. It then moves into review of literature on the subprocess of revision and specifically on revision as a social part of the writing process. The latter portions of the review discuss the specific aspect of signs of elaboration in writing and whether or not recursive writing processes can be fostered through the use of high-quality scripts, in classroom environments that require the production of formulaic products for assessment. The review of literature ends with a discussion of the theoretical framework that emerged as the appropriate framework for the study.

#### The Nature of Writing in School Genres

Beginning in the late 1960s and early 1970s, a revolution began to occur in recommended ways to teach writing (Hairston, 1982). Rather than viewing writing as the

production of a draft, researchers (e.g., Hayes & Flower, 1981) and practitioners (e.g., Judy & Judy, 1981) began to herald writing as a task more complex than the school genre often called *essays* produced with an algorithmic set of instructions in a single period of time using a specific method. This new approach to the teaching of writing encouraged research into how writing as a task should be described beyond its end product and what actually occurs as writers write.

As this line of research on writing processes persisted into the 1980s and 1990s, especially in academic settings (Haugen, 1991), researchers (e.g., Whyte, 2007) looked into the nature of the overall task and began to describe writing as *ill-structured* in nature, or as a task without clear-cut answers or procedures (Cohen, 1992). The term ill-structured had been used in the early 1980s by Kitchner (1983) to identify problems for which there can be multiple high-quality solutions or no solution at all and for which there may be different pathways/procedures to reach a high-quality solution. Researchers such as Whyte (in press) have argued that practitioners cannot develop algorithms that students can use to complete high-quality writings in the genres written in English courses (in the case of Whyte's (in press) research, in high schools).

In contrast, well-structured problems have absolutely correct and single solutions (Kitchner, 1983). These types of tasks can be broken down into a fixed sequence of subtasks and steps that consistently lead to the same goal. There is a specific, predictable algorithm that can be followed, one that enables students to obtain the same result each time they perform the algorithmic operations. Most writing tasks, however, even when major elements of the structure of the writing are pre specified, cannot be reduced to a fixed series of steps that yield the same quality result each time. Researchers (e.g.,

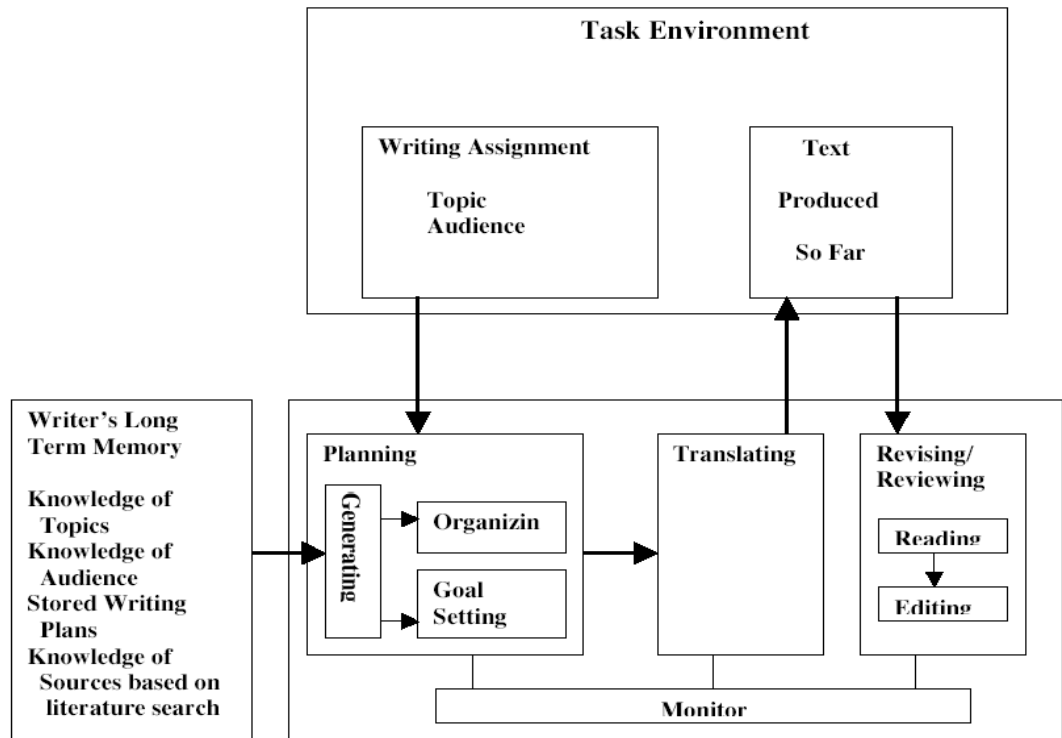
Whyte, 2007) suggest that many types of writing are indeed ill-structured tasks that cannot be broken down into a fixed sequence of subtasks and steps that consistently and unfailingly lead to a high-quality text.

The description of writing in school (and more specifically in a high school or lower division college English classes) as ill-structured in nature is but one result of the 30-year revolution within the teaching of composition. Early research (Hayes & Flower, 1981) launched a new paradigm of writing instruction that emphasized how skilled writers move through the creation of a draft by orchestrating what has become known as the writing process.

### Writing Process

The phrase *writing process* is a concept describing cognitive processes that can occur during writing. This process is described by Hayes and Flower (1981) as a set of mental operations that a writer can use at any time during drafting. In their landmark study of how skilled writers compose, Hayes and Flower (1981) found that experienced writers combine elements of all phases of the writing process in complex, yet identifiable ways as they move toward a completed document. This multi layered and recursive process, often flowing back and forth in several directions at the same time, is utilized by experienced writers as well as novice writers, the latter being typical of freshmen composition classes (Hayes & Flower, 1981). The recursive writing process consists of a non linear, non algorithmic set of events occurring in no specific order but proceeding in a manner that is determined by writers' goals (Dyson & Freedman, 1991) as the following flow chart (Figure 2) illustrates.

Figure 2: One possible example of a recursive process of writing



Hayes and Flower's (1981) findings produced a groundswell of support for a change in the way writing was being taught, and researchers such as Hairston (1982) predicted that the "winds of change" (p. 121), though in their beginnings, were bringing a stronger focus on the process approach from practitioners, researchers, and theorists. In the years following Hairston's (1982) article, large-scale research such as that by the National Writing Project (2006) as well as university-based empirical (e.g., Brunk-Chavez & Martin, 2002; Perl 1997) and practitioner (Brooks, 2001; Gillespie, 2001 Humes, 1983) research has validated skillful writing in school genres as a recursive process while others have focused on whether instructing teachers in how to teach writing as a process actually relates to increased student achievement in writing (Allen, 2003).



One such example of research into teaching the writing process, a large assessment study, offered anecdotal evidence to support the effectiveness of exposing writing teachers to the concept of recursive writing process. Allen (2003) focused on evaluating the success of NWP programs in the U.S. Department of Defense Dependent Schools. These schools serve more than 80,000 students across an expanse stretching from Iceland to Okinawa. In recent years, assessments of students in that school system had shown that nearly 82 percent of its fifth, eighth, and tenth graders scored at the proficient level or above on four types of writing: autobiographical incident, report of information, problem solution, and observation. Allen (2003) claimed that this achievement rate could be attributed to the NWP's 29 process approach workshops held during the mid-1990s for school system teachers. There were, however, no control variables in the design of Allen's (2003) study.

This *process approach* to teaching writing, which has become a prevalent practice in the U.S. through the influence of the National Writing Project (Pritchard & Honeycutt, 2006), has been studied in a variety of ways. The common thread among these various process-approach methods is that writing teachers recognize that during the process writers may engage in many types of activities such as planning, drafting, revising, editing, and publishing as they compose (Dyson & Freedman, 2003). These subprocesses have been the subject of many empirical studies (e.g., Bender, 1989; Calkins, 1982; Perl, 1997; Wei Zhu, 1995), and much of this research places specific emphasis on the importance of one subprocess: revision.

## Revision

One of the primary subprocesses typically identified in empirical research on the writing process is revision—or a revisiting of drafts for the purpose of changing, rearranging, or enhancing content. This subprocess can occur at any time during the writing process (Hayes & Flower, 1981), and may often lead, practitioners and researchers have asserted, to better, more substantive and more productive prose (Murray, 1997) and increase performance on achievement measures (Beach, 1979; Cooper, 1991; Nystrand & Brandt, 1989). Students' revision of their writing in school genres has become recommended as an integral part of writing classroom instruction at all levels (NCTE, 2004).

Within the last three decades as explicit provisions to encourage revision have become more common in writing instruction, many researchers (Hogan & Barnett, 1991; Hull, Rose, et al., 1991; Nystrand, 1984; Wyche-Smith, 1995; Zellermeier & Cohen, 1996) and composition instructors (Bruffee, 1999; Coleman, 1987; Judy & Judy, 1981; Schaffer, 1996; Sitko, 1992; Sommers, 1978) have expanded the concept of revision beyond the single student to involving a more social process. Many foundational studies (Beach, 1979; Cooper, 1991; Nystrand & Brandt, 1989), at least to some degree, discuss revision as a social process by suggesting that classroom work arrangements which allow access to the resource of others' ideas can improve the quality of students' writing. These foundational researchers and widely read practitioners have also discuss how students' revision can be furthered. As early as 1973, Elbow, in his book *Writing Without Teachers*, stated that the interaction between writer and audience is a basic component of writing. He writes the following directly to writers:

If you are stuck writing or trying to figure something out, there is nothing better than finding one person, or more to talk to. If they don't agree or have trouble understanding, so much the better—so long as their minds are not closed... Two heads are better than one because two heads can make conflicting material interact better than one head usually can. (p. 49)

In the 1980s Gere (1987) echoed this idea when she commented that no writer ever truly composes in solitude because every written work is the result of social interaction and is therefore a social process. Ede and Lunsford (1985), basing their assumptions on research to the mid 1980s, claimed that “the concept of authorship as inherently single or solitary is both theoretically naïve and pedagogically flawed” (p. 120). Into the new century, Ross and Thomas (2003) claim that group peer review of writing is one of the most widely practiced forms of collaboration in the college setting.

Prior to this decades-long expansion, if revisions were required, they were to be completed by the student alone (Hillocks, 1995; O’Neil, 1998). Therefore, the prospect of seeking input from a peer was typically not part of generating a final draft. As the field of composition studies grew, so did the need for new methods of writing instruction (Bauman, 1998). The traditional product-oriented approach was supplanted by recommendations for a process-oriented approach with preliminary work that was a part of and not the end product. Therefore, revision, with peer input, became an important part of the overarching writing process in practitioner and empirical literatures. This emphasis on peer response/review implies that joint problem-solving in order to revise will be more effective than independent revision because it

- reflects the social nature of skillful writing, including school genres (Ferris & Hedgcock, 1998; Gere, 1987; Ross & Thomas, 2003);

- increases student awareness of audience (Darling, 1992; Gere, 1987)
- can give students confidence in the value of their own words and ideas (Bruffee, 1999);
- can give students opportunities to rehearse changes in their own writing by participating in discussion of others' writing (Coleman, 1987).

### Collaborative Learning through Peer Groups

One way of moving away from independent revision and encouraging revision through interaction among students has been the use of peer review groups (including students exchanging their work and providing feedback to one another on writings) designed to enhance knowledge through collaboration (Baldwin, 2003; Beason, 1993; Bruffee, 1999; Roschelle, 1992). Practitioners Ross and Thomas (2003) argue that peer review partnerships and groups provide opportunities for college students to learn from each other, especially by reviewing drafts prior to revision.

In addition to providing a wider audience than only the instructor, peer review workshops may offer safety in numbers to many writers (Murray, 2003). In other words, the draft may be commented on several times and even by multiple peer reviewers before the instructor gives the final evaluation (Bruffee, 1999). As a method of writing instruction, this collaborative form of learning promotes new learning through an exchange of ideas and possible better understanding of one's own personal writing (Ross and Thomas, 2003). The group may become a safe place to exchange ideas and establish collective understanding (Baldwin, 2003). Through collaboration, students may construct

shared meanings for concepts, conversations, and experiences (Brown & Palincsar, 1989) and then may transfer the collective knowledge into individual writing.

Further, high school and college student writers may gain confidence through the social dynamic that can be developed through high-quality peer interaction (e.g., Ferris & Hedgcock, 1998; Gere & Abbott, 1985; McCarthy, 1987). This interaction, which may be found in peer response groups, peer writing groups, and peer review groups<sup>2</sup> (Gere, 1987), allows writers to experience the processes of inquiry, clarification, and elaboration that are necessary for successful writing, including school genres (McCarthy, 1987). Improvement of student writing becomes possible as the distance between reader and writer is reduced (Gere, 1987); student awareness of audience is increased (Darling, 1992); and student opportunity to rehearse changes in their own writing by participating in discussion of others' writing is enhanced (Coleman, 1987). Through these interactions, like peer response (Gere, 1987) peer review may provide the opportunity for student writers to receive unspecified reaction to their writing from other student writers.

### Benefits of Collaboration

While participating in contexts promoting interaction, a number of empirical studies in classroom settings across the curriculum have indicated that individuals can learn by explaining material to other group members and, to a lesser extent, by receiving explanations from other students as evidenced on mathematics learning (e.g., Webb, 1980, 2001). Providing explanations, or in the example of writing classes, elaborations,

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<sup>2</sup> Peer review groups are one of the most commonly used organizational structures in composition classes. They are groups of two or more students who read and react to each other's work with enhanced writing quality as a primary goal.

whether to help others or to defend ideas, encourages the explainer to reorganize and clarify material, recognize misconceptions and fill in gaps in his or her own understanding, and develop new perspectives and understanding as a result (Bargh & Schul, 1980). On the other side of the interaction, receiving explanations may benefit the receiver by filling in gaps in his or her understanding, correcting misconceptions, and strengthening connections between new information and previous learning (Wittrock, 1990). In fact, according to Vedder (1985), Webb (1992), and Webb, Troper, & Fall (1995), across school subject areas, students who receive explanations will benefit most if they then use the explanations to solve problems or perform tasks for themselves.

The use of writing collaborations to provide feedback in student pairs or groups as a beneficial writers' resource is a feature of present-day college classrooms as part of the essay-writing process (Hodges, 2002; Storch, 2005). Many composition scholars and practitioners have made assertions about the patterns of interactions in these groups. Early findings reported that individuals in groups with varying achievement levels can serve as more capable peers who help classmates reach their creative, individual potentials in writing tasks (e.g., Bruffee, 1984; Ede & Lunsford, 1985; Gere, 1987). Bruffee (1983) emphasizes the value of the social nature of public writing, a condition he identifies as common in non academic settings. He argues for students to be public with their writing to receive feedback, and he maintains that public writing in classrooms helps to deemphasize teacher authority and promotes student-writers' abilities to see themselves as responsible writers and to view writing as a social activity.

Within the specific context of a ninth-grade English writing classroom, students who provided and received explanations, or feedback, regarding their own writing and on

the writing of others, increased their content knowledge and subsequently improved their writing skills (Dale, 1994).

### Benefits of Feedback during Collaboration

Characteristics of feedback writers receive are important aspects of writing collaborations. Multiple studies of the influences of oral and written comments on student writing have found associations between the provision of peer feedback and achievement in writing. In a case study of college freshman composition students, Bender's (1989) research on six college writers investigated the influence of peer and teacher comments on writing achievement. The study used an editing guide, designed to help students clarify and organize their ideas as a catalyst for encouraging revision among peers in addition to written teacher comments on drafts. The product-based editing guide, which students used to form their comments, focused attention on specific sections of the draft such as the introduction, body, and conclusion and on overall mechanics. Bender (1989) found that students who engaged in a three-way written dialogue (written comments based on the response guide from peers, teacher comments, and self-evaluations) with the writer, peer editor, and teacher profited more in their writing achievement on a variety of tasks than those who had only one source of engagement.

While Bender's (1989) study focused on multiple sources of feedback, other studies have involved only peer review. Olson and Raffeld (1998), looking at college writers working on both formulaic and creative assignments, distinguish between what they term content versus surface feedback from peers. Content feedback challenges

students to consider the validity of their ideas and exposes biases that often constitute the foundation for these ideas. In contrast, surface feedback is carried out in rote learning, checklist fashion and focuses on how something is said rather than what is said: for example, on word choice, sentence structure, and mechanical style. Both types of feedback, these authors suggest, may be intended to encourage students to think critically about the ideas they are expressing, with the hope that these students will view their argument from the perspective of the audience being addressed. Olson and Raffeld (1998) reported that guidance on all types of writing had an important place in increasing writing scores, but without a parallel focus on content, surface feedback is of quite limited benefit in that students who focused only on surface feedback earned lower scores on writing tasks. Similarly, Sitko (1992) found college freshmen's achievement on holistically graded formulaic essays was associated with the use of oral feedback from classroom peers to revise. Minchew & McGrath's (2001) quasi-experimental study found that freshman expository composition writers, writing an instructor-prescribed formulaic essay and working with randomly assigned revising groups receiving both oral and written comments, exhibited significantly higher mean scores on essays than writers who worked alone. Further, Carifo, Jackson, & Dagostino (2001) claim in their quasi-experimental study of the effects of peer feedback on revising that community college writers with access to specific peer feedback on drafts improved their revising skills (diagnostic and prescriptive) more extensively than writers with less specific peer feedback.

At the opposite end of the writing achievement spectrum, other studies focus on writing achievement in college remedial settings. Hull, Rose, Fraser, and Castello (1991)



have found that both formulaic and creative writing by developmental learners steadily improved when oral conversation and feedback from peers were part of the process. Their observational study of college writers targeted classroom conversation about writing. Students were given several assignments over the course of the term, of which most were teacher-prescribed and based on a response to a particular reading. The researchers noted characteristics of talk about writing these assignments such as intonation, excitement, guessing, and silence. They counted the different characteristics of talk present in the classroom and found that students who were highly engaged in the whole-class conversations demonstrated steady improvement throughout the term.

#### Effects of Group Size in Collaboration and Feedback

Social writing activities through which feedback is offered can occur in various groupings from two or three up to an entire classroom. For the purposes of this study, the focus was narrowed to pairs and compared to groups of four to five. Much anecdotal evidence, based on social theory and gleaned from decades of observation, exists to support revision of various types of writing in high school through college settings and across the curriculum through pairs (Hall, Sidio-Hall, & Saling, 1996; Mancine, Hall, Hall, & Stewert, 1998; Van Boxtel, Van Der Linden & Kanselaar, 1997) and groups (Dale, 1994; Giraud, 1997; Webb & Palinsar, 2006; Webb, et al., 1995). However, limited empirical research exists clearly indicating the advantages of writing in pairs or groups in college writing, and no empirical studies comparing the effectiveness of pairs to groups on formulaic writing tasks were noted.

When analyzing pair work in the lower division college composition classroom, Storch (2005) found that in a study of college students co-writing a prescribed essay, heterogeneous pairs produced shorter but better texts in terms of task fulfillment, grammatical accuracy, and complexity when compared to individuals completing the same tasks. In a case study related to pairs and the concept of shared knowledge, Roschelle (1992) found that students who volunteered to work together in pairs were able to coordinate their constructions of knowledge for greater gains on recall tasks and on the discussion sections of written scientific reports.

In a study of larger groups, Bryan (1996) suggests that heterogeneously assigned writing groups of three to four increased the quality of writing in her rural community college writing classes. She indicates that content (quality of support, effectiveness of introductory and concluding paragraphs, and stylistic characteristics such as word choice and sentence structure) was enhanced once peer readers had the opportunity to comment on essays through peer review sessions. Hodges (2002) argues that working collaboratively in groups can motivate college writers in ways which encourage them to redraft their work purposefully and explicitly in pursuit of particular creative effects (memorable prose, vivid characters) as reflected in the work of writers studying to be English teachers. Her study focused on encouraging students to share their narratives via a class web page and receive feedback. Student groups posted drafts and then received feedback anonymously. Recommended classroom practices thus continue to trend toward writing classes as places where collaboration functions as a vehicle to encourage revision through recursive process, increase the quality of the creative content of all types of writing, and improve student achievement.

### Effects of Group Size on Writing Quality

Another reported advantage to collaboration with other writers is enhanced quality of student writing. Once students have received reactions to their work, they may internalize, through exploratory talk, the public exchange of ideas into their own private perspectives and be more likely to reconsider or revisit their positions (Barnes, 1990).

Both early and more recent studies indicate positive results of incorporating peer feedback into the composition classroom. Gere and Abbott (1985), in an observational study of peer response groups, report that secondary students were motivated to revise their writing and developed a sense of community *because of* their work in writing groups. They claim that peer writing groups can stay focused on discussions about writing without the direct supervision of the teacher. In fact, their research showed that group discussions where teachers are present were different from those where teachers were absent in that they were less formal and more likely to include elaboration by students on their suggestions and ideas.

Nystrand and Brandt (1989), in a qualitative study of college writers in their major courses, indicated that students who participated in an innovative alternative to regular class sessions that involved peer response groups made greater improvements in their writing as compared to writers whose work was read only by the instructor. Nystrand and Brandt (1989) report in detail through videotapes and transcripts of student conversations on their research in the Expository Writing Studio at the University of Wisconsin, Madison. In the studio, “students meet regularly in groups of four or five, and the same groups meet three times a week over the course of the term for the purpose of sharing and critiquing another's writing” (p. 209). These student volunteers, with no

specific training of how to work in groups, present their drafts each time they meet. The instructor assigns few specific writing topics (except to suggest that students write representations of personal experiences, about significant, memorable, or important events in their lives) and gives no checklists to use in monitoring the discussions—students are left much on their own, with “little direct instruction ... [or] teacher intervention”; in their small groups, students are told “to consider the extent to which the author achieves his or her purpose; they are to avoid discussing spelling, punctuation, and usage” (p. 209). Nystrand and Brandt's research found that students who talk with each other in these groups “learn to write better” than do students who have had no access to such talk (p. 209).

Wei Zhu (1995) found that college students who participated in unscripted peer response following training produced higher quality writing than those writers who worked from a low-quality instructor-provided script consisting of a sequence of generic questions for the groups to address. Sargent (1997), in a quantitative study, focused on the effects of writers participating in peer response groups. The groups of seven or eight were assigned by previous achievement level as determined by the instructor from class writing samples. Group members' responsibilities rotated as the group's reader and recorder of the other members' “inkshedding” (p. 46) on the provided report form. Her findings indicated that high and low-achieving groups of students “became more fluent writers—less apt to freeze on an essay exam, more able to write coherently under pressure, more able to marshal supporting detail from the text to advance an argument or develop an interpretation” (p. 51). She argues that as students have conversations about their writing, the task is put into a “more useful and legitimate context” when students

“talk in the margins of the text” and “ground their responses in the text and point to particular passages” (p. 42-44).

Simmons (2003) studied how randomly assigned secondary and college students functioned in peer response groups that communicated across these two levels of schooling and reported that students with experience working in these groups were more helpful in their responses and their feedback than those who had little or no previous experience. His study allowed students from the high school group to experience both face-to-face response from their secondary peers and feedback from college writers through drafts posted on the Internet. The high school students also responded to the drafts of the college writers. Students who received and gave feedback in both settings received higher scores on their writing quality than students who only received teacher feedback.

Simmons’ study also suggested that students could be taught to be better responders and better writers through several techniques including the following: sharing their writing, clarifying evaluation versus response, modeling specific praise, modeling understanding, modeling questions, modeling suggestions, whole-class response, partner response, peer comment review, and response conferences.

One instructional method that can provide opportunities for writers to become better reviewers of peers’ writing is in the form of scripted collaboration.

#### Providing Feedback through Scripted Collaboration during Revision

One method of collaborative revision occurs when pairs or groups of peers work together from a guide or a script as they comment on drafts. My broad definition of

“script,” for the purposes of this study, outlines learner activities and specifies the goal for group members to achieve (Borich, 1996), has features that allow participation from all members, and provokes increased response to particular tasks (Cohen & Cohen, 1991; cited in Whyte, 2007). Revision scripts in composition classes can range from simple checklists and prompts to more elaborate sets of questions for responders of drafts to address. Beyond the use of the script as a guide for revision of drafts, "scripted cooperative learning" is a technique commonly associated with reading comprehension of an outside source, but it is a technique that may be transferred to the reading and review of student writing as the source text.

Scripted cooperative learning consists of a controlled interaction among students as they learn some body of text material (Hall, et al. 1996), and its influence on achievement has reported mixed results. When studying outcomes related to writing, Cohen and Cohen (1991) found that in groups addressing problems that the group members perceive to be ill-structured, productivity in groups with structures that require reciprocal interdependence is dependent on the level of interaction among group members themselves. Reciprocal interdependence, for the purposes of this study, refers to students who work together within a pair or group and share common goals with each individual's outcomes affected by the actions of the others. Therefore, the level of interaction students engage in within pairs or groups directly influences productivity. Whyte (in press) built on this proposition: “The joint problem-solving that is the task of a reciprocally interdependent group connects the exchange of task-related resources (e.g., talk about the task) with productivity” (p. 8). Therefore, features of high-quality scripts should promote participation from all members, interaction among all members, and

foster joint problem-solving. Without this reciprocally interdependent problem-solving, no negotiation of meaning and thus construction of understanding need occur despite the presence of idea exchange.

Scripted cooperation implies the application of a schema (a cooperation script), i.e., a set of rules and phases according to which the cooperation proceeds (O'Donnell & Dansereau, 1992) which may or may not stipulate a sequence of actions. When working in pairs, the following scripted interaction in response to a source text is suggested by Dansereau & Johnson (1994):

1. Both learners read to a specified stopping point.
2. Both put the learning materials out of sight.
3. One learner explains what has been covered to this point, while the other contributes by detecting and correcting errors.
4. Both learners look back through the material and make further corrections and decide on elaborations and strategies that will help them remember the key information.
5. They then switch roles and repeat steps 1 – 4.

A simple group example might be a heterogeneous discussion group, moderated by a teacher who tries to structure the discussion along a sequence of specific phases, e.g., brainstorming, critique, and summary. A more sophisticated cooperation script has been proposed and tested by O'Donnell and Dansereau (1992). The objective of the cooperation is to summarize a text, consisting of several sections. For each section, one member of the heterogeneous learning group is assigned the role of a “summarizer” whose task is to produce a concise summary of the current section. The other members of the group take the role of “commentators” commenting and criticizing the summary. With the following sections of the text, roles are switched and another learner is assigned the role of a summarizer; this continues until the whole text is processed. This method

may be used within the writing classroom as well with student drafts serving as the source texts. Commentary would focus mainly on a critique of the work rather than a summary.

Other variations of scripted cooperation have been studied by Slavin (1995) and Mancine, Hall, & Hall (1998). In the Mancine et al. (1998) study, the researchers, in a college psychology class, focused on a guided script interaction in dyads using open-ended questions as the form of the script. They reported positive results from subjective student responses to questionnaires following the activity. However, they did not discuss achievement benefits. Empirical evidence with respect to positive effects on knowledge acquisition and cooperation competence of scripted peer interaction across school subjects levels and subjects is mixed, though generally supportive (O'Donnell & Dansereau, 1992; Slavin, 1995).

Classroom composition practitioners use a variety of scripts or guides to encourage peer review and ultimately writer revision. These peer response scripts can be generalized to be appropriate for most any type of writing (Connelly, 2006, p. 651; Wyrick, 1999, p. 116), or they may be coordinated for specific assignments (Ferris & Hedgecock, 1998). Scripts also may be very structured in sequence as the group members navigate through the items (Freedman, 1987; Schank & Albertson, 1977), or they may be less formal and uniform in the response manner (Deering & Meloth, 1993).

As early as the 1970s, scripts were being advocated across school subjects as beneficial to learning. For example, Schank and Albertson (1977) claimed that a sequenced script has positive implications for middle to high school students in the context of collaborative learning. They encouraged the use of routine procedures to aid



in the performance of learning tasks and posited that a sequenced script can become internalized and can provide a model for learners in future situations. In the late 1980s, practitioners Collins, Brown, & Newman (1989) echoed this advocacy of sequenced scripts in an essay promoting the teaching of writing and other disciplines as a craft. These authors claimed that a sequenced script, with opportunities for joint problem-solving including the generation of new ideas as well as the increased elaboration of already included ideas, can help learners perform tasks like an expert.

Thus, to perform like an expert on ill-structured tasks such as writing, students need high-quality scripts which offer opportunities to foster the element of joint problem-solving within the collaboration.

### High-Quality Scripts

Evidence of scripted pair and groupwork increasing student achievement when provisions for joint problem-solving are incorporated into what I have defined as “scripting” (i.e., with or without sequencing of the topics students will address) has accrued across school subjects and across secondary, and college settings (e.g., Dale, 1994; Hall & Sidio, 1996). When studying outcomes related to writing, Cohen and Cohen (1991) found that provided participants see the task at hand as the equivalent of an ill-structured problem, productivity in groups with structures that required reciprocal interdependence was dependent on the level of interaction among group members. The Cohen & Cohen (1991) and Whyte (in press) findings can be interpreted to indicate that features of high-quality scripts for peer collaboration on writing that create reciprocal interdependence, and thus not only exchange of resources and interaction among all

members but also joint problem-solving can be expected to promote oral and written elaboration in school genres of writing.

### Effectiveness of High-Quality Scripts

Research results on the use of scripts to enhance the quality and amount of task-related talk within pairs and groups collaborate on student writing, have been mixed (Deering & Meloth, 1993; Freedman, 1987; Higgins, Flower & Petraglia, 1991). Scripts to guide peer review designed as a list of questions for interaction and exchange without structures in the environment to foster joint problem-solving tend to demonstrate little joint problem-solving among group members and less evidence of increased elaboration (Freedman, 1987; Wei Zhu, 1995). Three studies in the field of composition are available to analyze joint problem-solving through peer response using a script.

In Freedman's (1987) ethnographic study of two San Francisco Bay Area high school ninth grade English classes, she noted that scripts consisting solely of a sequence of specific questions or prompts generated little high-quality talk between students and seemed to turn the focus from responding to student writing into responding for the teacher. Students were asked to prepare an out-of-class "interview" paper based on an interview with a classmate. Heterogeneous response groups were established in the class and a response sheet was given to guide peer response. Five specific questions were used:

1. What did you think of the introduction? Why?
2. What is the most interesting part of the paper? Why?
3. What is the part that needs the most work? Why?

4. Help the writer identify any places where there is not enough “showing” or too much “showing.”

5. Identify the focus of the paper as you understood it.

Each student read his/her draft aloud and the listeners completed the scripts.

Students could make oral comments about the papers if they chose to do so. Freedman (1987) found that students completed the sheets as directed by the teacher with little additional oral or written elaboration beyond the listed questions and with little joint problem-solving observed.

In the Higgins et al. (1991) observational study of first-year college writers, researchers analyzed the relationship between collaborative planning and critical reflection on essays. Students were assigned a literary criticism paper in which they were to “transform source texts in a purposeful, rhetorical way” (p. 7). The students were assigned to pairs and worked from a script that had four specific areas and was referred to as a “planner’s blackboard.” The blackboard focused on discussing four main points in the essays: 1. purpose, 2. key point, 3. audience, and 4. text conventions. Students were directed to focus on those four specific areas during peer response and to offer both oral and written feedback to the writers. By incorporating the specific “key point” area, the planner focused attention on elaboration of the content of students’ writing for both the writer and the peer reviewer, thus encouraging consideration and discussion from both views. The student conversations about their drafts were recorded, transcribed, and then coded to analyze reflective comments (i.e., identify problems, search for and evaluate alternate plans, and to elaborate ideas through a process of justification) and students’ plans for writing were holistically rated for quality. Higgins et al. (1991) reported a

significant correlation between the amount of reflective conversation and the quality of student plans. This correlation indicated the occurrence of joint problem-solving in the pairs.

In a study on a different scripting approach used in a junior high school combined science and writing assignment, Deering and Meloth (1993) analyzed cooperative learning in groups of four that focused on a source text and on writing a response to the text through a script referred to as a “problem-solving heuristic.” While many responses to writing assignments focus on literary texts, Deering and Meloth (1993) studied written response to informational texts, specifically a science text. The study concentrated on teacher instruction in a problem-solving heuristic and whether this heuristic was reflected in the students' talk, the learning outcomes, and the students' perception of the lesson(s). The problem solving heuristic used involved students responding to and elaborating on a problem in four ways that together, provide for reciprocal interdependence as a feature of the structure of these groups:

1. by generating or proposing an idea,
2. then negotiating (exchanging ideas about which ideas were most appropriate),
3. reacting to suggestions before
4. coming to a final recommendation about whether it should be included in the group's response to the task.

Deering and Meloth (1993) reported that the students practiced joint problem-solving (i.e., looked for explanations, evaluated evidence, and drew conclusions) in the cooperative group on tasks set by the teacher, and they did so with success. On a follow-up survey of the activity, the students responded positively to their experiences of

receiving specific directions, in the form of the heuristic, from the teacher and to working within a group to produce a product. They also responded favorably to producing the product by implementing a range of problem-solving strategies from the heuristic.

Findings from these key studies for middle school through college writing instruction indicate scripts that are not simply questions to be answered but rather provide for students' perception of the task as an ill-structured problem and for reciprocal interdependence are more conducive to collaboration through joint problem-solving including the discussion of elaboration. Therefore, based on these findings, features of high-quality scripts should include opportunities for students to work interdependently to resolve an ill-structured task, to foster joint problem-solving, and to provide arrangements that encourage increased elaboration.

### Elaboration

Communicating effectively as a writer is a primary function of elaboration with the amount of elaboration present in written texts, whether formulaic or non-formulaic, often seen as an indication of writing ability (Benton, Kraft, Glover, & Plake, 1986).

College composition researcher Stein (1990) says the following of elaboration in any type of writing:

Writing involves the generation of representations of meaning and then the process of determining which representations may grow in purpose, fullness and coherence as ideas develop. Again, the creation of such representations involves the selection, organization, and connection of ideas. But the writing process requires that a student translates that private meaning into public utterance. That is to say, the text she produces must not only reflect understanding of the topic, it must also be shaped so that the reader can draw on shared knowledge to get the author's intended point. These two goals—to say what is meant and to make that meaning accessible—shape the

representation of meaning as surely as schemas affect the creation of meaning during reading. As the writer invents meaning, he draws on his experience of the world to indicate what he believes to be most important to write about. As he adapts his prose for an audience, he draws on stores of shared knowledge and experience—e.g. knowledge of text structure conventions, of specific people in his audience, of experience with the world, of rhetorical commonplaces—to build a representation of meaning that guides the reader toward his intent (p. 8).

This intent to both say what is meant and make the meaning accessible helps writers create new texts of their own from multiple sources which may include the texts they are currently reading, conversations they are having, and written comments they are receiving about their own texts, as well as their own prior knowledge.

Readers/writers *transform texts* (Spivey, 1990) through the constructive tasks of selecting, connecting, and organizing information from source texts, conversations, comments, and prior knowledge. This incorporation of prior knowledge is what Stein (1990) refers to as *elaboration*. This cognitive process is "the principle means by which information from memory is combined with source text material in the reading process" (p. 146). Elaborations during reading create a "pool of ideas from which to draw during the writing process" (p. 147). In her quasi-experimental study of 17 first-year college composition writers, Stein (1990) found that when working with a reading-to-write protocol, students were able to create and use elaborations in the reading portion, and that transfer of elaborations did occur into the writing portion, though not at the reading level (80 percent versus 21 percent).

In a follow-up study to Stein (1990), Nunnally (1996) proposed that if students were given more explicit instructions in the writing portion, more elaboration would be transferred. For Nunnally's (1996) study, elaboration was defined as "the process of

importing or tapping prior knowledge ideas during information processing; it involves the writer using what he/she already knows during the writing process” (p. 231).

Through the prompt, she specifically stated what students were expected to produce from their essays and instructed them to “explain, support, refute, or cite.” She wanted to assess the number of elaborative ideas generated by the writer in the essay with elaborative ideas identified as those using his/her prior knowledge of thoughts, emotions, or experiences that were produced by students during their writing. Nunnally (1996) reported that students in her study transferred over one third of the elaborations from their reading to the writing portion.

In many college composition classrooms, elaboration in student writing is also identified by practitioners and composition text authors as “support” for the writer’s ideas in the text (Cali, 2003; Connelly, 2006; Wyrick, 2006). This support, according to Cali (2003) must be sufficient and relevant in order to achieve the kind of meaning Stein discusses. Connelly (2006) and Wyrick (2006) claim that meaning must be made through the incorporation of specific examples and details from personal experiences, memories, observations, facts, statistics, reasoned arguments, testimony from authorities, and research, depending on the audience and the writer’s purpose. In the setting of the community college classes where this study was conducted, this elaboration must present itself within the confines of a very rigid structure referred to as the formulaic essay.

## Formulaic Writing

One form of writing that has been present in classrooms for decades is formulaic writing, or writing that consists of students being given a highly specified format for writing. Much of formulaic writing follows the blueprint of the school genre known as the five-paragraph essay or five-paragraph theme with this blueprint remaining constant in combination with formulas that treat modes of writing (compare/contrast, definition, classification, division, cause/effect) as discrete school genres. Practitioner Glenda Moss (2002) has identified the typical formula for the five-paragraph essay as the following: five paragraphs: an introduction, three body paragraphs, and a conclusion. Each body paragraph has an opening sentence and at least two details to support the opening sentence. Students tell what they will write about, write about it, and then tell what they wrote about. Moss (2002) goes on to recall that this was a standard modeled in the 1950s and 1960s when she was an elementary and secondary student; it was, however, only one model of several. During the educational reform of the 1990s, however, this one model<sup>3</sup> seemingly became the only writing model for secondary school, community college, and lower division college students.

Because of accountability testing, the five paragraph essay has become so prevalent in elementary and secondary classrooms it has a new nickname...the McEssay (Black, 2001). Despite its widespread use, little research exists on formulaic writing outside the areas of high-stakes and accountability assessments. However, much

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<sup>3</sup> This model also seems to have institutionalized this school genre through the advent of state tests of writing under the federal No Child Left Behind Act and then through incorporation into SAT and ACT sections of brief (i.e., 25 minutes) of writing with no evidence supplied to students and scoring criteria and benchmark papers that fail to reinforce good-quality versus low-quality development of an argument (Hillocks, 2002).



anecdotal evidence exists. Mark Wiley, a composition coordinator at a large university, notes that the five-paragraph essay itself is not the problem. Instead, it is "...pedagogical blindness that formulaic writing leads to" that is the problem (2000, p. 61). Wiley admits teachers and writers can find a "life raft of sorts" in the FPE. He claims it can make "the teacher's job easier (both to instruct and to assess), it gives students a starting point, and in many cases the formula can result in increased assessment scores" (p. 63).

Composition teachers such as Thomas Nunnally (1991) suggest that even though formulas may produce "bland but planned essays," they can also provide students with a model of qualities of good writing (p. 69). In addition, Art Halbrook (1999), a writing assessment specialist for GED, agrees that "avoiding the template of formulaic writing is not simple" (p. 8). Like Wiley and Nunnally, he agrees that formulaic writing is not "altogether inappropriate" for beginners. But in his experience with GED essays, the learners are, according to Halbrook, "shackled to a form that denies that individual the ability to grow and communicate as a writer" (p.9).

#### Formulaic Writing Instruction in the High School and Freshman Year of College

Moss (2002) defines formulaic writing as being highly structured (specific number of sentences and paragraphs that work together to support a thesis), most often conforming to a specific situation or event, and most often represented in the form of a five-paragraph essay. Just how pervasive is the FPE in instruction? Johnson, Smagorinsky, Thompson & Fry (2003) write that "the five-paragraph theme's ubiquity is more presumed than documented" (p. 168). Yet, they report that evidence exists to suggest that the FPE is "alive and well" in high school composition classes. They point

to a student “How To” FPE website that had well over 12 million hits in 2003. There is evidence that the pervasiveness of the FPE continues during the initial year of college. A 1997 Writing Across the Curriculum conference of college writing center administrators and its follow-up list serve discussions reported that regardless of the pros and cons of formulaic writing, specifically pertaining to five-paragraph essays, these essays were a regular part of freshman composition classes across the nation (WAC, 2000).

Furthermore, an additional, more local indicator that the FPE is a feature of freshman composition classes is that in a 2006 survey of freshman composition department chairs and instructors in 21 community colleges in the southeastern state where this study was conducted, a majority reported teaching the FPE as part of their instruction.

Many researchers and practitioners at both the secondary and college freshman level have commented negatively to the presence of formulaic writing by contending that the FPE squelches opportunities for recursiveness to occur (e.g. Applebee, 1984; Emig, 1971; Hillocks, 2002). Stephens (1998) goes so far as to say that the FPE is akin to the Greek mythological Procrustean bed. In the myth, travelers were offered a bed for the night but with a catch. If they did not fit exactly into the shape of the bed, they were either stretched or had their extremities cut off until they did fit—much like the process that takes place to achieve the five-paragraph format of an introduction, three body paragraphs, and a conclusion—each of these paragraphs sometimes also standardized sentence-by-sentence.

In a college writing guide, Harvey (2003) calls the five-paragraph essay an “elementary essay format” many students learn in high school and then carry into college writing classes. While the model may be useful for introducing the concept of rhetorical

structure, he warns that it can become a straitjacket that leads some students to distort their arguments to make them fit the rigid 5-part structure. Rorschach (2004) also uses the straitjacket analogy for the five paragraph essay in her discussion of freshman college writers. She says that this “preset format lulls students into a non thinking automaticity. It causes a closing down of the natural human tendency to draw connections and see patterns and relationships in our experiences” (p. 2). This “closing-down effect” results, in Rorschach’s opinion, in students not using their writing to make sense of the world or to trace the routes of their ideas. “The five-paragraph theme is, therefore,” she asserts, “guilty of more than just straightjacketing students when they write” (Rorschach, 2004, p. 8).

Not all researchers and practitioners, however, share the view that five-paragraph essay formulaic writing is a rigid Procrustean bed (Butler, 2002) or a straitjacket. In a 2000 article on college composition, Robert Connors argued that the field has lost something by its attempt to reject pedagogical practices that encourage prescribed structure (thesis, clearly supported in a specific number of body paragraphs). He traces the use of formulaic writing back to Aristotle and advocates a return to the teaching of formulaic aspects of writing (118-24). Researchers Frank Farmer and Phillip Arrington’s (1995) synthesis of secondary and college writing instruction articles and studies published since the 1960s documents that in a significant number of high school and college classrooms many “formal aspects of composition instruction have disappeared because they are associated with the product approach to writing “ (p. 13). Therefore, some practitioners who make formulaic writing a staple of their instruction may consciously know and agree with Farmer and Arrington. Whether or not the teaching of

the FPE is a reasoned choice, the genre persists. Wartchow and Gustavson (1999) analyzed writing instruction in the upper high school grades by interviewing high-school students from a large urban school and others from a private suburban school. In both schools, five-paragraph formulaic writing was stressed above all else, with emphasis on the customary pattern: introductory paragraph, three body paragraphs, and conclusion (p. 5). Baines (1999) observed that in a study of 300 secondary writing classes using three variations of the process approach, including a teacher-prescribed five-paragraph approach; a classic process approach with specific steps of prewriting, drafting, and revising; and an anti-grammarians approach with no particular form or grammar correctness requirements, writing as a recursive and creative process was encouraged by the teachers and practiced by most students. Both Wartchow and Gustavson (1999) and Baines (1999) report having observed that many students talked through ideas with one another at various points during the writing of the FPE.

#### Elaboration as an Ill-Structured Problem in Formulaic Writing

I will argue here that writing as a recursive process can manifest itself when students write in school genres that consist of formulaic expository writing. Expository writing has been defined as sustained reflection during which writers focus on and process information to various degrees within a prescribed structure (Nystrand, Cohen, Dowling, 1993). Wyrick (1999), author of the freshman composition handbook *Steps to Writing Well*, includes narration, explanation, definition, classification, division, comparison, contrast, causal analysis, argument, and description as types of expository writing that can fit into a five-paragraph formulaic pattern. The value of these

expository, formulaic writing modes as a presence in high school and college composition classes has been debated since the early 1970s with Janet Emig's (1971) concerns over the proliferation of five-paragraph essays revealed in her landmark study of twelfth-grade students. Her research employed the think-aloud protocols to examine case study students' work processes as they completed a series of writing tasks and illustrated how complex and evolutionary the act of skillful writing in twelfth grade actually was.

Since then, many have joined the debate on both sides. Shafer (2000) calls students writing in the formulaic, expository modes "behavioristic bird[s] who peck[ ] the right button to receive a reward" (p. 30). Halasek (1999) refers to formulaic writing in college composition classes as "repressive" and a form that "allows only one way of writing" (p.99). In contrast Albertson (2000) in a descriptive study of 300 secondary school writers challenges these ideas when she claims that formulaic writing, specifically in the areas of example and narration, can represent sound, clear writing and can foster recursiveness.

In reference to differences between FPE formulaic essays and non formulaic essays, Penny (2003) conducted a holistic study of essays by secondary writing students who had been given limited time to write. Papers that scored as "adequate" or above were primarily five-paragraph essays that varied as to expository mode lending support to the claims of Butler (2002), Connors (2000), and Baines et al. (1999) that formulaic writing does not necessarily represent a rigid, straitjacket like structure with little or no room for recursiveness or creativity.

Manzo (2003), in a response to a call by the National Commission on Writing in America's Schools and Colleges for a writing revolution, looks beyond the five-paragraph formula in secondary schools and notes that while a rigid five-paragraph form may exist, within each of the expository modes, a recursive, thoughtful process can be incorporated so that creativity and form do not necessarily become rivals. Carifio, Jackson, & Dagostino (2001) conducted a small-scale study of community college freshman writers that looked into the effects of peer comments on instructor-prescribed, non timed formulaic writing. The essays were written over the course of several class periods, and in addition to the longer composing time, students had access to peer comments on their drafts regarding content and mechanics through peer review sessions that allowed them to discuss written comments and expand the discussion into areas that were initiated by the original comments. Their findings indicate that college composition classrooms organized to promote recursive writing, regardless of expository mode, result in higher achievement on final products when compared to classrooms without the emphasis on recursiveness (i.e., no opportunity for students to write beyond one period).

Just as researchers and practitioners disagree about whether a recursive process can be fostered within formulaic writing, no consensus has been reached as to whether ill-structured problem-solving can occur within a formulaic essay since the “creative” elements of writing are often associated with narrative fiction. The term “creativity” rather than “ill-structured problem-solving” characterizes the field of composition studies; yet, these different terms are much alike in their meaning. Both concepts are indicative of more than one path to a solution.

However, others claim that creativity/ill-structured problem-solving can and does exist in the academic essay. While there are many views about the nature of creativity and whether it can be taught, there is some agreement that the creative process involves the application of past experiences or ideas in novel ways (Sternberg, 1988; Finke, Ward & Smith, 1992). University of Idaho Professor Phil Druker (2006) defines creative, academic nonfiction as a hybrid of literature and nonfiction. Non fiction elements include the essay form (prescribed or not), explanation, standard rhetorical patterns, ideas, and facts with creative literary elements consisting of literary voice, story, characterization, setting, personally engaged author, artistic elements, and polished language. In combination, the two “present a way of looking at the world with concrete examples [that] are grounded in self, interesting to the reader, [and that] have unique voice” (p. 1).

Similarly, in a handbook focusing on writing creative nonfiction, Gerald (1996) asserts that academic writing can exhibit creative elements such as word choice, syntax, voice, and the use of figurative language and that all interesting writing has one feature in common—coherent structure. Gerald notes, “Structure is the arrangement of parts and all the techniques you use to hold the parts together and make it *do* what it is intended to do” (156). The structure is always moving the reader toward something—a point of view, an insight (159). It is dynamic; it creates movement. In the course of this movement, writer creativity takes the form of elaboration meaning “supporting” the writer’s ideas in the text (Cali, 2003; Connelly, 2006; Wyrick, 2006) by incorporating of prior knowledge (Stein, 1990) expressed as “interesting turns of phrase, fresh metaphors, lively...

presentation, a shunning of clichés and obvious endings, a sense of control over nuance, accurate use of words, and governing aesthetic sensibility” (11).

As previously stated, Nunnally (1996), building on Stein’s work, has defined elaboration as “the process of importing or tapping prior knowledge and ideas during information processing; it involves the writer using what he/she already knows during the writing process” (p. 231). Thus, an elaborative idea, in either formulaic or non formulaic writing, is one generated by the writer using his/her prior knowledge of thoughts, emotions, or experiences. And, this presence of creative elaboration, embedded in the “structure” Gerald (1996) refers to, can arguably be the primary aspect of writing that makes “it do what it is intended to do” (156).

Chapman (1991) in a research-based article on the generative aspects of the five-paragraph essay puts forth the following:

Much of our resistance to discussing form with students comes from a romantic view of composition that posits form as a product of inspiration and suggests that specifying a form for composition, therefore, inevitably limits a writer’s individual genius. In other words, *form* is often associated with *conformity*, with rigid rules and “boiler plate” prose. (p. 1)

Since the 1970s and 80s, much scholarship has suggested that forms, of all types, can serve a generative purpose in writing, freeing rather than limiting many student writers (Anderson, 1987; Coe, 1987; D’Angelo, 1975). Anderson (1987) has directed attention to literary nonfiction and the importance of forms while Richard Coe (1987) asserts in an article on teaching form in composition that we have lost what the traditional approach to composition did: it “essentially taught good form” (235). These “good forms” or conventional patterns that encourage speculation and invention represent socially shared



strategies of response, ways of “sorting factors, sizing up situations” that have become part of the rhetorical competence of those belonging to a particular discourse community, a community that the student writer is being asked to join.

D’Angelo (1975) details the benefits of formulaic writing for teaching writers the importance of structure when he explains that within highly specified forms, other elements of text manifest themselves as concrete, particular, and unique (through word choice and sentence style). These elements then work together with the overall conceptual framework which is abstract, general, and universal (79). Ideally, he claims, an essay works on both levels. Finally, Berthoff (1981) argues that form is the creative force behind composition. She says, “Forms are not cookie cutters superimposed on some given, rolled-out reality dough; forms are not alien structures that are somehow made appropriate to “what you want to say. Forms are our means of abstracting; or rather forming *is* abstracting” (p. 77). Berthoff’s observations arose from an analysis of findings in her own classroom. She assigned her students to prewrite using the prescribed form of double-entry notebooks. The students then used the prewriting as the basis for an essay. Berthoff (1981) found that double-entry notebooks provided a form that helped students creatively order the chaos of their impressions as they prepared to draft an essay.

In the 1990s and into the Twenty-first Century, this view has been echoed. Practitioner Debra Dean (2000) claims in an observational study that creative elements are present in the five-paragraph writing of secondary students who are personally engaged in their writing. Others strongly disagree with this claim. Practitioner Gregory Shafer (2000) notes that despite “altruistic motives and a belief that all of the

prescriptions will only make composing easier,” high school and college writing teachers “routinely stifle their students’ voices, creativity, and passion by becoming transmitters of academic prescription” (p. 29).

Nancy Sommers (2006), commenting on the article “Why Can’t Johnny Write?,” argues that form determines the content when college students write in five-paragraph essay format and that students cannot make conceptual moves within the confines of the structure. As evidenced, however, among both researchers and practitioners, there is no distinct consensus regarding the merits and drawbacks of the FPE regarding creativity and recursiveness, only a plethora of supported claims from both ideological camps.

What consensus does present itself is that formulaic writing is a persistent school genre, and teaching the ill-structured aspects of these genres may be impeded by typical institutional methods of writing assessment.

### Assessing Student Writing

Like composition teaching practices, the assessment of student writing in college has undergone a series of practice-based shifts over the past half-century from primarily indirect methods to more presently widespread direct methods of assessing student writing (i.e., assessing writing via scoring of one or more writing samples rather than employing a battery of multiple-choice test items) (Yancey, 1999). Assessment practices began to come under scrutiny as the social nature of writing became more accepted (Faigley, 1985); therefore, the need for authentic assessments of writing including means that provide access to others’ ideas during writing became evident (Smith, 2004). The argument emerged that (1) students drawing on their personal knowledge through

experience and culture and on the knowledge of their peers and that (2) students writing for an authentic audience was a valuable consideration for assessment (Smith, 2004). If instructors evaluate solely on a direct writing assessment with no evaluative criteria which allows students to draw from their experiences or consider their audience, writers are placed at a disadvantage (Cho, 2003). Furthermore, high school and college empirical research cautions against evaluating student performances in writing rather than students' knowledge of what writing is and does (e.g., Albertson & Marwitz, 2001; Trimbur, 1996).

Existing scholarship (Albertson & Marwitz, 2001; Barritt, 1994; Tepper & Costa, 1994; White, 1994) argues against a one-shot method of evaluation such as high-stakes writing exams, and White (1994) claims that assessment can function as the enemy of instruction. The one-shot products simply do not tell the complete story of the students' complex writing processes (Strickland & Strickland, 1998). What occurs during the entire process tells a more accurate picture of the exploration, discovery, and final results in much clearer detail than the final product alone (Albertson & Marwitz, 2001).

### Direct Assessment Practices

As direct assessment became more prevalent, the need to have instruments that were both reliable and valid became obvious (Bers & Smith, 1990). One of the first attempts was through holistic writing assessment, also referred to as impressionistic scoring (Huot, 1993). Huot (1993) says that the development of holistic scoring has been one of the greatest writing assessment breakthroughs, and it has become standard in the composition profession. Assessing holistically is to attempt to view the writing as more

than the sum of its elementary parts (Bailey, 1998). Readers do not separately judge the singular factors such as treatment of topic, selection of rhetorical methods, word choice, grammar and mechanics--that constitute a piece of writing. Rather, raters are asked to consider these factors as elements that work together (Elliot, 1990).

Holistic scoring allows readers to use their full and overall impressions of a written piece while assessing it (Bers & Smith, 1990). Additionally, holistic scoring does not require that assessment is focused on a particular set of grammar, usage, or mechanical skills (Bers & Smith, 1990; Elliot, 1990; Huot, 1993).

Using holistic scoring was not without problems. First, reliability levels were not as high, so interrater reliability was addressed (Huot, 1990; White, 1994). Second, this re-focus on reliability caused researchers like Elbow (1993) to question whether writing was being scored in a valid way. Schema, rubrics, and model papers came into existence to assist raters and to make the holistic scoring of direct writing more cost effective and efficient (Bailey, 1998; Bers & Smith, 1990; Elliot, 1990; Huot, 1993).

A *typical* holistically graded process is carried out as follows: Training of raters occurs to establish and ensure interrater agreement and to identify benchmark papers. Each written piece is read by two readers, who provide separate, independent judgments on the overall quality of the writing based on a rubric or another method specified for the particular test situation. The readers are generally chosen from among professionals who teach writing (Elliot, 1990). For the essays to be scored fairly and consistently, readers must be able and willing to adjust their personal standards of evaluation to those set for the particular testing program (Huot, 1993).

Another form of direct assessment comes in the form of the impromptu essay assessment. This assessment method gives writers a prompt on which to write and then sets a time limit within which the essay is to be completed. The essay is then assessed holistically and is generally used for placement purposes (White, 1994). Some institutions also use these essays for high-stakes decisions such as course pass/fail. White (1995) points out that twenty years ago, the essay test was strongly defended as an effective method of testing writing ability. However, today it is under strong attack as being an inauthentic form of assessment (Barritt, 1994; Tepper and Costa, 1994; Trimbur, 1996). As a matter of fact, a council of the 1992 National Council of the Teachers of English resolved to eliminate the practice from composition classrooms.

Despite this push in the early 1990s, White (1994) reports that over 70% of all colleges use some form of impromptu writing as part of their writing assessment process. These impromptu writings may be administered in the form of diagnostic essays, placement essays, or high-stakes pass/fail exams. Whatever the design, impromptu essays are still a widely used form of writing assessment (Haswell & Wyche-Smith, 1994; White, 1995).

#### Collaboration during Testing

As impromptu essay assessments have been and remain a factor in the assessment of writing, according to university researcher Webb (1995), another type of assessment began to emerge in the early 1990s. Large-scale assessment programs began to include collaborative small-group work instead of, or in addition to, students' working

individually (e.g., Connecticut's Common Core of Learning Assessment, 1992; California Assessment Program, 1985; California Learning Assessment System, 1992).

One factor for using group work in assessment is that it links assessment more closely to the growing emphasis on small-group collaboration and cooperation that occurs in classroom instruction (Linn, 1993; Wise & Behuniak, 1993). Recognizing that cooperative and collaborative learning in the classroom can increase student learning and enhance socio emotional factors such as social skills, self-esteem, and attitudes towards others (Slavin, 1987), school districts, state departments of education, institutions of higher education, and national research organizations have started to advise widespread use of cooperative and collaborative learning methods of instruction (e.g., California State Department of Education, 1985, 1992; Mathematical Sciences Education Board, National Research Council, 1989). Additionally, calls for collaborative small group work also appear in many curriculum standards and courses of study to help students develop and communicate ideas and promote deeper understanding of the subject matter (National Council of Teachers of Mathematics, 1989). With the increased call for collaboration in classroom settings, the implications for assessment are apparent.

### High-Stakes Testing

As the terrain of composition instruction was changing to a more process-based instruction approach with research on assessment practices following suit, the standardized testing landscape was shifting toward greater accountability in educational instruction (Koretz, 2002; Yancey, 1999). Standardized testing as a method of

assessment is not a new phenomenon. New York State's Regents Exams for college-bound students have been in existence over one hundred years, since 1865, and following World War II and the implementation of the GI Bill, standardized testing became more prevalent (Koretz, 2002). These standardized tests in school settings were typically low stakes with the noted exceptions of standardized tests for classification purposes of students (e.g., gifted and qualifying for accommodations) and college entrance exams. Apart from these exceptions, standardized testing had few consequences for students, teachers, and schools that accompanied the results of these tests (Koretz, 2002). This changed somewhat in the 1970s with the advent of minimum competency testing (Yancey, 1999). This type of testing required that students achieve minimum levels of proficiency before being passed from grade to grade or receiving a high school diploma (Chandler, 1982; Palardy, 2001; Walstead, 1984; Wise, 1979). However, the tests were written at a relatively low level and were intended to "weed out" only the bottom portion of students (Koretz, 2002).

Change occurred once again in the 1980s following the U.S. Department of Education's National Commission on Excellence in Education's report entitled *A Nation at Risk* (1983). This report suggested implementing specific instructional and testing policies to ensure that the educational system in the U.S. was producing well-educated individuals and recommended that (1) graduation requirements should be strengthened, (2) colleges and universities should adopt higher and measurable standards, (3) learning time should be significantly increased, and (4) the teaching profession should be improved through higher standards for preparation and professional growth. As a result, more and higher consequences became attached to standardized testing in the form of

additional testing requirements through the number of tests given, yet through the 1980s, the tests were still considered low stakes (Jones, 2001).

This low-level type of testing would prove to be short-lived as an explosion of change occurred in the late 1990s and into the 21<sup>st</sup> century (Yancey, 1999).

Accountability in education became paramount (Volger, 2004), and the term high-stakes testing became a fixture within education. High-stakes testing (Jones, 2001; Merchant, 2004; Volger, 2004) is testing that students must pass to graduate or advance to another grade. Merchant (2004) further remarks that high-stakes tests are tests that carry serious consequences for students and/or educators including rewards to punitive measures.

### High-Stakes Impact on Composition Instruction

High-stakes composition testing removes opportunities for students to revise, which can decrease final scores and result in papers that “lack sophistication, are cursory discussions, are disjointed, confused, lacking in rhetorical markers, and riddled with surface errors” (Albertson & Marwitz, 2001. p. 150). These characteristics of timed high-stakes writing samples are indicative of writing that is being produced through these types of composition assessments. Such samples are not the most reliable evidence of students’ writing abilities (Barritt, 1994; Cho, 2003; Tepper & Costa, 1994). Another concern, regarding reliability, is the writing prompt itself (Cho, 2003). Prompts affect how and what the writers write and also how their responses are perceived by raters, and one high-stakes response to a single prompt will not yield reliable results (Albertson & Marwitz, 2002; Cho, 2003). Barritt (1994) and Tepper and Costa (1994) argue against the



reliability of one-shot tests as well. Further, Cho (2003) points out that time constraints influence reliability. Studies indicate that students who have more time write essays that are scored higher using the holistic scale than those who are limited in time (Kroll, 1990; Powers & Fowles, 1996). Time constraints affect the writing process and topic choice of the writer. Albertson and Marwitz (2001) indicate that students who are under time pressure tend to take the safe way to writing an essay in that they write highly formulaic, less risky essays.

When taking high-stakes tests, students write with the intention of passing the exam and not for the natural discovery of writing: “When institutions rely on a single test for assessment, students’ risk of failure overrides any impulse for discovery that writing invites” (Albertson & Marwitz, 2001 p. 150). This knowledge places composition instructors into the dilemma of teaching students about writing as a process compared to writing to pass a timed test (Albertson & Marwitz, 2001). Writing teachers concerned about individual student growth and the writing process as a means of discovery of rhetorical proficiency beyond school genres are at odds with state and local governing bodies interested in reducing costs and identifying minimally proficient individuals and the programs that produce them (Albertson & Marwitz 2001). If the aim is general assessment, valid process-oriented instruction will continually be undermined for the ease of blanket testing (Barritt, 1994; Tepper & Costa, 1994).

### Conclusions from Literature

Based on findings from the past three decades, certain conclusions may be drawn regarding the teaching and assessing of composition. First, cognitive development is

dependent on social interaction. Second, writing is a process that is both recursive and social in nature. Third, participation in revision activities with peers can, when high-quality joint problem-solving is achieved, result in gains in writing achievement. More specifically, scripts with features that foster joint problem-solving through reciprocal interdependence are an instructional method to produce writing achievement.

Therefore, based on previous theory and empirical research, composition classes that treat writing as a recursive process, including teaching emphasis on revision, can be organized to engender elaboration that establishes and augments students' conceptual frameworks for new learning of the rhetoric of school genres of writing. When such classroom environments incorporate peer collaboration during writing that (1) provides for students to see writing and/or peer review as an ill-structured problem and (2) provides reciprocal interdependence, the joint problem-solving that is the task of such groups will generate high-quality talk that, in turn, produces achievement in writing on required topics and in formulaic school genres.

### Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework of this study centers on a class of behavioral theory, referred to as contingency theory (Lawrence & Lorsch, 1967; Thompson, 1967), that contends there is no one best way of organizing a work environment and that organizational arrangements which are effective in some situations may not be successful in others (Fiedler, 1964). In other words, optimal work arrangements are contingent upon various internal and external constraints. Early work in the theory focused on environmental factors that shape organizational action (Thompson, 1967), including that

the amounts of environmental uncertainty place different requirements on organizations (Lawrence & Lorsch, 1967). Subsequent work has expanded the field to consider other organizational variables such as strategy (Chandler, 1977), uncertainty of tasks (Galbraith, 1973), and technology (Perrow, 1967). The work of Perrow (1967) has been further adapted by researchers (Cohen & Cohen, 1991; Cohen, Lotan, & Leechor, 1989; Whyte, 2007) to study how organizational work arrangements relate to student learning outcomes. For this framework to be appropriate for this investigation, three issues must be addressed. (1) Is writing, as an individual and with a group, an uncertain or ill-structured task? (2) Is the revision of writing a group task? (3) Is joint problem-solving a characteristic of a group with the task of peer review of writing in a formulaic school genre that can be fostered?

#### *Writing as an Ill-Structured Problem for Individual Writers and for Peer Groups*

When studying effective methods of organizing classrooms for student learning outcomes, the genesis for organization should be identifying the nature of the work to be performed (Cohen, Lothan and Holthuis, 1997). In composition classrooms, the nature of the writing task can be considered one that is ill-structured rather than routine and one that is sometimes undertaken individually and sometimes undertaken as part of a peer response group. For a task to be considered ill-structured, it should not have clear-cut answers or procedures (Cohen, 1991); it should have multiple solutions, no solution at all, and may have different pathways/procedures to reach a solution (Kitchner, 1983). No *certain* pathway is evident. Highlighting that skilled writing is an ill-structured task, Flower and Hayes' (1981) empirical research on the composing processes of expert writers and subsequent research on the revision process (Flower, Hayes, Carey, Schriver,

& Stratman, 1986) indicates that the stages skilled writers use during the writing process and also during particular revision processes, because they are recursive, are not uniform from writer to writer nor even from one episode of a skilled writer's composing process to the next. According to Whyte (in press) writing as an ill-structured problem is applicable to peer response group work as well. She states that "provided [ ] peer response group work is embedded in a writing task that preserves the uncertainty of skillful writing, peer response toward revision of writing is itself an ill-structured problem" (in press).

Ill-structured problems, whether worked on individually or in a group, contrast with those problems that can be solved by a routine series of specific steps (i.e., by algorithm). The lack of a routine task (i.e., the *uncertainty* associated with an ill-structured task) is a scope condition for Cohen, Lotan, and Leechor's (1989) research on delegation of authority by teachers to students working in small task groups and high-quality talk within the groups. Task uncertainty is likewise a scope condition for this research on arrangements to create reciprocal interdependence within student peer review groups, resource exchange, and subsequent achievement in writing, and I argue joint problem-solving.

#### *Revision of Writing as a Group Task*

Flower et al. (1986) identified revision as one of the important sub processes within the writing process, and Cohen and Cohen (1991) concluded that under the conditions of an ill-structured problem and a true group task (i.e., a task that cannot be completed by an individual group member), interaction is important to productivity. Based on these findings and focusing on the specific aspect of responding to writing

through peer group revision, can the work of peer review groups be considered a group task? Whyte (in press) reports that peer response groupwork can be considered a group task. Citing Cohen and Arechavala-Vargas' (1987) work, which identifies two criteria for labeling tasks as "true group tasks," Whyte (in press) claims that both criteria are met during peer response group work. The first criterion establishes that at least two individuals must have essential resources, and the second criterion establishes that the task cannot be completed without input from at least one other individual. She writes:

During peer response group work, the student whose writing is being responded to must provide the resource of his or her written draft, and at least one other student must provide the resource of some response to that writing. The group cannot complete the task of peer response to writing without, at a minimum, resources from the writer and from at least one peer respondent (Whyte, 2007).

Building on Whyte's (in press) proposition that response to writing through peer response groups is a group task, Cohen and Cohen's (1991) conclusion that interaction during an ill-structured task that is also a group task will influence productivity, and Flower et al.'s (1986) claim that revision is one of the important sub processes in the composing process, peer response group revision work is indeed a group task and, further, that provided these scope conditions are met, high-quality talk within peer review groups will predict the groups' productivity.

#### *Joint Problem-Solving during Peer Group Work*

Cohen, Lotan, and Leechor's (1989) study of elementary school classroom work groups built on Perrow's theory which posits that when the tools used to complete a task become uncertain, two specific changes should occur to avoid losing organizational effectiveness: (1) more delegation of authority and (2) more lateral communication. Focusing on these two areas, Cohen and her colleagues investigated whether the

delegation of authority to students in comparison to teachers' retaining authority (i.e., directly supervising students' work processes) impacted achievement and if the exchange of resources among students as they worked on classroom tasks affected collective achievement (Whyte, 2007). Delegation of authority was characterized as students' understanding that they could make their own decisions and thus learn from their own errors with lateral communication characterized as the exchange of intellectual resources from student to student. Cohen, Lotan, and Leechor (1989) concluded that the more authority teachers retained, the less lateral communication occurred within the groups of students. In her study of high school peer response groups in English classes, Whyte (in press) focused on full delegation of authority with reciprocal interdependence through rotating role-based group activities versus partial delegation of authority with sequential interdependence through checklist-based group activities within peer response groups. She found there was a positive correlation between rate of specific talk about writing and achievement in the role-based group, but that positive correlation did not manifest itself in the checklist-based group. Further, she reported that "these results thus support the interpretation that the reciprocally interdependent group structures in the role-based treatment, together with full delegation of authority, generated joint problem-solving which connected the exchange of task-related resources (talk about the task) with productivity in the form of target students' achievement in writing" (in press). Therefore, based on Whyte's (in press) findings, there is evidence to support that joint problem-solving can be fostered within a community college peer review group setting.

In organizational work arrangements where one important resource for a group is ideas, Cohen and Cohen (1991) found that during social interaction within a group,

opportunities for the resources to surface and for tasks to be completed occur. Further, Cohen and Cohen (1991) found that when groups work to solve an ill-structured problem with structures that promote reciprocal interdependence, interaction within the group is higher than when these structures are absent. Whyte (in press) has argued that structures promoting reciprocal interdependence through the development of roles in peer response groups generate opportunities for joint problem-solving to occur. Therefore, the conceptual framework that guided this study features students organized into peer review groups completing an ill-structured with structures that promote reciprocal interdependence.

*Scripts as structures to foster joint problem-solving*

Scripts are structures commonly used in teaching reading through small group work to construct comprehension of a source text. These scripts, ranging from simple lists of questions testing recall to a set of more open-ended instructions that promote reciprocal interdependence and thus joint problem-solving, are used to guide readers as they work their way through texts. Empirical research suggests scripts that guide discussion without constraining the group members' ways of thinking about the task allow students to construct knowledge together and increase their level of comprehension (Barnes, 1990). What I have included within my definition of *scripts* (i.e., instructions to groups that foster joint construction of knowledge) can increase individual expertise and individual achievement (Whyte, 2007). In her analysis of rates of types of talk within groups working on peer response to writing as an ill-structured task, Whyte (in press) found that among students who engaged in shifting role-based activities (writer, facilitator, harmonizer, writer's assistant, materials manager) there was a positive and

statistically significant association between mean rate of specific talk about writing and achievement in writing. No sequenced script of questions for the groups to adhere to was given by the instructor in this treatment; rather, each writer was trained to set an agenda for the session, and each member of the group used that agenda to complete the task and to extend the discussion if necessary. Discussion was guided but not constrained by the writer's agenda. Therefore, a conceptual framework featuring students organized into peer review groups using what I am defining as a script with features that foster opportunities for access to joint problem-solving to complete an ill-structured task is an appropriate structure for this study.



## CHAPTER III

### METHODS AND PROCEDURES

#### Overview

This research took place at a community college in Southeast Alabama, so certain aspects involving participants and location were governed by the fact that the study was conducted within an institutional setting. Despite the impossibility of conducting a truly random experiment, the setting did lend itself to a quasi-experimental approach that offered very similar treatment and comparison environments in which to test the variables. Based on my review of literature and my specific areas of interest, I addressed the following research questions:

#### Research Questions

What are gains in achievement in writing including on the criterion of elaboration of freshman college students with access to multiple peer opinions as measured by scores on pretest/posttest writing assessment? Specifically, does scripted talk with two or more peer respondents produce greater achievement than students who work alone? Does scripted talk with one or more peer respondents produce greater gains in elaboration than students who work with only a partner?

This study tested the following hypotheses:

Null Hypothesis: There is no difference in the gains in overall writing achievement or on the criterion of elaboration of the three groups taking the exam. Control Group, Single Peer Review (SPR), Group Peer Review (GPR).

Alternate Hypothesis 1: Students in Single Peer Review (SPR) with a script to foster joint problem-solving will show greater gains in writing achievement and elaboration than the control group.

Alternate Hypothesis 2: Students in Group Peer Review (GPR) with a script to foster joint problem-solving will show greater gains in writing achievement and elaboration than the pair response group.

Alternate Hypothesis 3: Students in Group Peer Review (GPR) with a script to foster joint problem-solving will show greater gains in writing achievement and elaboration than the comparison group.

### Treatments

The two treatments for this study were designed to determine if (1) access to multiple peers' opinions of writing demonstrated greater overall increases in writing scores and elaboration scores compared to students with fewer or no access to peer resources and (2) participation in scripted peer revision activities demonstrated greater overall increases in writing scores and elaboration scores compared to students who revised alone.

The first treatment, Single Peer Review (SPR), involved a revision process that takes place with the writer and one peer responder, or a pair. The peer provided written and/or oral feedback to the writer concerning written drafts. The second treatment, Group Peer Review (GPR), involved a revision process that takes place in a group of four or five—the writer and three or four peers. Each member of the group provided written and/or oral feedback to the writer concerning written drafts.

All experimental groups used peer response scripts to respond to drafts throughout the semester. The groups used a script designed to generate rich conversation about student texts, specifically about elaboration, and the pairs used a script designed to solicit meaningful exchanges about the student texts, specifically about elaboration.

(Appendices B and C.) Prior research has indicated that participation in peer review activities which foster joint problem-solving can produce improved writing achievement (Gere, 1987; Hogan & Barnett, 1991; Roschelle, 1992) during the composition process. However, there is a lack of empirical studies reporting on the effects of participation in peer revision activities in preparation for and then during a high-stakes writing exam.

During fall semester 2006, I pilot tested variations of each of the three scripts in English Composition I classes. Based on instructor and student feedback, the current versions of the scripts were selected. The single peer response script (SPR), designed for pairs, incorporates features that promote joint problem-solving through encouraging participation from all members as well as interaction among all members as the group works together to construct knowledge. The structures of the script allowed both reader and responder to work through tasks together to increase the presence of elaboration in

their essays. The script was focused on features designed to enhance elaboration through collaborative joint problem-solving tasks. (Appendix B) The multiple-peer response script (GPR), designed for group of four to five, also incorporated features that foster joint problem-solving. The structures of this script allowed the group members to work through the various roles of summarizer, generator, and questioner as they worked through each other's drafts. Opportunities for joint problem-solving to increase elaboration were fostered through the script design which encourages collaboration on the script topics (Appendix C). The treatment scripts' design incorporates features that encourage students to consider their peer or group task as one that is ill-structured (i.e., no specific path to a solution, opportunities to select a variety of pathways to the end result) and that promote reciprocal interdependence (i.e., all members of the pair or group must actively participate to complete the task).

Two weeks into the study, following completion of participant agreements and after the evaluation of diagnostic essays, pairs and groups were randomly assigned, and the groups remained constant throughout the term. Each member of the pair/group provided written and/or verbal feedback to the writer concerning written drafts. Therefore, each member had at least two roles: writer and responder for pairs and generator, summarizer, questioner in groups. Experimental groups used similar peer response guides to respond to drafts throughout the semester. To address the difference in group size, the three different scripts were used, thus deliberately confounding the variables of script content and format with the variable of group size. The pairs used a script designed for pair work and the groups' script was appropriate for groups of four to

five. The comparison group used a script designed as self-review. Its features were similar to the treatments as it focused on enhancing elaboration in student drafts.

(Appendix A)

During the semester, observational data was recorded using two methods: Target Student Group Observation (TSGO) and Whole Class Observation (WCO). The TSGO was used to record types of student talk and was used descriptively to discuss evidence of joint problem-solving in pairs and groups. If the rate of high-quality talk was high, then the type of talk could be a predictor of achievement. Three randomly selected pairs or groups per treatment section were observed for three minute intervals 5 times during the semester. (Appendices G and H) WCO was used as a rigor of implementation measure for on-task activities and classroom management. (Appendices I and J)

At the end of the term, all classes were administered the English Composition I Exit Exam (Appendices E and F), designed by the researcher and the cooperating instructors and within the prescribed format of the College's Exit Exam policy. Each treatment group met during the exam time to assist in the revision of the essays prior to final submission. All groups, comparison and treatments, had access to the script used throughout the semester. The essays were scored by trained readers with no knowledge of which essays were comparison or treatment essays. Essays were scored using both the College-required Standards of Judging Freshmen Composition holistic rubric and the Elaboration rubric. I then compared the results to the diagnostic essay scores to determine if statistically significant gains in achievement and elaboration were present.

## Variables

The dependent variables for this study were the scores attained on the English Composition I Exit Exam and on the criterion of elaboration on the same exam. Scores for the Exit Exam were calculated on a 100 point holistic rating scale and evaluated used the Wallace Community College Standards for Judging Freshmen Composition. Appendix K. Elaboration scores were calculated using a 5 point scale. Appendix L.

A mediating variable of classroom implementation was addressed through quantitative measures. Using a matrix with categories of talk, randomly selected groups of students in the treatment sections were observed during peer response times throughout the period of the proposed study, and their talk was identified by categories. The matrix was modeled after Whyte's (1999) Target Student Observation Form and included the mutually exclusive talk categories of writing correctness, specific and actionable writing comments, unfocused writing comments, other task-related comments, non-task comments, and a category that specifically addresses comments focused on elaboration. This category was the one of most interest to the study. The matrix also included exhaustive categories (i.e., works alone, works with others). Appendix G

Five English Composition I classes taught by three instructors participated in the study, and there were two independent variables used. The independent variables were the types of revision procedures used in the composition class and employed in the Exit Exam. Each independent variable was part of the instructional content of the class and was validated as part of the instructional process through researcher observation, instructor reporting, and student reporting through data collected at the Exit Exam

debriefing. Two experimental groups were exposed to Method Single Peer Revision (SPR) and two other experimental groups were exposed to Method Group Peer Revision (GPR). In the experimental sections, two instructors each taught one SPR section and one GPR section. As a comparison, one class was randomly selected and used self-review or No Peer Review (NPR). The following table demonstrates the treatment and comparison assignments:

Table 1: Treatment Groups and Comparison Group Identifiers

Group Identifier	<i>Revision Script</i>	
	<i>Procedure</i>	<i>Instructor</i>
A	SPR	X
B	GPR	X
C	SPR	Y
D	GPR	Y
E	NPR	Z

### Research Design

The overall research design was a mixed method model because between group comparisons as well as within group comparisons are made. The design is quasi-experimental in nature with non-experimental elements in the form of observational notes recorded on the “Target Student Group Observation” form (Appendix G) and the “Whole

Class Observation” form (Appendix I). Participant debriefings also provided additional information. The actual experiment took place over 3 months of one semester.

The design is classified as quasi-experimental as the subjects were not randomly assigned to the control and experimental groups (Salkind, 2000). Stern and Kalof (1996) refer to this design as a “between subjects, experiments, nonequivalent-groups design” (Stern & Kalof, 1996, p. 37) as it tests hypotheses about variables through the manipulation of independent variables and the comparison of two or more groups that were not formed using randomization. Selection bias should not be considered a threat to validity as all English Composition I students must meet minimum pre-requisites to enroll in the class, and there were *no* dominant group (honors, advanced placement, technical) course sections. Additional threats to internal validity such as time and instrumentation were low as all participants used the same time frames and similar instruments. All participants were enrolled in a semester-long course, used the same revision and testing instruments, and entered the classes based on the same pre-requisites. The same instructors were used for the experimental groups which helped to reduce the threats to internal validity. As a partial control for teacher effects, the instructors were trained to keep the classes as similar as possible. This was accomplished through instructors using the same schedules, requirements, assignments, textbooks, and experiencing training for the study. In addition, the same data were recorded from another instructor known not to incorporate the classroom practices of the recursive writing process, revision, and collaboration in classroom activities. However, the groups



can be only presumed similar (Stern & Kalof, 1996). Participants came to the courses with different writing histories.

### Selection

The treatment instructors selected for the study were ones who consider writing as a process that is both recursive and social. Therefore, the selected instructors already exhibited a propensity for allowing their students to work in groups. The experimental group instructors were selected based on researcher knowledge as one who has worked closely with all possible participating instructors for at least three years. The experimental sections included instructors who implement revision and groupwork as activities in their writing classrooms and are identified as capable instructors through their excellent classroom management skills and their years of experience. Given the fact that it is extremely rare for an instructor to have more than two English composition I classes, two instructors taught the treatment sections (one pair (SPR) and one group (GPR) each) and the third instructor was used as the comparison. The comparison group was randomly selected from available English 101 course sections of instructors teaching writing through more product-oriented and solitary instruction.

The students in each of the classes were based on the College's registration process in which no manipulation is possible. Students enrolled in the instructors and sections of their choice. Given the conditions of the research design, selecting the experimental groups based on the propensity for revision activities by the instructors and randomly selecting the comparison group was appropriate.

### Instructor Training

Part of the instructor training, using practitioner validated by empirical studies of best practices (Ross and Thomas, 2003; Slavin, 1995; Wittrock, 1990) from cooperative/collaborative learning, focused on how to establish cooperative skills within the group structures. Instructors incorporated these skills in pair and group instructions and encouraged the establishment of norms that promote reciprocal interdependence and discourage social loafing. I validated this incorporation through the Fidelity in Implementation Form (Appendix M). Diagnostic essays (Appendix D), able to be used interchangeably with the Exit Exam (Appendix E), were evaluated and used to identify pre-treatment writing achievement and could also have been used if the randomly assigned groups' means, as calculated by one-way analysis of variance, demonstrated mean results that were too high or too low when compared to the overall group mean. Based on the results, this statistical procedure was not necessary.

In pursuit of consistency, both treatment instructors were trained by the researcher regarding grouping, revision activities, and testing methods. All participating instructors were trained by the researcher to encourage fidelity in implementation and consistency among the instruction and to ensure that grouping, revision activities, and testing methods were consistent. I trained the instructors with respect to the language definitions in the revision script, in random group selection, and in conducting peer response sessions. No training was required regarding the administering of the Exit Exam as all the instructors have given the exam numerous times.

I also trained two raters to observe and to record student pair and group talk in three pairs or groups per experimental sections. The “Target Student Group Observation” Form was piloted tested in the fall 2006 with a 90 percent rate of interrater agreement. Agreement was calculated by totaling the number of responses and then dividing total points by the number of disagreements from the raters. I also trained two independent raters to grade all the essays. These raters were non-participating current instructors, so no training was required for the raters for the College’s holistic rating scale (Appendix K). However, the Elaboration Rubric (Appendix L) was a new instrument, so I conducted a training session for this particular instrument. The Elaboration Rubric was pilot tested during the fall semester 2006 with descriptive essays and returned over 90 percent interrater agreement. Agreement was calculated by totaling the number of responses and then dividing total points by the number of differences from the raters. Training results mirrored the pilot test results. Rater training used various types of school genre (example, definition, classification, division) essays to train and assess agreement.

#### Participants within Groups

All participants in the study were enrolled in English Composition I based on one of the following prerequisites: 1. COMPASS score of 62. This is the placement exam for incoming students. 2. ACT score of 20. 3. SAT score of 480. 4. Successful completion of ENG 092 and 093. These are remedial courses designed to assist under prepared students succeed in college composition.

The student participants included 110 college freshmen or sophomores of varying ages in five different sections of English Composition I at a community college in southeast Alabama. Four of the course sections, or 87 participants, formed the four experimental groups. An additional 23 students enrolled in the randomly selected English composition class at the College were used as a comparison group. The target population was the number of students enrolled in English composition classes in the Spring Semester 2007. Approximately 450 students enroll in English 101 each semester at the College; therefore, the study involved 25 percent of the target population. All students, regardless of academic transfer or technical major, have to complete English 101 to receive their certificates or degrees; therefore, English 101 class demographics typically reflect the College's enrollment statistics. The typical student population of the College is illustrated in the table that follows:

Table 2: Student Body Characteristics

WCC's Student Body Characteristics (Student Development Records, 2006)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● 69 % Caucasian</li> <li>● 27 % African-American</li> <li>● 4 % Other Minority Groups</li> <li>● 44 % Age 24 or older</li> <li>● 63 % female; 37 % male</li> </ul>

Given the conditions of the research design, randomly selecting the control group and selecting the experimental groups based on the propensity for revision activities by the instructors was appropriate.

### Setting

The English Composition I classes at the college are designed to be highly constrained for the instructors and students in the classes. All English Composition I classes are designed to require six personal experience essays concentrating on the following expository modes: explanatory, descriptive, narrative, cause/effect, classification, division, definition, and/or comparison/contrast. Papers are typically organized according to five-paragraph, formulaic essay principles with an introduction to include a thesis, three body paragraphs which support the thesis, and a conclusion. All sections of the class use the same textbook, and the English Composition I classes are governed by a holistic rubric (Appendix K). The final exam is a timed high-stakes pass/fail essay exam in which the students have no prior knowledge of the topics and is administered in a location other than the classroom, normally a computer lab. This study focused on whether working in pairs or groups, in conjunction with a revision script, helped these particular composition students meet their individual goals for the Exit Exam and for the course.

### Strengths

Since a true experiment is not possible in the College's educational setting, the quasi-experimental design was the most appropriate design to use. The posttest design allowed for control of threats to internal and external validity to be addressed. Campbell and Stanley (1996, p. 205) remark that quasi-experimental designs are "well worth employing where more sufficient probes are unavailable." Through the observation notes,

I was able to substantiate that participation in the revision activities was occurring. Also, all instruments were identical throughout the study.

### Limitations

The limitations of the study are that it was not a true experiment with random selection; therefore, group comparability could not be assured. Also, the sample size was somewhat small. History of the participants might have been a limitation in that the participants entered the study with varied composition backgrounds. Finally, several months is a short time period for significant growth in writing to occur.

### Instruments

The instruments included the following:

1. Diagnostic/Posttest- This instrument is the College's Exit Exam, which is a timed essay test consisting of several prompts covering the following types of writing: explanatory, definition, comparison/contrast, classification, division. The students select one prompt and write one essay. The prompts were designed to reflect the instruction in the College's composition classes and were interchangeable. Advantage: Each student took the same type of written exam. Since direct assessment is the most desired method of assessing writing ability, the test can be considered more valid than an indirect assessment. Disadvantage: Though direct, the assessment was not an authentic form of assessment since it was conducted in an artificial setting under artificial

conditions with little or no real world application (e.g., there was limited opportunity to decide on what content to include and no opportunity to work on a piece of writing over several days). Appendix D and E.

2. Holistic Rubric- This instrument is the rubric used for grading by the College's English Department and was used to grade writing throughout the semester. Advantage: Holistic grading has been hailed as one of the greatest achievements in composition assessment (Huot, 1990). It allows raters to rate through an overall impression without having to focus on particular aspects. Another advantage is that the raters both used the same grading procedures and were already trained on the procedures. Disadvantage: Interrater reliability must be addressed. Raters must be able to put aside their personal feelings and rate according to the specified standards. Appendix K.
3. Elaboration Criterion- Each Exit Exam was also given a criterion score of 1-5, with 1 being the lowest score and 5 being the highest score. The raters evaluated the extent to which each essay incorporated the elaborative traits Connelly (2006) and Wyrick (2006) identify as specific examples and details from personal experiences, memories, observations, facts, statistics, reasoned arguments, testimony from authorities, and research, depending on the audience and the writer's purpose. Appendix L.
4. Target Student Group Observation Form- This instrument was adapted from Whyte's (1999) observation form and included exhaustive and

mutually exclusive categories of the types of talk occurring during peer response sessions in both the groups and pairs. Appendix G.

5. Revision Script- This instrument was designed by me as a general guide for revising English 101 essays. The script consisted of distinct parts with requests for the following: (1) Introduction, (2) Body Paragraphs, (3) Conclusion, and (4) General Comments to include grammar, mechanics, usage, and format. Throughout, the script also focused on elaboration within the essays. Each distinct part asked specific questions intended to direct the
6. Writers' and reader's attention to specific parts of the draft. Advantage: Writers are encouraged to focus on the most uncertain aspects of writing in a school genre for their peer response to one another's writing—in progress. Disadvantage: The guides may serve to stifle creativity by concentrating focus on specific areas of the drafts. Appendix A.
7. Peer Response Script- This instrument was the Revision script used when revising with a single peer reviewer. Advantage: Writers are encouraged to focus on the most uncertain aspects of writing in a school genre for their peer response to one another's writing—in progress. Disadvantage: Guides may serve to stifle creativity by focusing on specific areas of drafts. Appendix B.
8. Group Peer Response Script- This instrument was the Revision Script used when revising with a four or five-member peer response group. Advantage: Writers are encouraged to focus on the most uncertain aspects of writing in a school genre for their peer response to one another's writing—in progress.



Disadvantage: The guides may serve to stifle creativity by concentrating focus on specific areas of the drafts. Appendix C.

9. Whole Class Observation Form-This instrument was used as a measure of rigor of implementation of peer response pairs or groups (Whyte, 1999).

Appendix I.

10. Fidelity of Implementation-This instrument was used to ensure that all treatment sections were following the research design. Appendix M.

I designed all instruments based on relevant data from the literature and on the opinions of subject experts; therefore, validity should be high (Shannon, 2004), and I pilot tested the instruments prior to conducting research. These pilot tests were conducted on English Composition I students from randomly selected English Composition I sections. Interrater reliability was addressed on rating papers by having the raters score sample papers and then correlating the ratings. At least .70 was the minimum interrater agreement I would accept (Ross, 2005), and the agreement exceeded that number. See Table 3.

Table 3: Reliability Coefficients for Pilot Testing

Testing	$\alpha$	Number of Items
Pilot Testing 1	.83	2
Pilot Testing 2	.86	2

*Note.*  $\alpha$  = Cronbach's alpha

Validity of the instruments was addressed by creating instruments based on scholarly research in composition (Shannon, 2004), and the instruments were pilot tested the semester prior to the research.

### Procedures

The study took place over the course of two academic semesters. During the first semester, I determined which instructors used the process approach to composition instruction and specifically which instructors promoted revision activities.

Based on my knowledge of English Composition I instructors, I selected two instructors, X and Y for the four experimental sections of English Composition I. During the research, both instructors focused on revision as single-peer collaboration and on revision as peer group collaboration. Therefore, the same instructors taught both experimental sections. The comparison instructor was randomly selected from the remaining English Composition instructors whom I had determined not to be using a process approach. Exit exams were also designed during the initial phase of the study. These exams were used as both diagnostic tests and posttests.

### Training Instructors

The treatment instructors selected for the study were ones whom I knew considered writing as a process that is both recursive and social. Therefore, the selected instructors already exhibit a propensity for allowing their students to work in groups. However, to help lower the differences between the groups' experiences, the instructors

were provided information on and instruction in fostering a classroom environment conducive to successful group work. Three afternoon informational sessions were held with the participating instructors to discuss validated approaches for establishing classrooms that support pairs and groups. The sessions included the following types of training:

1. Training for collaboration and cooperation in classrooms
2. Training for structuring peer response group procedures in writing classes
3. Training for teaching students to give high-quality feedback

The first aspect of the training consisted of discussing with instructors the basic tenets of collaboration and cooperation. I shared with them information about collaborative and cooperative learning, and we discussed methods they would use to foster these following five cooperative learning elements in their classrooms. For group work to be a successful endeavor, Johnson & Johnson (1998) maintain that the following five essential elements must be present and this study, through pair and group work, focused specifically on the first three elements:

1. *Positive interdependence*: Positive interdependence is the perception that we are linked with others in a way so that we cannot succeed unless they do. Their work benefits us and our work benefits them. Within every cooperative lesson, positive goal interdependence must be established through mutual learning goals (learn the assigned material and make sure that all members of your group learn the assigned material). In order to strengthen positive interdependence, divided resources (giving each group member a part of the total information required to complete an assignment) and complementary roles (reader, checker, encourager, elaborator) may also be used.
2. *Individual accountability*: Individual accountability exists when the performance of each individual student is assessed and the results are given back to the group and the individual. The purpose of cooperative learning groups is to make each member a stronger individual. Students learn together so that they can subsequently perform

higher as individuals. To ensure that each member is strengthened, students are held individually accountable to do their share of the work. Common ways to structure individual accountability include (a) giving an individual test to each student, (b) randomly selecting one student's product to represent the entire group, or (c) having each student explain what they have learned to a classmate.

3. *Face-to-face promotive interaction:* Individuals promote each other's success by helping, assisting, supporting, encouraging, and praising each other's efforts to achieve. Certain cognitive activities and interpersonal dynamics only occur when students get involved in promoting each other's learning. These include orally explaining how to solve problems, discussing the nature of the concepts being learned, teaching one's knowledge to classmates, and connecting present with past learning. Accountability to peers, ability to influence each other's reasoning and conclusions, social modeling, social support, and interpersonal rewards all increase as the face-to-face interactions among group members increase. In addition, the verbal and nonverbal responses of other group members provide important information concerning a student's performance. Silent students are uninvolved students who are not contributing to the learning of others as well as themselves. To obtain meaningful face-to-face interaction, the size of groups needs to be small (2–4 members).
4. *Social skills:* Contributing to the success of a cooperative effort requires interpersonal and small group skills. Placing socially unskilled individuals in a group and telling them to cooperate does not guarantee that they will be able to do so effectively. Persons must be taught the leadership, decision-making, trust-building, communication, and conflict-management skills just as purposefully and precisely as academic skills.
5. *Group processing:* Group processing exists when group members discuss how well they are achieving their goals and maintaining effective working relationships. Groups need to describe what member actions are helpful and unhelpful and make decisions about what behaviors to continue or change. When difficulties in relating to each other arise, students must engage in group processing and identify, define, and solve the problems they are having working together effectively.

Johnson and Johnson (1998) claim in their text on cooperative learning that understanding these five basic elements and developing skills in structuring them allows teachers to (a) adapt cooperative learning to their unique circumstances, needs, and students, (b) fine tune their use of cooperative learning, and (c) prevent and solve problems students have in working together. The participating instructors agreed to use

activities to promote these elements. For example, all members of the pair or group were required to submit all evidence of revision activities before any paper would be graded. Additionally, following the return of graded essays, the groups met to discuss the results and identified ways that each group member could improve on the next essay.

The second aspect of the instructor training consisted of discussing the methods for structuring peer response group procedures in writing classes. Most instructors at the College who incorporate peer response workshops into their English Composition I classes follow the procedures described by Wyrick (1999) and relate both confidence and comfort in this method. Therefore, the study used the following procedures during the peer response activities. The treatment pairs and groups all used the same revision script to guide activities, and they carried out the same procedures for reading and responding to drafts. Treatment groups gathered in their peer response groups of four to five or in pairs, exchanged drafts for reading, and responded using the revision script as a guide. According to their specific roles, readers made comments on the drafts and on additional paper as necessary to convey their points thoroughly. Once the initial reading/responding time had elapsed, the drafts moved to the next reader. The reading/response period of the two to three page drafts was approximately fifteen minutes and was governed by the groups themselves. This process continued until all drafts received comments from all members. Because research has indicated that for feedback to be effective, it should be conveyed in a number of modes and should allow for response and interaction (Brinko, 1993), at the end of the written response time, students looked over the comments their drafts received and had time to discuss any questions they had or to solicit further

commentary. Peer feedback was kept with the original drafts so that writers could have access to the feedback as they prepared to revise and submit the final drafts. Students were not required by their instructors to apply the feedback to their drafts. Rather, instructors encouraged students to evaluate the feedback and apply it as they deemed appropriate to their essays. Instructors did not participate in the workshops. They did, however, monitor the groups for task completion by conducting walk-throughs during the peer response sessions. Any group anomalies were to be noted, and none were reported.

Finally, to help students become accustomed to working in pairs or groups, we determined that hands-on practice would be the most appropriate method to teach students how the scripts were to be used and also how to help students provide high-quality feedback to their peers. Anonymous student essays of all genres were used as the source texts for the practice sessions. The students responded to the drafts using the revision script as a guide. Following this activity, the instructors used the comments to discuss what types of feedback would be most useful when revising essays in the future. They pointed out that the script items required that students go beyond simple comments and elaborate on the suggestions that they make. To provide additional detail about the importance of useful feedback, we used Straub (1997) as our guide. According to Straub's (1997) exploratory study into student reactions to teacher comments, nine categories of useful comments were noted as important to students as they prepared to revise. We used "teacher comment" categories as "peer comment" categories for the purpose of training responders to provide high-quality feedback. The categories, described by Mosher (1998) are as follows:

1. **Focus.** The focus of a comment usually refers to what kind of comments the teacher makes: global (ideas, development, organization) or local (wording, sentence structure, correctness) (100). Students did not prefer one over the other and believed that both were useful when reviewing their papers. One concern students did have is with the teacher commenting on the ideas of the paper, a global issue. This concern regarded "authority" and how certain comments appeared to work "against the ideas that were already down on the page" (101). Students also reacted negatively to teacher attempts to correct or revise words or sentences. The students regarded this as the teacher's attempt to claim their writing authority because they saw the corrections as a reflection of "the idiosyncratic preferences of the teacher" (101).
2. **Specificity.** In all cases, the students wanted the teacher's comments to be specific. Students did not "respond favorably to any comment that they saw as unclear, vague, or difficult to understand" (102). For example, a teacher who stated "you need more evidence to support your main point" needed to state what evidence the student should have used, or at least to have suggested some directions the student could take in order to find more evidence. The consensus was that "comments that were specific and elaborate" were much more useful than those that were vague (102).
3. **Mode.** In mode (i.e. the tone of the teacher's voice), the students preferred comments that "sounded helpful and encouraging" rather than those that were terse and seemed "harsh and critical" (103). A comment such as "Not so. See above," made the students become defensive and caused them to leave the material as it was initially written.
4. **Criticism.** When it came to criticism, students preferred comments that were more like reader than teacher responses: students "felt these comments had a softer tone, and they appreciated the way the comments offered an individual reader's perspective on the writing" (105). For example, while students found the comment "You've missed his point" as offensive because it came "right out and [said that the paper was] bad," they found the comment "I hear LeMoult saying something different--that drugs are so dangerous to society largely because laws make them illegal" as objective and words they could easily work with during the revision process (104). Therefore, students appreciated teacher responses that focused on what the student was trying to say, and those that helped him/her see where he/she could change the wording so that the writer's own message would become clearer (105).
5. **Imperatives.** The practicality of imperatives, or commands, was debated. While most students believed, as currently hypothesized, that imperatives were

useless and suggested the teacher's attempt to control student writing, others saw imperatives as a worthwhile way of commenting. A student said that "even though it's telling [a student] how to write the paper, it's basic info that would make the paper more effective" (106).

6. Praise. Praise was always welcome in students' papers, but again they wanted the praise to be specific and to be "accompanied by an explanation of what the teacher saw as good" (106).
7. Questions. Interestingly, the efficiency regarding the use of questions in a paper was debated. While students did "appreciate the freedom and control over their writing" that questions allowed, sometimes the students were unclear on where to go with the questions (109). Students who complained about the overuse of questions stated that they "wanted more direction and a clearer sense of what the teacher wanted" (109).
8. & 9. Advice and Explanations. The overwhelming majority of students thought that advice and explanations were the key to productive revising. Students said that advice such as "in your next draft try to focus on developing more convincing arguments against legalized drugs" identified the problem "in a way that [made] the teachers seem like they cared" (107). Advice that was most favored was advice that suggested instead of commanded ways to approach revision, and advice that was followed by an explanation. The teacher would thus be praised if he/she added to the above sentence, why don't you add "point by point, your opponent's view, as clearly and objectively as you can" so that "then you can deal with each of his arguments and show the weaknesses in his position?" (109). The most productive comments thus not only gave advice, but also showed how to carry the idea of the advice throughout the paper.

Using the nine categories, instructors then provided students with opportunities to again practice giving "useful" comments. Therefore, during at least two class sessions, instructors demonstrated examples of high-quality feedback and conducted class activities designed to enhance the feedback skills of students. These activities were intended to serve as skill-building components and to encourage responding to drafts with high-quality feedback so that it would become normal for students.



## Training Observers and Raters

The training of observers to record pair and group talk focused on the student group observation form. I gave the observers a copy of the TSGO form and provided specific information regarding the methods they should use to interpret and record the types of talk occurring within the pairs and groups. Appendix G. The form was designed for the observers to document the types of talk occurring within the pair or group revision activities using 30 second intervals during three minute periods. The raters were to note the types of comments made by each pair or group member and what types of behavior the members were exhibiting during the observation. Following our initial meeting, we observed one composition class as they worked together in groups to revise an example essay. The raters used the TSGO form to rate three separate groups with four members in each group. Therefore, raters tallied as many as 4 students' comments per observation. Observer agreement was slightly above 80 percent during this session. Training of essay raters consisted of a session where two non-participating study instructors were given sample essays from each category (example, definition, classification, division, comparison/contrast) and asked to rate each paper according to the College's holistic rubric and the elaboration criteria. Interrater agreement was calculated at over 90 percent.

## Conducting the Study

The second phase of the study began with the random selection of one English 101 section to serve as the control group. I randomly drew one section from all available

classes of instructors who were identified as ones who did not routinely use revision group activities as part of instruction. The experimental sections had been previously selected. The treatment sections of each instructor were randomly assigned, by the toss of a coin the SPR (Single Peer Response) or GPR (Group Peer Response) treatment. Early in the term, I visited each group and explained that they would be part of a composition research project. I explained that the project would not interfere with their course and that the results of the study would be made available to them. I discussed with them that on several occasions during the semester, individuals would be visiting their classrooms to observe the revision activities. I also obtained written permission from the participants. On the next class day, the instructors administered one form of the exit exam to each group in the study to serve as the diagnostic for the groups and to be used as a basis of comparison in the study. (The College's English Department requires that a diagnostic essay be assigned at the beginning of each class.) The directions were identical to the Exit Exam, and the students had the same amount of time to complete this exam as the final Exit Exam. They were provided with a copy of the Revision Script to use on the exam if they chose to do so. I requested that the Revision Script be submitted along with the exam. Participants were identified by numbers only. (For example the control group participants became E1, E2, etc.). I made a copy of each exam, returned the original to the specific instructors, and had the copies scored by the pre-selected raters using the holistic scale and the elaboration rubric. Interrater agreement for the diagnostic essays averaged over .9. See Table 4.

Table 4: Reliability Coefficients for Diagnostic Essays

Variables	$\alpha$	Number of Items
Single Peer Review (SPR)	.97	2
Group Peer Review (GPR)	.85	2
Comparison Group (NPR)	.96	2

*Note.*  $\alpha$  = Cronbach's alpha

Prior to the formation of the heterogeneous pairs or groups, the instructors introduced the concepts of working in collaborative groups to the students. Throughout the research semester, students in the four experimental groups were exposed to one of the two experimental scripting methods, and the control group used a script for self-review. Students in the experimental groups were given a separate revision activity to use after they completed their initial drafts. Two groups (A and C) revised with a peer, and the other groups (B and D) revised within a peer response group of four to five writers. The control group (E) had the opportunity to use the general revision script for self-revision and evaluation. All the revision activities served to guide the students through a re-seeing of their drafts by focusing students' attention on particular aspects of their drafts and were the variables of interest for the study. As prior research indicates (e.g., Bennett, 1991; Carifo, Jackson, & Dagostino, 2001; Hull, Rose, Fraser, Castello, 1991; Zhu Wei, 1995), the presence of revision is a key component of successful writings. Based on this information, the revision script questions were designed to encourage students to make substantive content changes if needed. The same scripts were

used throughout the semester, and the scripts were also used on the Exit Exam. Thus, the students were versed in both the scripts and the pair/group peer response.

During the course of the semester, the observers and I made at least two visits to each group in the study. The visits were scheduled with the instructors in advance and were timed to coincide with specific revision activities. The classroom observations allowed me to validate that the designated forms of revision activities for each group were occurring, were observed for rigor of implementation on the “Whole Class Observation” form, and were observed for fidelity of implementation on that instrument.

During the course of the semester, I randomly selected pairs and groups to record types of student talk during peer response activities. At least two groups per treatment (group) section and two pairs per treatment (pair) section were observed at least five times over the semester. According to Cohen (1991) and Whyte (in press), five observations per target student is enough to provide a stable estimate of talk and behaviors within small groups. The observers monitored student talk and recorded the information on the Target Student Observation form. (Appendix G.) The forms were then returned to me for analysis.

During the testing phase, all groups were given identical Exit Exams. The exam consisted of five possible essay types. See Appendix E. Five topics for each type of writing were offered. Types of essays included example, definition, description, classification, division, and comparison/contrast. The students selected only one topic for the exam. Scores on the exam were based on a 100 point scale. Elaboration scores were based on the analytic 1-5 scale.

The Exit Exams were all administered at the same time (1:00 p.m.) in similar computer lab locations. All groups had three hours to complete identical exit exams. At the beginning of the testing period, the control group was given the exit exam and the instructions specific to the exam were given. They submitted one essay and were given the revision guide to use if they desired. For the control group, revision was optional. The experimental groups were given the same exam and received the same overall instructions. The experimental groups were then instructed to follow two distinct revision activities before they submitted their final drafts. These mirrored the semester-long type of classroom instruction. Single Peer Review (SPR) instructions revised their drafts using the guide with a peer reviewer, as they had over the course of the semester, before they submitted their final drafts. Group Peer Review (GPR) instructions were to revise their drafts using the guide with a peer review group, as they had over the course of the semester, before they submitted their final drafts. All materials were stapled to the final drafts of the exam, and the participants were identified by their numbers only. The English Composition I section instructors from the College, trained by the researcher, administered and monitored the exams. No anomalies were noted during the testing period. All exams were graded by the study raters using the specified holistic grading rubric and the elaboration scale.

Following the completion of the Exit Exam, the treatment instructors asked the participants to respond to three specific debriefing questions related to the three research questions. The responses were given anonymously.

### Data Sources

This research made primary use of classroom essays, both diagnostic and final, that were timed writings on specific personal experience topics. The essays were supplemented by student response and whole-class observations during revision activities over the course of the term.

### Data Analysis

To address the research question of whether or not revision activities influenced exit exam scores, data was analyzed using Analysis of Variance, specifically (MANOVA), with statistical significance set at  $p < 0.05$ . Multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA) is an ANOVA with more than one dependent variable. Therefore, MANOVA allows for the testing of hypotheses related to improvements in student achievement, specifically the improvement in overall writing scores and the improvement in elaboration scores. In this study, improvements in overall writing scores and elaboration scores were the two dependent variables, and the hypothesis is that both are affected by the different revision scripting methods. Instead of a univariate  $F$  value, a multivariate  $F$  value (Pillai) based on a comparison of the error variance/covariance matrix and the effect variance/covariance matrix was obtained. The "covariance" was included because the two measures are probably correlated and this correlation must be addressed when performing the significance test. Testing the multiple dependent variables was accomplished by creating new dependent variables that maximize group

differences. These artificial dependent variables are linear combinations of the measured dependent variables.

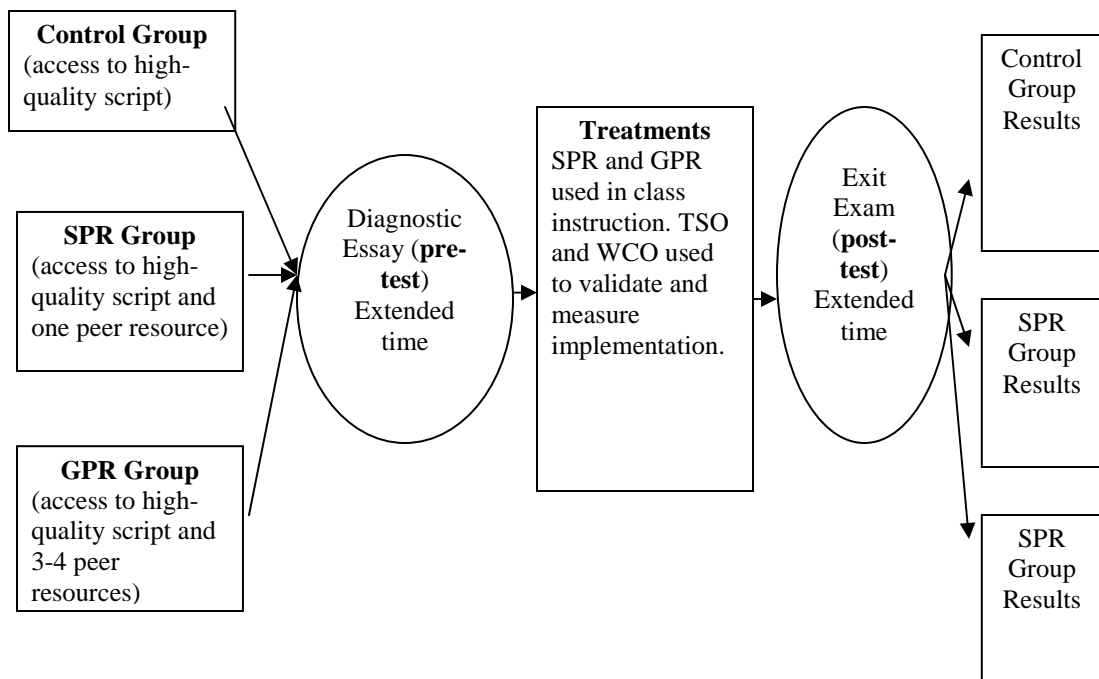
The study was designed to examine the differences between groups with two total independent variables (one independent variable per treatment group) and one dependent variable; therefore, MANOVA was appropriate as the statistical procedure and as a control for Type I errors. MANOVA is useful in experimental situations where at least some of the independent variables are manipulated as was the case with this design. It has several advantages over ANOVA. First, by measuring several dependent variables in a single experiment, there is a better chance of discovering which factor is truly important. Second, it can protect against Type I errors that might occur if multiple ANOVAs were conducted independently. It can also reveal differences not discovered by ANOVA tests.

In this design, the participants took a pre-test (diagnostic essay) and a posttest (Exit Exam), and there were five total groups. The independent variables were the types of peer response activity performed after the initial drafts were completed in the experimental groups. The dependent variables were the reported scores on the exit exam and on the criterion of elaboration. SPSS was the data analysis software used. By using MANOVA and other statistical procedures included in the SPSS software (e.g. Ordinary Least Squares regression analysis), planned comparisons could have been performed and post hoc interpretations completed as necessary to address any unexpected findings. Based on the findings, however, no additional comparisons were necessary.

In addition to the quantitative data gathered through scores, observational data, gained from the “Target Student Group Observation” form was analyzed to indicate the

frequency with which students talk about specific aspects of writing by calculating a percent for each observed pair or group. The “Whole Class Observation” form was also used as a measure for rigor of implementation for the study by categorizing the types of activities in pairs and groups in the treatment sections, and debriefing questions were used to identify student attitudes toward collaboration and scripted talk. The following figure (Figure 3) illustrates the research design.

Figure 3: Gains in Achievement with Access to Three Types of Scripted Activities on Elaboration in a Freshman Composition Class  
Design Schematic





## CHAPTER IV

### DISCUSSION

#### Overview

The results of the study indicated that while treatment groups increased their mean holistic writing scores and their mean elaboration criterion scores from the diagnostic essay to the exit essay, the increases did not meet statistical significance set at  $p < .05$ . The comparison group saw a decrease in both its mean holistic scores and the elaboration criterion scores, yet the decrease again did not meet statistical significance.

#### Statistical Tables and Interpretations

The results from quantitative statistical analyses and accompanying qualitative analyses are reported through tables and expanded discussion throughout this chapter. Initial tables and discussion report reliability for interrater agreement on the essay scores that were the outcome measures for this study. Subsequent discussion focuses on the Rigor of Implementation of the two treatments.

#### Reliability Statistics

The following tables report interrater agreement disaggregated for each of the treatment groups and the comparison group. Two raters scored each essay, and their scores were compared for indications of reliability agreement. The statistical interrater

agreement data indicate that the raters were very close in their scores averaging .932 across the two treatment and one comparison groups' essays.

Table 5: Reliability Coefficients Interrater Agreement

Variables	$\alpha$	Number of Items
Single Peer Review	.97	2
Group Peer Review	.85	2
Comparison Group	.96	2

*Note.*  $\alpha$  = Cronbach's alpha

### Rigor of Implementation

To validate that the designated forms of revision activities for each treatment pair and group section were occurring, two scheduled visits, with 10 minutes for each observed pair or group, by one observer and I were made to each treatment section over the course of the term. Reliability between raters was over 80% agreement on the five categories.

The "Whole Class Observation" form allowed me to document that the research was being conducted according to the design and to confirm that classroom management was not an area that could impede the study. However, these data can be identified as only a weak control for rigor of implementation as this measure was used just twice in each treatment class: not a large enough sample to provide a stable estimate of the percent of students engaged in talk and work together compared to off-task, passively on-task, or working alone. Also, this data must be approached cautiously as interrater

agreement was not established prior to the observations. All eight visits and the accompanying documentation indicated that the instructors were conducting their treatment classes in concert with the research design and that there were no major areas of concern with classroom management. In fact, across treatments, 59% of the time, students were “talking about their writing or talking and manipulating” their drafts. Of the other categories, 18% of the time students were “passive on task,” 24% of the time they were “manipulating materials,” and 25% of the time they were “reading or writing.” Observers noted that on occasion students seemed to become disengaged, and so approximately 8% of observed student behaviors were coded in this category. The majority of activities occurring within the pairs and groups were identified as on-task activities. Observers focused on the same two pairs or groups for 10 minute intervals and marked the number of times in the 10 minutes they noted the pairs or groups engaging in each identified activity. The following tables provide the aggregated data for the observers’ visits. Therefore, each row represents 20 minutes of observation time per observer or 40 minutes total observation time. Rows with zeros indicated the absence of a pair or group to observe.

Table 6: Aggregated Observation Data for Rigor of Implementation Treatment A (SPR)

Treatment A	<i>Talk or Talk/ Manipulation</i>	<i>Manipulation Materials</i>	<i>Read/ Write</i>	<i>Passive On Task</i>	<i>Dis- engaged</i>	<i>N</i>
1	5	7	6	1	1	20
2	2	4	5	3	3	17
3	2	4	4	3	0	13
4	0	0	6	4	0	10
5	5	0	5	3	3	16
6	2	2	3	1	0	10
7	0	0	0	0	0	0
8	4	3	4	0	2	14

Table 7: Aggregated Observation Data for Rigor of Implementation Treatment B (GPR)

Treatment B	<i>Talk or Talk/ Manipulation</i>	<i>Manipulation Materials</i>	<i>Read/ Write</i>	<i>Passive On Task</i>	<i>Dis- engaged</i>	<i>N</i>
1	3	5	4	2	3	18
2	3	2	4	1	1	11
3	0	0	0	0	0	0
4	4	5	3	3	1	16
5	4	5	0	0	0	11

Table 8: Aggregated Observation Data for Rigor of Implementation Treatment C (SPR)

Treatment C	<i>Talk or Talk/ Manipulation</i>	<i>Manipulation Materials</i>	<i>Read/ Write</i>	<i>Passive On Task</i>	<i>Dis- engaged</i>	<i>N</i>
1	5	4	2	3	1	11
2	2	5	1	1	3	12
3	8	2	1	1	1	13
4	3	4	2	2	0	11
5	0	0	0	0	0	0
6	6	3	0	0	0	9
7	4	2	2	2	0	10

Table 9: Aggregated Observation Data for Rigor of Implementation Treatment D (GPR)

Treatment D	<i>Talk or Talk/ Manipulation</i>	<i>Manipulation Materials</i>	<i>Read/ Write</i>	<i>Passive On Task</i>	<i>Dis- engaged</i>	<i>N</i>
1	4	2	4	2	1	13
2	4	4	2	2	2	14
3	3	1	5	3	1	13
4	1	1	4	4	0	10
5	0	0	0	0	0	0

### Fidelity in Implementation

I designed the “Fidelity in Implementation” instrument to document that instructors were conducting the study, from beginning to ending, as I designed it. During training sessions for the instructors, the participating treatment instructors agreed to keep

the features of instruction between their two treatment classes consistent. The same classrooms and instructional materials were used, lectures were consistent, assignments were identical, availability and use of technology was the same, and instructional time was even for both the pair treatment and the group treatment. No participating instructor in the two treatment groups was ever observed departing from the training she had received in SPR and GPR or from consistent features of instruction between the instructor’s SPR and GPR classes. Using the “Fidelity in Implementation” instrument, I validated that all aspects of the design were conducted appropriately.

Table 10: Fidelity in Implementation

Activity	Evidence of Implementation
Diagnostic essay administration procedures followed	All diagnostic essay procedures were followed.
Diagnostic essay collection procedures followed	Instructors, raters, and observers followed designed collection procedures.
Random assignment of pairs/groups	Groups and pairs were randomly assigned in each treatment pair and group. (Coin toss)
Pairs/groups peer response occurring for each essay following the diagnostic essay	Pairs and groups participated in SPR/GPR activities for each essay following the diagnostic essay.
Appropriate script used during peer response sessions	Pairs and groups participated in SPR/GPR activities using the appropriate script methods for each essay.
Script used consistently during all peer response sessions	The appropriate script was used for each treatment pair or group and was used in the comparison group.
Exit Exam essay administration procedures followed	All Exit Exam essay procedures were followed.
Exit Exam collection procedures followed	Instructors and raters followed designed collection procedures.

Using the participant data, the following specific questions were addressed.

Research Question 1: Access to Peers and Writing Achievement

What are the gains in achievement in writing including on the criterion of elaboration of freshman college students with access to multiple peer opinions as measured by scores on pretest/posttest writing assessment? As demonstrated in the following chart, the mean scores of the groups showed an improvement from pretest to posttest in all treatment groups, but not in the comparison group. Also, to determine if a larger N could have reached statistical significance the data from all treatment groups were aggregated, but statistical significance still was not reached.

Table 11: Descriptive Statistics for Pretest/Posttest Variables

Variable	<i>Pre-test</i> <i>M</i>	<i>Pre-test</i> <i>SD</i>	<i>Pre-test</i> <i>N</i>	<i>Post-test</i> <i>M</i>	<i>Post-test</i> <i>SD</i>	<i>Post-test</i> <i>N</i>
Holistic						
pair	78.43	9.35	30	82.68	7.65	30
group	74.45	11.15	35	78.37	10.68	35
Comparison	78.12	8.97	20	77.15	6.15	20
Total	76.72	10.12	85	79.40	8.99	85
Elaboration						
pair	3.81	.81	30	4.21	.78	30
group	3.72	.76	35	3.97	.67	35
Comparison	3.65	.82	20	3.53	.76	20
Total	3.74	.78	85	3.94	.76	85

\* Holistic scale 0-100, Elaboration scale 1-5

SPR Treatments A and C pretest means were 78.43 (SD 9.35) and 3.81 (SD .81) and posttest means were 82.68 (SD 7.65) and 4.22 (SD .78). GPR Treatments B and D pretest means 74.45 (SD 11.15) and 3.72 (SD .76) and posttest means 78.37 (SD 10.68) and 3.97 (SD .67). Treatments A and B were taught by the same instructor (X). Treatments C and D were taught by the same instructor (Y). Instructor Z's comparison group pretest mean was 78.12 (SD 8.97) and 3.65 (SD .82) and posttest was 77.15 (SD 6.15) and 3.54 (SD .76). All treatment groups were involved in a form of scripted peer revision, either single peer or groups during the academic semester and on the Exit Exam. The comparison group used a script without access to peer resources throughout the semester and on the Exit Exam. The opportunity for pair or group social exchange was a difference between the comparison group, which had no access to peer resources, and the two treatment groups. In this context, the fact that, though not statistically significant, all treatment group means improved while the comparison group mean decreased is of interest. The following charts illustrate the MANOVA results of the groups. The charts do not include post hocs. Since no significance was reported, there was no need to run post hoc analysis.



Table 12: Multivariate and Univariate Analyses of Variance for Achievement

Variable	<u>Multivariate</u>		<u>Univariate</u>	
	<i>df</i>	<i>F</i> <sup>a</sup>	Achievement <sup>b</sup>	Elaboration <sup>b</sup>
Time	2	3.78*	6.93*	5.21*
Group	4	2.23	2.09	1.88
Time X Group	4	.76	1.07	1.10

*Note.* Multivariate *F* ratios were generated from Pillai's statistic

<sup>a</sup> Multivariate *df* = 4, 164. <sup>b</sup> Univariate *df* = 1, 82.

\* *p* < .05.

The MANOVA results indicate that no significant increases in either achievement scores or elaboration scores were reported among the groups. Multivariate *F* ratio reported 3.78 with univariate analyses reported 6.93 on achievement scores and 5.21 on elaboration scores. All were higher than the .05 necessary for statistical significance.

### Discussion of Results

Based on the results of this pretest/posttest design, I concluded that in the SPR and GPR treatment groups, student achievement overall did not improve at a level that achieved statistical significance from pre to posttest. Achievement on the criterion of signs of elaboration also did not improve from pre to posttest at a level that achieved statistical significance. Therefore, the null hypothesis that there is no difference in the gains in overall writing achievement or on the criterion of elaboration of the three groups

taking the exam Comparison Group (no peer access), Single Peer Review (SPR), and Group Peer Review (GPR) is accepted. The alternative hypotheses, (1) that students in Single Peer Review (SPR) with a script to foster joint problem-solving will show greater gains in writing achievement and elaboration than the comparison group and (2) students in Group Peer Review (GPR) with a script to foster joint problem-solving will show greater gains in writing achievement and elaboration than the single peer response group (SPR), are rejected.

As previously mentioned, mean scores moved upward in the two treatment groups but downward in the comparison group, which experienced standardized instruction with no access to peers' opinions, indicates that had there been the resources to implement SPR and GPR for a more extended time and with larger numbers of participating students, students experiencing these treatments may have had significantly higher achievement and elaboration scores than students who experienced standardized instruction with no access to peers' ideas.

#### Research Question 2: Scripted Talk with Peers and Writing Achievement

Does scripted talk with two or more peer respondents produce greater achievement than students who work alone? As demonstrated by the statistical analysis in this study, scripted talk with two or more peers does not produce greater achievement on Exit Exam scores in relation to students who work alone.

Table 13: Multivariate and Univariate Analyses of Variance for Scripted Talk on Achievement

Variable	<u>Multivariate</u>		<u>Univariate</u>
	<i>df</i>	<i>F</i> <sup>a</sup>	Achievement <i>F</i> <sup>a</sup>
Time	2	3.78*	6.93*
Group	4	2.23	2.09
Time X Group	4	.76	1.07

*Note.* Multivariate *F* ratios were generated from Pillai's statistic

<sup>a</sup> Multivariate *df* = 4, 164. <sup>b</sup> Univariate *df* = 1, 82.

\* *p* < .05.

Research Question 3: Amount of Access to Resources for Scripted Talk with Peers and

Elaboration Achievement

Does scripted talk with one or more peer respondents produce greater gains in elaboration than students who work with only a partner? As demonstrated by the statistical analysis in this study, scripted talk with two or more peers did not produce greater elaboration scores in relation to students who work alone. The following MANOVA table reports elaboration score results as not reaching statistical significance with the 5.21 reported result.

Table: 14 Univariate Analyses of Variance for Scripted Talk on Elaboration

<u>Univariate</u>	
Variable	Elaboration
Time	5.21*
Group	1.88
Time X Group	1.10

*Note:* Univariate  $df = 1, 82$ .

\*  $p < .05$ .

#### Talk as Related to Writing and Elaboration Achievement

An additional aspect of the revision activities was observed. Five times during the semester, two randomly selected groups from both treatment sections were observed during revision activities and their rates of specific talk recorded using the “Target Student Observation” Form attached as Appendix G. The form indicated exhaustive and mutually exclusive categories of target student talk by identifying five specific types of talk. Since elaboration was the criterion of interest for this question, I analyzed the types of talk for their rate of overall talk about writing and then for their talk specifically relating to elaboration. Based on initial results, I decided to explore the data as validation of the “robust” findings in the literature on classroom work arrangements for ill-structured problem-solving (Cohen, 1991, p. 9) that, provided structures for ill-structured problem-solving and reciprocal interdependence are present, there is an association between high-quality talk and achievement. The rates of all the categories of talk about writing and Exit Exam scores were used in regression procedures to determine if the

amount and type of specific talk might be a predictor of achievement. I selected regression since I was trying to determine the relationship between two variables, type of specific talk and achievement prediction. Regression did not indicate that the types of talk categories were significant for predicting achievement or elaboration on post scores. This was expected with such a small sample and multiple predictor variables. However, when rates of “Elaboration Specific Talk” were coded and used as the variable with the pre scores for elaboration to predict post scores, the slope coefficient for the talk variable is significant. When pre scores are held constant, post scores increased by about .75 points when “Elaboration Specific Talk” was used. N = 24. Table 15 demonstrates the results, and Figure 4 illustrates the interaction plots.

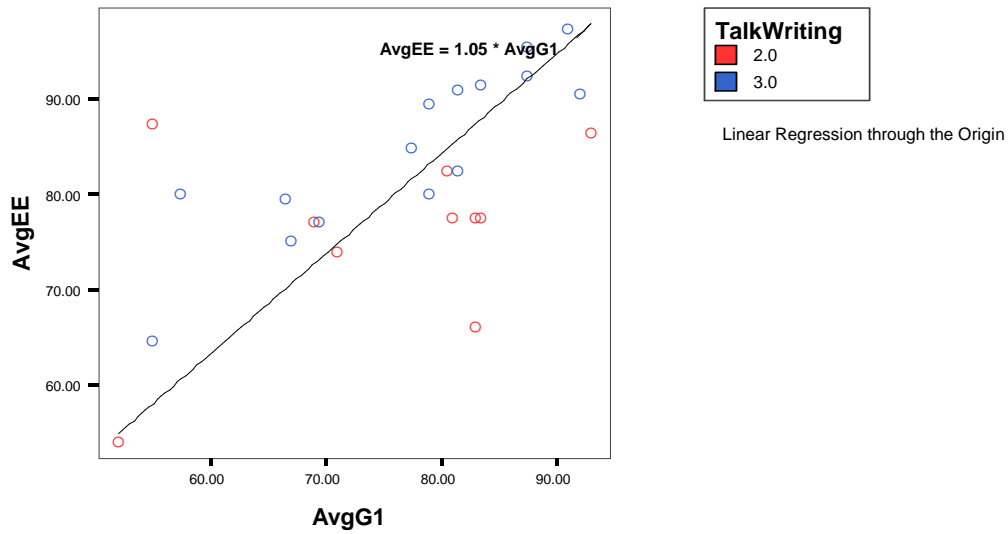
Table 15: Effects of Specific Talk about Elaboration for Signs of Elaboration in Writing

Model	<i>B</i>	<i>SE B</i>	<i>Probability Value</i>
Constant	2.522	.604	.000
Pre-test score			
Elaboration	.293	.149	.061
Talk about			
Elaboration	.747	.254	.008**

a. Predictors: (Constant), Talk about elaboration, Average elaboration pre-test score b. Dependent Variable: Average Exit Exam Elaboration Score,  $p < .05$ , \*\* $p < .01$

Figure 4: Interaction Plot for Talk about Writing and Exit Exam Achievement

Figure 4: Interaction Plot for Talk about Writing and Achievement



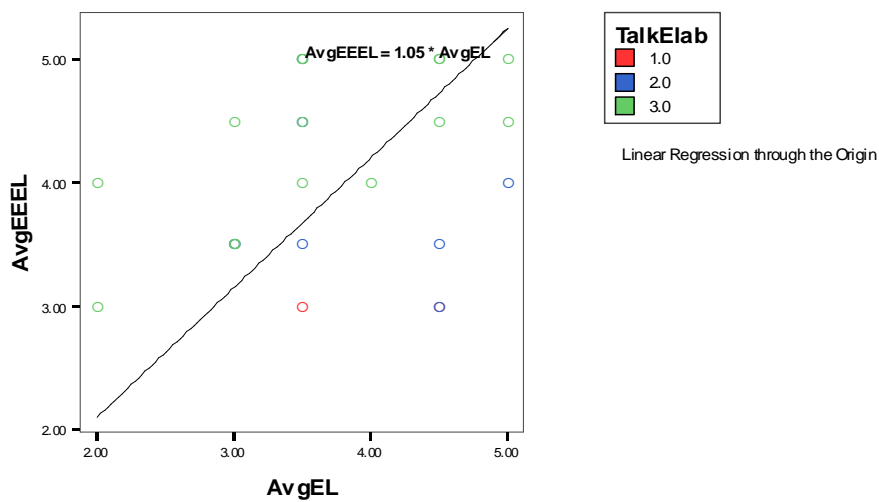
Similarly, when rates of “talk about writing” were coded and used as a predictor with pre scores for holistic quality of writing, the talk about writing predicts posttest scores on the holistic quality of the writing. When pre scores are held constant, post scores increased by about 7.80 points on a 0-100 point scale in association with “talk about writing.” N = 24. Table 16 demonstrates the results, and Figure 5 illustrates the interaction plots.

Table 16: Effects of Specific Talk on Exit Exam Scores, with Control for Pre-test Score

Model	<i>B</i>	<i>SE B</i>	<i>Probability Value</i>
Constant	38.252	9.477	.001
Average Writing Score	.503	.123	.000**
Talk about Writing	7.795	2.941	.015*

a. Predictors: (Constant), Talk about writing, Average holistic writing score b. Dependent Variable: Average Exit Exam Score, \*p<.05, \*\*p<.01

Figure 5: Interaction Plot for Talk about Writing and Elaboration Achievement



Raw rates were also used to calculate rates of talk within a two to five-member peer review pair or group. Talk was identified as “high,” “moderate,” or “low” based on the total number of marks made for each member of each pair or group by each rater over the course of six consecutive 30 second intervals each time this category of data on talk within the peer review groups was collected. High rates were given for any incidence over 66 incidences per three minutes, moderate rates were those ranging from 34-65 incidences per three minutes, and low was any rating below 34 incidences per three minutes. For example, one group had a total of 18 marks in the talk categories during one observation. Nine of those marks were identified as relating to elaboration, 5 were identified as specific talk about writing other than about elaboration, 2 were identified as talk about writing correctness, and 2 were identified as non-task related talk. Therefore, 15 out of the 18 marks or 83 percent identified were specific to talk about writing in some form and 69 percent of the talk was specific to elaboration yielding high ratings for talk about writing and for elaboration. While no statistical significance was recorded among groups, the rate of specific student talk observed in these randomly selected pairs and groups yielded some noteworthy results.

Information from each randomly selected group is represented in the following tables. Each table shows the pre and posttest scores and the rates of talk.



Table 17: Random Group Means for Diagnostic and Exit Exam by Rate of Talk about Writing and Rate of Elaboration Specific Talk

Group Numbers	<i>M</i> <i>Diagnostic</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i> <i>Exit</i> <i>Exam</i>	<i>SD</i>	Rate of Talk about Writing	Rate of Elaboration Specific Talk
B8/B9/B14/B20	71.12	9.89	83.50	9.53	High	High
B2/B13/B17/B19	67.75	14.72	75.50	12.55	Moderate	Moderate
D4/D5/D8/D17	79.00	10.93	78.62	12.53	Moderate	Moderate
D6/D9/D12/D13/D20	81.80	9.529	86.90	10.94	High	High

The randomly selected groups with a “High” rate of talk about writing and specific talk about elaboration demonstrated mean gains in achievement on both mean scores for overall writing achievement and for elaboration. Groups with a “Moderate” rate of talk about writing and specific talk about elaboration did not demonstrate mean score gains in both dependent variables.

Table 18: Random Group Means for Elaboration Mean Score Diagnostic and Exit Exam by Rate of Talk about Writing and Rate of Elaboration Specific Talk

Group Numbers	<i>M</i> <i>Diagnostic</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i> <i>Exit</i> <i>Exam</i>	<i>SD</i>	Rate of Talk about Writing	Rate of Elaboration Specific Talk
B8/B9/B14/B20	3.37	.915	4.375	.816	High	High
B2/B13/B17/B19	4.12	.876	3.875	.997	Moderate	Moderate
D4/D5/D8/D17	3.50	.902	3.75	.837	Moderate	Moderate
D6/D9/D12/D13/D20	3.60	1.08	4.30	.894	High	High

Information from each randomly selected pair is represented in the following tables. Each table shows the pre and posttest scores and the rates of talk.

Table 19: Random Pair Means for Diagnostic and Exit Exam Scores by Rate of Talk about Writing and Rate of Elaboration Specific Talk

Pair Numbers	<i>M Diagnostic</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M Exit Exam</i>	<i>SD</i>	Rate of Talk about Writing	Rate of Elaboration Specific Talk
A6/A7	61.00	6.36	69.75	11.08	High	High
A2/A9	82.00	4.33	71.75	13.10	Moderate	Moderate
C9/C22	86.75	6.65	90.75	10.93	Moderate	Moderate
C4/C17	83.25	10.21	91.00	10.76	High	High

Table: 20 Random Pair Means for Elaboration Mean Score Diagnostic and Exit Exam by Rate of Talk about Writing and Rate of Elaboration Specific Talk

Pair Numbers	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M Exit Exam</i>	<i>SD</i>	Rate of Talk about Writing	Rate of Elaboration Specific Talk
A6/A7	2.50	.997	3.25	.823	High	High
A2/A9	3.00	.0	3.0	.668	Moderate	Moderate
C9/C22	4.25	.816	4.75	.816	Moderate	Moderate
C4/C17	4.50	.876	5.0	.894	High	High

The randomly selected pairs with a “High” rate of talk about writing and specific talk about elaboration demonstrated mean gains in achievement on both mean scores for overall writing achievement and for elaboration. Groups with “Moderate” and “Low” rates of talk about writing and specific talk about elaboration did not demonstrate mean score gains in either dependent variable.

### Participant Debriefing

On the day the Exit Exams were returned to the students in the treatment sections, the participating instructors requested that the students answer questions about the study. The students were given 3 questions, asked to respond anonymously, and then to submit their responses. The questions were as follows:

1. Do you think that your writing benefited from your pair/group collaboration during this term? Please be specific in your answer as to why or why not and identify if you were part of a pair or group.
2. Do you think that your writing benefited from using a script during the revision activities? Please be specific in your answer as to why or why not.
3. Do you think that your Exit Exam score was impacted positively or negatively because of the included revision activity? Please be specific in your answer as to why or why not.

Fifty-three out of the 87 participants (approximately 61 percent) responded to the questions. After reading through the debriefing responses several times, I classified comments into distinct categories per question based on the written responses from each

participant in both pair and group treatments. To determine the response rate for each comment, I analyzed each response and matched it with the appropriate category using the content analysis method described by Whitney (2006).

Discussions of category characteristics are included in the sections which address each question.

Debriefing Question 1: Do you think that your writing benefited from your pair/group collaboration during this term? Please be specific in your answer as to why or why not and identify if you were part of a pair or group.

Table 21: Benefits of Pair or Group

Treatment Type	Positive response to collaboration	Negative response to collaboration	Total Response to collaboration
Pair	21	3	24
Group	24	5	29
Total	45	8	53

Eighty-five percent of the students who experienced treatments rated the opportunity to participate in collaboration as a positive experience with comments such as “Having the chance to work on my papers with my partner gave me the chance to hear what someone else thought before I had to turn it in.” Another student said, “Working in my group helped me so much. I’m not a good writer, and they kept on encouraging me all during the class. They also told me things that were really helpful like how to add

more details to my paragraphs and what paragraphs did not prove what I wanted them to.” Still another student wrote, “I have never worked with anybody during the process of writing a paper. My partner and I really took this seriously, and I learned that people shouldn’t write papers without getting opinions from other people. Having another person’s opinion can really make the difference in how your paper sounds.”

Using the aforementioned responses and the remaining responses from each participant debriefing, I identified 6 specific categories for the benefits of collaboration.

The category identified as *general discussion about writing* encompasses comments about the writing process or the recursive nature of writing such as the following:

1. “When my partner talked about the way she wrote papers from start to finish, it helped me to understand that I cannot write a decent paper in 30 minutes.”
2. “My group members were constantly reminding me that if I would spend more time generating ideas for my paper I wouldn’t be stressing out when I drew a blank at the middle of my paper.”
3. “My partner helped me to understand that writing doesn’t have to be just an assignment to do. I learned that writing can be a release.”
4. “If it had not been for my group and the fact that they helped me to believe I could write a paper I would have dropped this class.”

The second identified category focused on comments related to peers providing *specific examples/details to use in the papers* with responses typical of the following:

1. “There was one paper that I was stuck on big time. One of the members in my group gave me an idea of how I could prove my topic sentence better. I’d still be

- stuck in that paragraph if she hadn't told me to use that story.”
2. “My peer partner told me to put in a really scary statistic to grab the instructor’s attention when she read the introduction.”

The third identified category arose from comments *pointing out unnecessary information* represented by the following:

1. “The best advice I got from my group was that sometimes I got to the point and wore it out. They kept telling me that I was saying the same thing ten different ways and not giving ten different reasons to support my point.”
2. “My partner told me to ‘cut the fluff’ and keep only the ‘stuff.’ I will always remember that.”
3. “If you’ve got to make it up—don’t use it!”

The fourth category was identified as *organizational information* with the following types of comments creating the category:

1. “Add transition sentences. I heard that a lot.”
2. “Make the conclusion longer.”
3. “I was always asked where my thesis was.”

The fifth category focused only on comments that addressed pairs/groups *pointing out strong areas of paragraph* through the following:

1. “Your thesis was great. The first time I heard that...it made my day.”
2. “My group always liked my body paragraphs. They said that I could sell ice to an Eskimo.”
3. “Strong support here.”

4. “My revision group made me feel confident when they talked about how good my introductions were.”

The sixth category was identified by comments *pointing out grammar, mechanics, and usage* through the following examples:

1. “It really helped to have someone look at my paper before I turned it in. I am not too good in grammar and I needed that extra help.”
2. “Thanks for the chance to let other people proofread my work. I couldn’t catch my mistakes after I had read the paper a hundred times.”

Tables 22 and 23 report the response frequencies for pairs and groups who participated in collaboration and who reported benefits from this participation.

Table 22: Response Rate for Collaboration Benefits in Pairs

Treatment Type	Benefited from Collaboration Comment Categories	Response
Pair N 21 students		Frequency out of 21
	Benefit from general discussion about writing	2
	Benefit from the providing of specific examples/details to use in paper	2
	Benefit from the pointing out of unnecessary information	5
	Benefit from organizational information	3
	Benefit from point out strong areas in paragraphs	8
	Benefit from pointing out grammar/mechanics	1

Table 23: Response Rate for Collaboration Benefits in Groups

Treatment Type	Benefited from Collaboration Comment Categories	Response
Group N 24 students		Frequency out of 24
	Benefit from general discussion about writing	5
	Benefit from the providing of specific examples/details to use in paper	6
	Benefit from the pointing out of unnecessary information	3
	Benefit from organizational information	2
	Benefit from point out strong areas in paragraphs	4
	Benefit from pointing out grammar/mechanics	6

Most respondents' comments addressed only one area. In fact, only two respondents addressed more than one area of the benefits of collaboration. In those two cases, the responses were placed in each appropriate category.

Fifteen percent of those same students (i.e., 8 participants among 53— 24 pair and 29 group respondents—who experienced SPR or GPR offered negative comments in regard to collaboration. The two reasons for the negative responses in pairs included, “My partner and I did not want to talk about writing. We mainly talked about stuff going on around us and not our papers.” The other reason was similar. “It was hard for our group to focus on the papers. There was too much else to talk about and the papers just didn’t make the cut.” Based on those 2 comments and the similar following comments, all 8



responses could be placed in a single category that the “group/pair did not function well:”

1. “My partner and I didn’t gel. She’s nice. I’m not. We don’t have anything in common, so that made it tough.”
2. “Our group liked to talk about stuff other than writing.”

Table 24: Response Rate for Collaboration Negatives in Groups and Pairs

Treatment Type	Negatives from Scripted Talk Comment Categories	Response
Pair/Group N 11 students		Frequency out of 11
	Group/pair did not function well	8

Debriefing Question 2: Do you think that your writing benefited from using a script during the revision activities? Please be specific in your answer as to why or why not.

Table 25: Benefits of Script

Treatment Type	Positive response to script	Negative response to script	Total Response to script
Pair	22	2	24
Group	20	9	29

Seventy-nine percent of students rated the use of a script as a positive experience. One of the participants wrote, “The script helped to keep our group working on revising the papers. I found that when I didn’t really have anything else to say about the paper, the script gave me an idea of where to go next.” Another stated that using the script “helped to keep our focus on the papers. There were times when we wanted to talk about something not related to the papers, but the script helped to keep us on track.” Still another said that “the script reminded me what I needed to do to make my paper better and to make the other papers in my group better.”

Using the aforementioned responses and the remaining responses from each participant debriefing, I identified 4 specific categories for the benefits of scripted talk with 2 repeated from Debriefing Question 1.

The category identified as *staying on task* encompasses comments about the writing process or the recursive nature of writing such as the following:

1. “Without the script to guide my partner and me we would have been talking about The Sopranos.”
2. “We ended up with a shy girl in our group. Having this script gave her a reason to work with us.”

The second identified category focused on comments related to peers providing *specific examples/details to use in the paper* with responses typical of the following:

1. “I really need help when I write because I can be general all the time but trying to give someone a specific reason for something is hard for me. The script helped me with those specific things to use.”

2. “The script was where I went when I needed to be reminded of what specific details could be.”

The third category focused on one comment that addressed pairs/groups *pointing out strong areas of paragraphs* through the following:

1. “I liked it when people told me what was right.”

The fourth category focused on comments about *writing assistance*:

1. “Having the script in revision time helped my group make our papers better from start to finish.”
2. “The script helped me to write better.”

Tables 31 and 32 report the response frequencies for pairs and groups who participated in scripted revision activities (SPR or GPR) and who reported benefits from this participation.

Table 26: Response Rate for Scripted Talk Benefits in Pairs

Treatment Type	Benefited from Scripted Talk Comment Categories	Response Frequency
Pair N 22 students		out of 22
	Benefit from staying on task	12
	Benefit from the providing of specific examples/details to use in paper	7
	Benefit from pointing out strong areas of the paragraphs	1
	Benefit from writing assistance	2

Table 27: Response Rate for Scripted Talk Benefits in Groups

Treatment Type	Benefited from Scripted Talk Comment Categories	Response
Group N 24 students		Frequency out of 24
	Benefit from staying on task	5
	Benefit from the providing of specific examples/details to use in paper	6
	Benefit from pointing out strong areas of the paragraphs	2
	Benefit from writing assistance	11

Twenty-one percent of the participants (N= 11) indicated that they had a negative response to the script. One said, “I don’t like being told how to respond to other people. I felt like the script wanted me to stick to a certain order and use certain questions.” Another said that the script “made my partner and me feel like we were in junior high. It made us think that the instructor didn’t trust us to do what we were supposed to do.” One additional comment stated that “using the script felt like my peer partner and I were confined to a set of areas that we could cover. It just felt like we were supposed to comment only on certain things.” Based on those comments and the similar following comments, 2 categories were created.

The category identified as *too constraining* encompasses the aforementioned comments and the following:

1. “I don’t like going in a particular order when I look at papers.”
2. “The script didn’t let me talk about what I wanted to say.”

The category identified as *not useful* resulted from one comment:

1. “The script did not help me at all.”

Table 28: Response Rate for Scripted Talk Negatives in Groups and Pairs

Treatment Type	Negatives from Scripted Talk Comment Categories	Response
Pair/Group	N 11	Rate out of 11
	Script was too constraining	10
	Script was not useful	1

Debriefing Question 3: Do you think that your Exit Exam score was impacted positively or negatively because of the included revision activity? Please be specific in your answer as to why or why not.

Table 29: Benefits on Exit Exam

Treatment Type	Positive response to Treatment Exit Exam	Negative response to Treatment Exit Exam	Total Response to Exit Exam
Pair	23	1	24
Group	26	3	29

Ninety-two percent of students (N= 49), the highest percentage of the three answers, rated the opportunity to participate in revision activities during the exam as a positive experience. Comments included the following: “If you have to take a pass/fail writing test, this is how it should be done. All semester I had worked with my partner, so I really relied on her opinion. To go through the most important paper of the semester without her would have been hard.” One student wrote that “having my group look over my paper and give me advice and kudos made me feel not so nervous about the exam.” Another said, “My partner made me feel confident in what I turned in, and it helped me to help him. I wouldn’t have wanted to turn my paper in without his okay.” One commented the “test was not so nerve wracking since I knew my group would read my paper before the real grader did. I felt like we all wanted each other to do a good job, so we worked hard to make sure that each paper was as good as we could get it.”

Using the aforementioned responses and the remaining responses from each participant debriefing, I identified specific categories for the benefits of scripted talk with 1 category repeated from Debriefing Question 2.

The category identified as *same teaching and testing methods* encompasses comments about the writing process or the recursive nature of writing such as the following:

1. “We had our group’s help all semester. It would have been a shock to lose it at the end.”
2. “My partner and I had a system all through the class. I would be really stressed if I had to go through a pass/fail test without it.”

The category identified as *confidence building* was created from aforementioned comments and comments such as these:

1. “I am not a good test taker. Having my partner to look over my final draft made me feel better.”
2. “I might have tossed my lunch without my partner.”

The third category focused on *writing assistance*:

1. “My partner reminded me that I needed a clear thesis.”
2. “My group showed me several errors.”
3. “One person in my group gave me a good idea for my conclusion.”

Tables 35 and 36 report the response frequencies for pairs and groups who participated in scripted revision activities (SPR or GPR) during the Exit Exam and who reported benefits from this participation.

Table 30: Response Rate for Exit Exam Benefits in Pairs

Treatment Type	Benefits on Exit Exam Comment Categories	Response
Pair N 23 students		Frequency out of 23
	Benefit from same teaching and testing methods	3
	Benefit from confidence building	19
	Benefit from writing assistance	1

Table 31: Response Rate for Exit Exam Benefits in Groups

Treatment Type	Benefits on Exit Exam Comment Categories	Response
Pair N 26 students		Frequency out of 26
	Benefit from same teaching and testing methods	1
	Benefit from confidence building	21
	Benefit from writing assistance	4

Of the eight percent who said that the exam revision activities were a negative experience, only one left a specific comment. It read as follows: “I guess that I am pretty selfish when it comes to the time I have in an exam that makes or breaks my grade in the class. I didn’t want to help someone else get a good grade when I just needed to worry about my own grade.”

#### Instructor Debriefing

Following the conclusion of the study and the reporting of the results to the participating instructors, I asked the participating treatment instructors to answer three questions similar to the ones the participating students were asked.

1. Do you think that your students’ writing benefited from pair/group collaboration during this term? Please be specific in your answer as to why or why not.



2. Do you think that your students' writing benefited from using a script during the revision activities? Please be specific in your answer as to why or why not.
3. Do you think that your students' Exit Exam scores were impacted positively or negatively because of the included revision activity? Please be specific in your answer as to why or why not.

Both participating instructors are advocates for collaboration in their writing classrooms, but both usually use groups rather than pairs. They commented that during the semester, they felt as though they would be likely to use more pair collaborations in the future since there did not appear to be an advantage to using groups versus pairs in their classes and the pairs seemed to stay on task with more consistency. Both said that they felt their students returned better drafts following the peer revision activities and that they felt the revision activities worked well. They both noted that not all pairs and groups stayed on task as much as they would have liked on each activity, but overall they felt that most students performed better after collaboration than they would have alone.

Both participating instructors felt as though the script was effective for their classrooms. One wrote, "Our papers are ordered to encourage a specific organization, and it helps to have students pay attention to what is going on within that specific structure. Encouraging attention to elaboration gave me student papers that were more interesting, more vivid, and more real. I will continue to use this script to encourage my students to elaborate in their papers."

The participation in revision activities during the Exit Exam received mixed reviews. One instructor did not advocate the use of a peer or group during the exam. She

said, “At some point, we have to make the students responsible for their own learning. They cannot always rely on peers to make their papers stronger.” The other instructor gave the following comment: “The incorporation of peer revision activities in the testing situation adds validity to the test. By allowing students to test the way they have been taught, we give credence to the process method that we advocate, and we encourage our students to avoid writing in a vacuum.”

## CHAPTER V

### CONCLUSIONS

#### Overview

Results from this study indicated that no statistically significant gains in achievement occurred in writing including on the criterion of elaboration of freshman college students with access to multiple peer opinions. Although the null hypothesis could not be rejected, the fact that the mean scores in all treatment groups increased while the comparison group means decreased warrants further investigation. In addition, data are consistent with previous findings and interpretations that report high-quality talk as a predictor of writing improvement.

It should be expected that students who complete a college writing course should demonstrate some degree of increases in writing scores from pretest to posttest, though as conventional wisdom dictates, real improvement in writing usually needs more than an academic semester to be realized (Applebee, 2000). This increase in mean scores from pretest to posttest was in fact the case in this study with the exception of the comparison group. This fact is of much interest, and invites additional inquiry. What specifically caused the decrease? All participants used the same texts, completed the same assignments, were scored by the same raters, and had access to similar scripts during revision activities. However, the comparison group lacked opportunities for interaction with their peers. This variable seems to offer a plausible explanation for the difference

and thus these data provide some further validation of composition research and theory that characterize writing as an act that is profoundly social in nature (Sperling, 1996).

Although the null hypothesis could not be rejected, based on the recorded information relating to the rates of specific types of student talk controlling for previous achievement in writing, in community college classrooms where peer review is carried out by students' using scripts that (1) focus students on ill-structured aspects of formulaic writing in school genres and (2) establish reciprocal interdependence within peer review pairs or groups, an association between high rates of talk about writing and increased achievement does exist. Similarly, moderate and low rates of talk about writing seem to correlate with no increase in achievement and even in some cases a decrease in achievement.

Based on the increase in means data and the correlations between rate of talk about writing and achievement, it could be possible that, with an increased amount of time and under the same conditions, the null would be rejected in a subsequent study.

Additionally, these results on rate of talk and achievement suggest, in contrast to current findings (i.e., Whyte, in press) that scripting peer response or peer review groupwork need not be contrasted in opposition to reciprocally interdependent response to writing nor as counter to students' sense of writing as an ill-structured problem. Rather, the design of the scripts for this study and the association between talk and achievement in these data indicate that a hybrid script with both sequential and ill-structured and reciprocal interdependence features may suffice for the talk in peer response or peer review groups to relate to students' achievement in writing.

### Implications for Collaboration in Composition Studies

As previously stated, the mean score results from this study provide some support for current assertions in the composition studies literature that students who work with peers to revise improve their skills more notably than writers with less specific peer feedback (e.g, Carifo, Jackson, & Dagostino, 2001). Results also support findings that writers revising with peers exhibit significantly higher mean scores on essays than writers who worked alone (Minchew & McGrath, 2001). Random target student observations in both the pairs and groups indicate that students with opportunities to engage in reciprocal interdependence, who view the problem as ill-structured, and who engage in *higher* rates of specific talk about writing increase their mean scores on both the holistic score and the elaboration score while pairs and groups with more *moderate* rates of specific talk about writing do not demonstrate mean score increases on both measures. Also, overwhelming anecdotal evidence from the participating students, 85 percent compared to 15 percent, suggests that writers feel their writing is influenced positively by opportunities for collaboration. Therefore, the inclusion of peer review and response activities within college writing classrooms continues to be an appropriate instructional method.

The study does not suggest whether collaboration in pairs or groups is more effective. All treatment pairs and groups increased their means, but no statistical significance differentiating the pairs from the groups could be noted. In addition, random target student observations do not demonstrate one organizational method to be superior to the other.

Also, data gathered from the student debriefing does not offer any anecdotal evidence as to whether a pair or group is the better organizational structure for a composition classroom.

When focusing on the instructors' and students' debriefing comments, some of their remarks seem to suggest that adequate training of all students to establish cooperative norms and adequate role development within the pairs/groups may not have occurred which could have resulted in some students' inability to fully participate in their pairs or groups because they still considered the instructor as the central authority figure, even in their groups or pairs. Since the script does not appear to be an inhibiting factor in this study and since Wei Zhu (1995) found that college students who participated in unscripted peer response following training produced higher quality writing than those writers who worked from a low-quality sequence of generic questions, instructors might choose to use a high-quality script and invest more instructional time preparing students for peer review by focusing on the establishment of cooperative norms and the development of reciprocally interdependent roles for groups and pairs. By instructors' delegating more authority to groups and pairs, peer review, and thus achievement in writing, may be increased.

#### Implications for Scripted Revision Activities in Composition Studies

The study also does not offer results that achieved statistical significance as to the influence of a script on overall writing achievement and on the specific criterion of signs of elaboration in students' writing, but it does not demonstrate significant negative associations between scripts and achievement in writing either. Further, based on the fact

that all scripted treatment groups exhibited increases in their mean raw scores and on results from analysis of the types of specific talk occurring within pairs and groups, instructors may be able to use a script to identify and focus on individual areas of student writing that are ill-structured problems, perhaps within largely routine writing tasks, and that need improvement.

Additionally, findings from debriefing comments in randomly selected pairs and groups suggest that scripting activities can be designed so that students view writing as an ill-structured problem. Students reported that the script “gave me an idea of where to go next” and “reminded me what I need to do to make my paper better.” These comments also suggest that scripts can foster joint problem-solving between pairs and among groups. Students wrote that “having this script gave her a reason to work with us,” and that “the script helped my group make our paper better from start to finish.”

Anecdotal evidence suggests that many students (79 percent) and their instructors responded positively to using a script during revision activities and felt that a script can improve their scores on writing tasks and enhance their writing experiences. This evidence highlights the contrast between previous findings (e.g., Freedman, 1987) that report the ineffectiveness of a sequenced script as demonstrating little additional oral or written elaboration beyond the listed questions and with little joint problem-solving observed. The treatment scripts employed in this study indicated that scripts can incorporate features that allow students to view the task as ill-structured and that establish reciprocally interdependent roles during scripted peer review.

### Implications for High-Stakes Collaboration Opportunities in Composition Studies

Again, the study does not offer results that achieved statistical significance regarding the influence of collaborative revision activities leading up to and during a high-stakes exam. Yet the mean raw scores of all the treatment groups, which were exposed to collaborative revision activities throughout the term and in the high-stakes exam, increased from pretest to posttest while the comparison group, with no exposure to collaboration, saw a decrease in mean raw scores. As previously stated, random target student observations in both the pairs and groups demonstrated that students with opportunities to engage in reciprocal interdependence, who view the problem as ill-structured, and who engage in higher rates of specific talk about writing during SPR and GPR increase their mean scores on both the holistic score and the elaboration score while pairs and groups with more moderate rates of specific talk about writing do not demonstrate mean score increases on both measures. Finally, 92 percent of students reported positive opinions toward scripted collaboration leading up to and during the Exit Exam.

Therefore, while statistical data did not support a rejection of the null hypothesis, sufficient evidence exists to encourage additional inquiry into the effects of carefully engineered scripted revision activities accompanied by thorough preparation of students for collaboration in the college composition classroom.

### Recommendations

This research explored the possible effects that revising in pairs, groups, or alone with a script designed to increase elaboration had on achievement in writing. Even



though the study did not reveal a significant statistical difference among the three groups, important issues related to effective composition instruction became evident.

First, the study provides some support through the correlation between the rate of specific talk and scores on the Exit Exam posttest and through participant feedback for pursuing further research on scripted peer review in the lower-division college composition classroom. Further inquiry could, however, inquire into the relationship between talk about writing in peer review pairs and/or groups and writing achievement on high-stakes exams. This could be designed as a mixed-methods case study to allow in-depth analysis of the content as well rates of talk and students' subsequent written texts.

Such in-depth inquiry could also lead to additional data on the presence and content of joint problem-solving that occurs within the pairs or groups, which is a second point of interest. Scripted interactions could be taped and then transcribed to determine what types of interactions are represented during the talk, if the interactions exhibit the characteristics of joint problem-solving, and if when the scope conditions of ill-structured problem-solving and reciprocal interdependence are present, the presence of joint problem-solving persists, or even increases, over time.

Third, since the mean scores of the treatment groups increased, further study into the amount of time it actually takes to yield statistically significant gains in writing in freshman composition classes is warranted. A follow-up study that tracks a writing cohort through freshman composition I and II would provide the additional time and would keep the pairs and groups in-tact longer, thus making it possible to determine if under the same research conditions the increased time in conjunction to access to

multiple peers' ideas relates to achievement. This type of study would allow further investigation of differences in pairs and groups when there is full delegation of authority by the instructor via the establishment of cooperative norms and establishment of reciprocally interdependent roles within the pair or groups. Such research could allow script effectiveness to be tracked across different types of writing as Composition II is generally focused on writing that contrasts in some respect (e.g., in the community college setting emphasizing about literature rather than personal experience) with Composition I.

Finally, this study took place within a community college setting with a somewhat diverse student population. All groups exhibited demographic characteristics of the typical community college composition classroom. It would be of interest to see this study replicated in a university setting to inquire into any differences between more traditional college composition classes and community college composition classes.

### Conclusion

Outcomes of this study suggest that scripted peer revision, whether organized in pair or in groups, is an appropriate instructional method in college composition classes because scripting can be engineered to foster joint problem-solving. Relying on the results specifically related to student opinions of scripted peer review, this outcome has the potential to change learning in classrooms that still maintain current traditionalist standardized practices for managing writing instruction. The instructional emphasis can be shifted from product to process, and learning environments conducive to the social and

ill-structured nature of even formulaic writing in school genres can be successfully established within rigid high-stakes assessment structures.

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## APPENDICES

## Appendix A

### English Composition Revision Script (Comparison Group)

## **English Composition I Revision Script**

As you read through your draft, address the following questions, and think about possible ideas for helping your paper achieve its point when/if it falls short in any of the areas discussed below.

### **INTRODUCTION**

1. Does the introduction draw you, as a reader, into the essay by grabbing your attention with specific details that help you understand the main point of the essay?
2. Does the introduction present a way of looking at the subject that contains the following elements: concrete examples, unique voice, real-world facts/issues, well-developed facts, clear and relevant explanations (Druker, 2005)?
3. Do you present a thesis that is clearly stated, completes the introduction, and prepares a reader for the body of the essay?

### **BODY PARAGRAPHS**

1. Do the topic sentences support the thesis and present a “whole picture” of the paragraph that follows (Druker, 2005)?
2. Do you, as a writer, draw from your prior knowledge to explain, support, refute, and/or cite information (Langer, 1987; Applebee, 1987; Rosenblatt, 1978)?
3. Does the information “come alive” through creative elements such as voice, narration, characterization, setting, artistic language (Druker, 2005)?
4. Do you, as the writer, present details that help a reader to understand the main points of the paragraphs?
5. Do you, as the writer, select, connect, and organize ideas to support his/her main ideas (Stein, 1989)?
6. Do you, as the writer depending on the audience and the your purpose, incorporate specific examples and details from personal experiences, memories, observations, facts, statistics, reasoned arguments, testimony from authorities, and research (Wyrick, 1999)?

### **CONCLUSION**

1. Does the conclusion provide a sense of finality in the paper for the reader (Wyrick, 1999)?
2. Does the conclusion leave you with any questions/concerns about the writer’s thesis?

### **GENERAL**

1. Does the paper demonstrate the characteristics of proper grammar, mechanics, and usage?
2. Does the paper adhere to the required essay form?

## Appendix B

### Peer Response Revision Script (SPR Treatment Groups)

### **Peer Response Revision Script**

1. Read through the entire draft of your peer's essay.
2. After you (reader) have completed reading the draft, orally respond to the following questions. Allow the writer time to write down brief notes and ask questions as you move through each item.
3. Does the introduction present a way of looking at the subject that contains the following elements: concrete examples, unique voice, real-world facts/issues, well-developed facts, clear and relevant explanations.
4. Point out where topic sentences support the thesis and present a "whole picture" of the paragraph that follows.
5. Where does the writer draw from his/her prior knowledge to explain, support, refute, and/or cite information.
6. In what places does the information "come alive" through creative elements such as voice, narration, characterization, setting, artistic language.
7. Point out places that the writer, depending on his/her purpose, incorporate specific examples and details from personal experiences, memories, observations, facts, statistics, reasoned arguments, testimony from authorities, and research.
8. What questions do you have for me?

## Appendix C

### Peer Response Revision Script (GPR Treatment Groups)



### Peer Response Revision Script (Groups)

9. Once you are in your group, each member will take a role for each draft. The roles are those of Summarizer, Questioner, and Generator. The roles should rotate with each draft, and the writer will not have an assigned role for his/her draft. See bottom of page for responsibilities of each role. If your group has 5 members, assign the Generator role twice.
10. Read through the drafts of your peers' essays and respond to the draft with your particular role in mind. (You should have a copy of each person's draft.)
11. After you have completed reading each draft, write down brief notes and comments on the draft as you move through each item below. (45 minutes)
12. Does the introduction present a way of looking at the subject that contains the following elements: concrete examples, unique voice, real-world facts/issues, well-developed facts, clear and relevant explanations.
13. Where does the writer draw from his/her prior knowledge to explain, support, refute, and/or cite information.
14. In what places does the information "come alive" through creative elements such as voice, narration, characterization, setting, artistic language.
15. Point out places that the writer, depending on his/her purpose, incorporate specific examples and details from personal experiences, memories, observations, facts, statistics, reasoned arguments, testimony from authorities, and research.

At the end of the initial reading/responding time, address each draft orally as a group providing your responses according to your role. Allow the writer of each draft to ask questions and receive additional comments and assistance from the group. (30 minutes)

**Summarizer**-Summarizes the content of the paper pertaining to the specific script questions

**Questioner**-Poses questions based on the specific script questions

**Generator**-Generates new ideas to share with the group based on the specific script questions

**Writer**-Asks clarifying questions of other group members and for additional suggestions/opinions

## Appendix D

### English 101 Pre-test/Diagnostic Essay

## English 101 Pre-test/Diagnostic Essay

**Directions:** Choose ONE of the following topics and write a five-paragraph essay (introduction, three body paragraphs, and a conclusion) using the principles of developing, revising, and polishing learned in this class. Use life as you have lived and observed it for convincing support of your thesis. Remember to follow instructor directions regarding revision and use of the revision script. Submit all materials at the end of the exam.

### Essay Topics

**Definition:** Write an essay which defines one of the following terms or concepts.

- The “Generation X”
- A Western movie
- A Gamer
- California girl
- The perfect mother or father

**Example:** Write an essay using well-developed examples to discuss one of the following:

- Christmas with the family can be difficult.
- Friends can be hard to understand.
- I learned the hard way every time.
- Appearances can be deceiving.
- Some people care too much about what others think of them.

**Compare/Contrast:** Write an essay comparing and/or contrasting one of the following:

- Life before kids and life after kids
- Two types of boyfriends/girlfriends
- Two approaches to teaching
- Two similar theme parks
- Two family roles you have played

**Division/Classification:** Write an essay which divides or classifies one of the following:

- Rap music
- Elementary teachers you had
- Reality shows
- Theft
- Friends

**Cause/Effect:** Write an essay which uses one of the following as either cause or effect:

- Driving too fast
- Overeating
- Watching TV
- Playing video games
- Drinking too much

Appendix E  
English 101 Exit Exam

## English 101 Exit Exam

Social Security Number \_\_\_\_\_

Telephone Number \_\_\_\_\_

**Directions:** Choose ONE of the following topics and write a five-paragraph essay (introduction, three body paragraphs, and a conclusion) using the principles of developing, revising, and polishing learned in this class. Use life as you have lived and observed it for convincing support of your thesis. Remember to follow instructor directions regarding revision and use of the revision script. Submit all materials at the end of the exam.

### Essay Topics

**Definition:** Write an essay which defines one of the following terms or concepts.

- The “American way of life”
- A chick flick
- A control freak
- Southern hospitality
- The perfect girlfriend or boyfriend

**Example:** Write an essay using well-developed examples to discuss one of the following:

- Doing good deeds can backfire.
- Women/men can be hard to understand.
- Embarrassing experiences
- What you see is what you get.
- Some people move to the beat of a different drummer.

**Compare/Contrast:** Write an essay comparing and/or contrasting one of the following:

- Life before 9/11 and life after 9/11
- Two types of students
- Two approaches to coaching
- Two similar restaurants
- Two jobs you have had

**Division/Classification:** Write an essay which divides or classifies one of the following:

- Blue jeans
- Professors, bosses, or coaches you have known
- American Idol contestants
- Lies
- Abuse

**Cause/Effect:** Write an essay which uses one of the following as either cause or effect:

- Dropping out of school
- Overspending
- Stress
- Weight
- Reckless behavior

## Appendix F

### Collection Procedures for Exit Exam

## Collection Procedures Exit Exam

### *Overview*

During the testing phase, all groups will be given identical Exit Exams. The exams will consist of five possible essay types with five topics for each type of writing will be offered. Types of essays may include example, definition, description, narration, classification, division, cause/effect, and comparison/contrast. The students will select only one topic for the exam. Scores on the exam will be based on a 100 point scale. Any exam receiving below a 60 score fails the test.

### *Procedures*

The Exit Exams will all be administered at the same time in similar computer lab locations. All groups will have three hours to complete the identical exams. At the beginning of the testing period, the control group will be given the exam and the instructions specific to the exam will be given. For example, the instructors will remind them to identify themselves only by student number, to remember the time requirements, and to print two copies of their exams (one for the instructor for class grading purposes and one for the researcher). They will write one essay and will be given the revision script to use if they desire. For the control group, revision is optional. The experimental groups will be given the same exam and will receive the same overall instructions. The experimental groups will then be instructed to follow two distinct revision activities before they submit their final drafts. These mirror the semester-long type of classroom instruction. The Single-Peer Review (SPR) treatment instructions will be to revise their drafts using the script with a peer responder, as they have over the course of the semester,

before they submit their final drafts. The peer reviewers will be participants who are pre-assigned with their partners and will be in the same English 101 section. Multiple-Peer Review (GPR) treatment instructions will be to revise their drafts using the script with a peer review group, as they have over the course of the semester, before they submit their final drafts. The groups will be pre-assigned as previously discussed. All materials will be stapled to the final draft of the exam. The participants will be identified by their numbers only. The English Composition I section instructors from the College, trained by researcher, will administer and monitor the exams. Any anomalies will be noted during the testing period. Once the instructors submit the exams to the researcher, all exams will be coded by the researcher. All exams used for the purposes of the proposed research will be graded by the trained readers using the college-specified holistic grading rubric and the elaboration criteria. Once the exams have been graded, they will be returned to the researcher for analysis.



## Appendix G

### Target Student Group/Pair Observation Instrument

Target Student Group/Pair Observation Instrument

Student ID#: \_\_\_\_\_ Instructor ID#: \_\_\_\_\_ Treatment ID (circle): Pair or Group  
 Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Coding Category	Minute #1		Minute #2		Minute #3		Total
	1-30	1-30	1-30	1-30	1-30	1-30	

**T.S. TALK**

A1 Talk about writing.  
correctness (sp.,  
 punct., sent, str.,  
 word usage)

B1 Talk about writing.  
specific and  
actionable (specific  
 info about the  
 writing but not  
 about correctness  
 or elaboration)

B2 Talk about writing.  
specific and  
actionable (specific  
 info about the  
 writing regarding  
 elaboration but not  
 about correctness)

C1 Talk about writing.  
unfocused  
 (includes gen.,  
 global writing talk)

D1 Other task-related  
talk (including  
 procedural talk)

E1 Non-task related  
 talk

**T.S. BEHAVIOR**

F1 Works alone

G1 Works with others

H1 Behvs like Facil.

I1 Look/Listen

J1 Waits for instr.

K1 In transition

L1 Other Ac. Work

M1 Disengaged

\*Use hash marks.

## Appendix H

### Collection Procedures for Target Student Group/Pair Observation Instrument

## Collection Procedures

### Target Student Group/Pair Observation Instrument

During the course of the semester, pairs and groups will be randomly selected to record types of student talk during peer response activities. At least two groups per treatment (group) section and three pairs per treatment (pair) section will be observed at least five times over the semester. According to Cohen (1991) and Whyte (in press), five observations are sufficient to provide a stable estimate of behaviors for analysis. Two previously trained individuals, other than the participating instructors, will record information regarding student talk during peer response sessions. The observations will be arranged by the researcher in cooperation with the participating instructors. The instructors will not record student data, and they will not have access to the forms. The observers will be present within the classroom during peer response sessions, monitor student talk, and record the information on the Target Student Group/Pair Observation form. The sessions will be observed in real time and will not be video or audio recorded. The forms will then be returned to the researcher for analysis.

## Appendix I

### Whole Class Observation Form for Rigor of Implementation

Whole Class Observation Form

Teacher ID # \_\_\_\_\_ Class ID# \_\_\_\_\_ Date of Observation \_\_\_\_\_  
 Total # of students in classroom \_\_\_\_\_ Time of observation \_\_\_\_\_  
 1<sup>st</sup> or 2<sup>nd</sup> observation \_\_\_\_\_  
 Observer ID# \_\_\_\_\_

Type of Activities in Small Groups

Small Groups	Talk or Talk/Manip	Manip Materials	Read/Write	Passive On Task	Disengaged	N for rows
1						
2						
3						
4						
5						
6						
7						
8						
9						
10						
11						
12						

## Appendix J

### Collection Procedures for Whole Class Observation Form

## Collection Procedures

### Whole Class Observation for Rigor of Implementation

The Whole Class Observation instrument is designed to assess the participating instructors' rigor of implementation in the four treatment sections. The instrument, adapted from Whyte (1999), records students as being on-task during pair or groupwork and can indicate whether classroom management problems are present and if these problems preclude collaboration.

The instrument is designed to be completed without disruption to the class, without disruption to the pairs or groups, and without disruption to the instructor. The observer will complete the first section of the form to indicate information that will identify the instructor, section, date, time, and whether it is the first or second observation.

The second section of the form identifies and records the types of activities the pairs or groups are engaged in. Pairs/groups are identified on the vertical axis and the activities are identified on the horizontal axis. Identified activities include the following: "Talk or talk/manipulation of materials," "manipulation of materials," "reading/writing," "passive on task," and "disengaged." The columns are totaled under the N column.



## Appendix K

### Standards for Grading Freshman Composition Rubric

## Wallace Community College

### Standards for Judging Freshman Composition

Writing instructors throughout the United States use prescribed standards to determine grades assigned to freshman composition essays. Essays are evaluated as A, B, C, D, or F based on the four factors generally termed Content, Organization, Style and Mechanics summarized below. We begin with the C paper because C is the level considered average. Instructors generally expect to find average work and usually do. Some essays, however, demonstrate above-average or below-average writing.

#### The C Essay

A C paper must be at least competent in all four areas.

**Content:** A C paper is composed at the level of competence most often demonstrated by freshmen. It treats a worthwhile topic and may have nothing obviously wrong with it. However, the supporting material for thesis and topic sentences may be general and abstract rather than specific and concrete. A C essay should show some insight; therefore, a perfunctory assemblage of commonplace ideas is *not* a C paper.

**Organization:** A C essay follows all instructions given for the assignment, and its organization is clear, logical, and coherent.

**Style:** Ideas in a C paper are expressed with clarity but perhaps not with grace. Sentence patterns may be overly repetitive, and transition between sentences may be lacking. Language may be overly casual or colloquial and may even include slang.

**Mechanics:** A C paper demonstrates acceptable control of punctuation and the conventions of ordinary printed English. It usually displays none of the following serious (“red flag”) errors: comma splices, run-on sentences, subject-verb agreement errors, or sentence fragments. Spelling, punctuation and grammar are generally correct.

#### The D Essay

A D paper is marginally below minimum college standards in any *one* of the four areas.

**Content:** A paper may merit a D if it treats a topic incompletely or perfunctorily or if it treats a trivial subject. The D paper usually demonstrates minimal success in supplying supporting details for the thesis and topic sentences.

**Organization:** The organization of a D paper may not be logically worked out or may not adhere to instructions given for that assignment. There may be no clear organizational pattern at all; if there is, the pattern may not be competently executed.

**Style:** Ideas in a D paper are often expressed in a fashion lacking clarity and grace. The language may be overly casual, colloquial, or grammatically substandard. Sentence patterns may show little variety.

Mechanics: A D paper may not demonstrate acceptable control of punctuation and the conventions of ordinary printed English. It may even display “red flag” errors.

#### The F Essay

An F paper is clearly well below minimum college standards in *at least one* of the four areas and is the proper grade for any paper short of reasonable competence.

Content: The F paper may consist of unsupported generalities and/or the repetition of commonplace ideas. The F paper probably lacks originality and insight.

Organization: The F paper may not follow the instructions given for the assignment. It may be rambling, disorganized and incoherent.

Style: The F paper may consist almost entirely of simple sentences. Sentence pattern variety as well as transition between sentences and paragraphs may be nonexistent.

Mechanics: An F paper probably has a greater degree of error than a D paper though not necessarily. More than half a dozen errors of any type will almost certainly result in the grade F.

#### The B Essay

The B paper must attain a high level of mastery in all four areas.

Content: A B paper is considerably above average. A worthwhile topic is appropriately handled; there is a satisfactory depth of relevant information. Supporting details for thesis and topic sentences are specific, concrete, and plentiful.

Organization: A B paper places proper weight and emphasis on the various subdivisions of the argument and does not contain material obviously unrelated to the thesis or improperly placed. The pattern of organization is clear, logical, and well executed.

Style: The writing in a B paper has fluency, clarity, and consistent force. Sentences have varied structures; transitions are smooth and logical. The reader senses the character of the writer as the essay develops. A definite “writing voice” is evident.

Mechanics: Considerable control of punctuation and the conventions of standard printed English is demonstrated. No red flag errors appear in a B paper though slight errors in punctuation and spelling may occur.

#### The A Essay

The A paper must attain excellence in all four areas.

Content: The A essay displays an interesting topic that is handled with intelligence, originality, and depth. A wealth of supporting material which has been smoothly integrated into the text

demonstrates the writer's clear and compelling interest in the subject. A definite tone is established and maintained throughout the paper.

Organization: A clear, logical, and purposeful organization of the entire essay is consistently demonstrated throughout.

Style: The A paper has been thought through with vigor and vigilance. As a result it impresses the reader as unusually clear and credible. The reader senses the character of the writer and enjoys the "writing voice" evident in the essay. If the essay has a persuasive purpose, the reader appreciates the essay's argument and finds it convincing. Richly varied sentence patterns support the flow and development of ideas. Sentences in an A essay are fluid, polished, balanced, graceful and energetic.

Mechanics: An A paper displays mastery of punctuation and the conventions of standard printed English. It has no comma splices, run-ons, agreement errors, or fragments. It should not display misplaced or dangling modifiers, shifts in viewpoint, or other structural or grammatical problems. Words are spelled correctly *except possibly in very unusual cases*. Punctuation conforms to good usage *except possibly in a few minor or debatable instances*. Usually an A paper is mechanically perfect, or nearly so.

\*\*\*\*\*

Even though the grading criteria of content organization, style and mechanics have been separately discussed, this separation is a matter of convenience. In reality these elements are inseparable. A paper faulty in mechanics and style – poorly organized, inaccurately phrased, badly spelled – can seldom, if ever, have worthwhile or even intelligible content. A paper that is technically correct in matters of spelling, punctuation, and grammar but is full of trivial or disjointed remarks is not only poor in content but poor in style.

If the content of the paper, considered separately, is worth a B, but errors in mechanics make it worth no higher than an F, the paper receives an F. No matter how interesting the ideas are, or how well organized, the unfavorable impression made on a reader by carelessness in mechanics makes it impossible for the paper to earn a passing grade.

In addition, student work that does not follow the instructions for the assignment (even though acceptable in other respects) merits the grade F.

Appendix L  
Elaboration Rubric

## Elaboration Rubric

Rate each elaboration category 0 to 5 with 0 representing the no evidence of elaboration and 5 representing very strong evidence of elaboration.

- 0- no evidence of elaboration
- 1- little evidence elaboration
- 2- some evidence of elaboration
- 3- sufficient evidence of elaboration
- 4- strong evidence of elaboration
- 5- very strong evidence of elaboration

Rate each of the following categories. Add the numbers and divide by four to indicate the score for elaboration.

\_\_\_\_\_ evidence of concrete, specific examples, through real-world facts/issues, reasoned arguments, statistics, testimony from authorities, and outside research

\_\_\_\_\_ prior knowledge to explain, support, refute, and/or cite information

\_\_\_\_\_ information “comes alive” through creative elements such as voice, narration, characterization, setting, artistic language

\_\_\_\_\_ incorporation of specific details from personal experiences, memories, and observations

\_\_\_\_\_ Elaboration score (0 to 5 possible)

## Appendix M

### Fidelity of Implementation

## Fidelity in Implementation

Three English instructors will be involved in the study. All will be trained by the researcher to ensure that grouping, revision activities, and testing methods are consistent. Additionally, the instructors who teach the experimental groups will be trained by the researcher in each of the revision-specific activities. The researcher will train the instructors with respect to the language definitions in the revision script, in random group selection, and in conducting peer response sessions. No training will be required regarding the administering of the Exit Exam as all the instructors will have given the exam numerous times. The following table will be used to document that instructors are conducting the proposed study as designed by the researcher. The researcher will observe each group to ensure that implementation of the activities is occurring.

<b>Activity</b>	<b>Evidence of Implementation</b>
Diagnostic essay administration procedures followed	
Collection procedures followed	
Random assignment of pairs/groups	
Pairs/groups peer response occurring for each essay following the diagnostic essay	
Appropriate script used during peer response sessions	
Script used consistently during all peer response sessions	
Exit Exam essay administration procedures followed	
Collection procedures followed	



Appendix N

Sample Freshman Composition I Syllabus

**Wallace Community College**  
**College Studies, Humanities, and Education Division**  
**ENG 101, ENGLISH COMPOSITION I**

**I. Course Identification**

- A. English 101 provides instruction and practice in writing at least six extended compositions and developing analytical and critical reading skills and basic reference and documentation skills in the composition process. It may include instruction and practice in library use.
- B. Pre-requisites: Successful completion of ENG 093, score of 42 or better on the English section of the ASSET, score of 62 or better on the COMPASS, or score of 20 or better on the ACT (or equivalent SAT score).
- C. 3 Credit hours

**II. Division/Instructor Information**

- A. Instructor
- B. Division Director

**III. Curriculum Status Statement**

- A. Wallace Community College awards associate in arts, associate in science, and associate in applied science degrees. The associate in arts (AA) and associate in science (AS) degree programs are designed for students planning to transfer to a senior institution to pursue a course of study in liberal arts, the sciences, or a specialized professional field. The associate in applied science (AAS) degree is designed for students planning to seek employment based on competencies and skills attained through AAS degree programs of study and applicable courses may or may not be transferable to senior institutions. Certificates are awarded for programs below the degree level that are designed for students who plan to seek employment based on competencies and skills attained through these programs of study.
- B. English 101 partially satisfies the Area I for the Associate in Arts and the Associate in Science Degrees, and the humanities and fine arts requirement for the Associate in Applied Science Degree. This course is transferable to other colleges and universities and is required in many programs of study. It is the responsibility of the student desiring transfer credit to check with their transfer institution to assure applicability of courses toward their planned education goals. Any student planning to transfer to a Florida college or university should check with the instructor to ensure compliance with the Gordon Rule.

#### IV. **Course Objectives:**

1. To develop and use strategies for writing formal, analytical essays from development of subject through revision of essay.
2. To write clearly and effectively, adhering to the conventions of standard English in grammar, usage, and mechanics.
3. To implement the recursive process of creating, writing, and revising.
4. To write unified, coherent, and well-developed paragraphs.
5. To restrict a topic, formulate a thesis, gather and organize materials, and write a coherent, unified expository essay of 400 to 700 words.
6. To develop precision and accuracy of word choice.
7. To perform critical analysis about your own ideas and your world through both reading and writing.

V. **Course Content** English 101 is designed to develop students' facility with the written language. The course teaches students basic language skills—to read critically, to think logically, and to write clearly—that they will need for their college courses and for their business or professional careers. (Description of units of study, major sections/topics, chapter numbers in text, etc.)

#### VI. **Methods of Instruction**

- A. General statement--eg., Instruction may include, but is not limited to, lecture, discussion, computer-assisted instruction, unit exams, pop quizzes, and a comprehensive final exam.
- B. If any student is planning to attend a college or university in Florida, he/she should save all written work from the course. This will assist in providing necessary information for students transferring to Florida and ensure compliance with the Gordon Rule.

#### VII. **Course Requirements/ Grading Criteria**

- A. Standard institutional grading scale  
90-100=A, 80-89=B, 70-79=C, 60-69=D, below 60=F
- B. Course grades will be averaged as determined by the following:
  1. Graded Theme 1 10%
  - Graded Theme 2 10%
  - Graded Theme 3 20%
  - Graded Theme 4 20%
  - Graded Theme 5 20%

Graded Theme 6 20%

2. The Exit Exam will be given on \_\_\_\_\_.

- C. The instructor reserves the right to alter the above)
- D. Questions and/or concerns--Any student who has a question or concern about the final course grade must consult with the faculty member within the first twelve calendar days of the following term.
- E. **PAPERS ARE DUE AT THE BEGINNING OF CLASS ON THE ASSIGNED DATE. ANY PAPER TURNED IN AFTER THE INSTRUCTOR HAS TAKEN UP ESSAYS WILL BE CONSIDERED LATE.**

### VIII. Textbooks, Supplies, Materials

- A. Since the textbook is a major source of information, examples, and exercises, all students are required to have the course textbook. The text provides valuable information on the writing process and writing strategies. Model essays are also packaged with the text for benefit of the student.
- B. Paper, pens, and a college dictionary

### IX. Course Policies

- A. Exam make-up policy- Papers are due on the date assigned at the beginning of class. A penalty of 5 points per day will be deducted from late papers. Late papers will not be accepted after 2 weeks.
- B. Cell phones and beepers should be on silent mode.
- C. Academic integrity statement (See *College Catalog/Student Handbook*)

### X. Attendance Policy

- A. College attendance policy
  - 1. Students are expected to attend all classes for which they are registered. Students should recognize the academic responsibilities inherent in their college career, especially those of timely arrival for and attendance of all classes. Any absences from scheduled classes, regardless of the cause or circumstance, reduce academic opportunities for students. Class activities and assignments missed during absences must be made up as directed by faculty members.

Class attendance policies are in effect from the first class meeting. Faculty members will ensure that the applicable policy is contained in the course syllabus provided to students. Students whose unexcused absences exceed the maximum number should be counseled concerning the probability that they will be able to meet course requirements.

Individual faculty members will abide by the overall attendance policy and will make decisions regarding excused absences. Examples of excused absences include serious illness, death in the student's immediate family, military obligations, or official College business. Students called to extended military or court duty will be excused to the extent possible without jeopardizing successful attainment of course objectives.

The attendance policy applicable to a specific instructional program may be more restrictive than the College policy. These policies may be influenced by requirements of external agencies that oversee curricula in those programs and provide certification, licensure, or registry opportunities for students and graduates.

Students with legitimate concerns may appeal the tardiness and attendance actions of faculty members by following the procedures outlined under the Student Academic Grievance Policy in the current *Wallace Community College Catalog and Student Handbook*.

2. Students who are unable to meet course requirements due to excessive absences are encouraged to withdraw. Withdrawal must be student initiated and requires completion of a withdrawal form. Withdrawal forms may be obtained from the Office of Student Affairs and/or other designated locations at each instructional site. A grade of "W" will be assigned for withdrawals prior to the designated date each term. No withdrawals will be allowed after this date.

B. Discipline specific attendance policy

1. Students' unexcused absences should not exceed more than twice the number of weekly class meetings for the course. (Include policies applicable to specific course and/or discipline. Requirements of external regulating agencies may be addressed here)

## XI. **Safety/Health Information**

- A. Wallace Community College has a comprehensive safety plan that covers many possible emergency situations. If you are involved in, or witness an accident on campus, immediately contact a faculty member or dial "O" for the switchboard operator. All students should become familiar with emergency exits as well as emergency warning system messages, both of which are posted in all buildings. Additional information is in the *College Catalog*.

## XII. **ADA Compliance**

Wallace Community College complies with the Americans with Disabilities Act, 1990. Any student requiring reasonable accommodations under this Act should speak

with the instructor during the first week of classes.

**XIII. Additional College Policies**

Students are expected to be knowledgeable of and abide by policies covered by the Code of Student Conduct found in the current *Wallace Community College Catalog and Student Handbook*. These policies include, but are not limited to, dishonesty, destruction of property, possession of firearms, consumption of alcoholic beverages or controlled substances, obstruction or disruption of instruction, and lewd, obscene, licentious, or indecent conduct.

**XIV. Additional Division/Discipline Information**

English 101 students are required to pass the Exit Exam to successfully complete the course. However, a passing score on the Exit Exam does not ensure a passing grade in the course. Students must maintain a passing grade in their other coursework and pass the Exit Exam to pass English 101. Students who are unsuccessful on their first Exit Exam may retake the exam if they have a “C” average in the class.

The assignments in this class are subject to Internet assessment.

Plagiarism is a serious moral, ethical, and legal infraction. Plagiarism will be discussed by the instructor during the first meetings of the course. You are also responsible for understanding the information concerning plagiarism in the *Student Handbook* section of the *WCC Catalog*.

Violation of the rules concerning plagiarism could result in many serious consequences, the least of which is a bad grade and the opportunity to correct the error. Papers which appear to include use of unacknowledged sources will not be graded until cleared of the charges. Penalties can result in failure of the course, a reprimand in the student’s permanent file, or expulsion from the college.

**XV. Instructor's Personal Statement of Affirmation (with signature)**

Instructors respect each student as an individual. We welcome any student for conferences and especially encourage students who are failing prior to mid-term to make an appointment to discuss their status.

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