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# Portrait of the L2 Writer as a Writing Center Visitor

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# Portrait of the L2 Writer as a Writing Center Visitor

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# Why this matters

- “I assumed that **writing processes** . . . were fundamentally the same.”
- “It was challenging to differentiate between **writing concerns and language issues.**”
- “I had to discard **initial assumptions** about their abilities.”
- “[There is] a fine line between helping the student achieve **grammatical competence** and striving to preserve their **voice**. I think it’s often too easy to confuse **stylistic imperfections** with **grammatical errors.**”
- “I struggled with . . . coming up with strategies to foster the **independence** of ESL students [with respect to **grammar.**]”
- **“I worried about pretty much everything.”**

Writer Perception:

“I have no idea how to write properly.”

Explain your personal writing process, and tell whether it is the same or different when you write in your primary language or in English.

- Listed a single process (did not specify language)
  - Purdue--45%
  - ASU--61%
- Specified the same process (or only slight variation)
  - Purdue--33%
  - ASU--13%
- Specified a different process
  - Purdue--13%
  - ASU--19%

# What that single process looks like:

- Some variation of prewriting, writing, editing or revising
  - Purdue--42%
  - ASU--58%
- The same, minus either prewriting or editing/revising
- Includes marshaling resources prior to writing
  - “Firstly make an outline, then do research to enrich each point of outline...”
  - “I start by writing a list of keywords about things I will articulate in each section...”
  - “Brainstorm. Talk with Professors about the ideas. Research and find resources. Outline...”

# What a difference in process looks like:

- Added steps when writing in English
  - “I think I use the same process except need further grammar check when I write in English.”
  - “In my English writing, I start by writing a list of keywords . . . My writing style in primary language is quite similar . . . except that some steps may be skipped.”
- Translanguaging when writing in English
  - “Thinking, making simple pre-write in my primary language, write drafts in English...”
  - “If writing in English, I think and do the pre-writing in a mixture of using both the languages...”
  - “Sometimes...I will write the draft or outline in my primary language first then when I revise the draft, I will change it into English.”
- Rigidity of method when writing in English
  - “The difference is that I write in a more robotic sense when I write in English.”
  - “I can do more multitasking in Chinese . . . . In English, it has to be one at a time.”

For each global or local skill, indicate the degree to which you feel confident demonstrating that skill in a writing assignment in your primary language or in English.

- “I am **never confident** when it comes to my writing [in either language.]”
- “For my writing experience, I can say that I am very **confident about writing in my primary language . . . .** I still need practices and **improvements in English writing.**”



# Global and local confidence levels

## Global Skills (Purdue)

Very Confident:

- Primary--41-52%
- English--27-30%

Somewhat Confident:

- Primary--39-48%
- English--58-67%

## Local Skills (ASU)

Confident:

- Primary--57-76%
- English--21-34%

Not Confident:

- Primary--4-9%
- English--2-19%

# Not confident at all in English

## Purdue

- For global issues, between 12-18%
  - Being aware of audience
  - Expressing/connecting ideas
  - Sustaining an argument
  - Organizing the paper
  - Using feedback to revise
- For local issues, between 20-40%
  - Forming grammatically-correct sentences
  - Varying sentence structure
  - Using a varied vocabulary
  - Editing/proofreading on my own

## ASU

- For global issues, between 10-13%
  - Constructing a thesis statement
  - Sustaining an argument
  - Using sources effectively
- For local issues, between 15-20%
  - Using a varied vocabulary
  - Editing/proofreading on my own

Tutor (Mis)Perception:

“L2 writers **just** want proofreading help.”

# Why did you visit the writing center?

## Top two reasons for the first visit:

- Worry about writing skills
  - Purdue--44%
  - ASU--46%
- Worry about language skills
  - Purdue--42%
  - ASU--41%

## Reasons for the most recent visit:

- Selected both local & global options
  - Purdue--46%
  - ASU-- 51%
- Selected global but NOT local options
  - Purdue--27%
  - ASU--10%
- Selected only local options
  - Purdue--28%
  - ASU--39%

Proofreading is NOT the top choice for writers at either institution.

# Is there a particular style of tutoring or type of feedback that you find most helpful?

## Purdue Writing Lab

- “I enjoyed when a tutor would **teach me** how to review my writing...”
- “I prefer tutors who can **provide critical opinions** to my paper . . . can really help me get improvements.”
- “Give both **positive and negative** feedback.”
- “I can follow [tutor notes] to **correct my vocabulary and grammar later by myself.**”

## ASU Writing Center

- “They **write down what mistakes** I have made. . . then I can get the feedback every time I see it.”
- “I loved when a writing tutor **asked me questions** when he or she got confused by my paper...”
- “...**help me to improve my skills** on writing, for example, teach me how to make the words and sentences various.”
- “Listen to the student and **help him/her to understand** his/her mistakes.”

# Before your first visit, what did you think the roles of the tutor & writer would be?

## Tutor's Role:

- Helping (writer retains agency)
  - Purdue--41%
  - ASU--42%

“Give me hints to help me find the way myself.”

- Fixing (tutor given agency)
  - Purdue--33%
  - ASU--33%

“Correcting errors in my paper.”

## Writer's Role:

- Has agency
  - Purdue--57%
  - ASU--68%

“I am totally responsible for my project.”

- Lacks agency
  - Purdue--34%
  - ASU--18%

“To do whatever they told me.”

# Portraits of prototypical local L2 writers

## Purdue Writing Lab

- Undergrad
- Chinese
- Mechanical Engineering major
- 30-minute, F2F appointment
- Fall semester
- For a course assignment
- Revising/editing stage
- One-time visitor

## ASU Writing Center

- Undergrad
- ?
- Finance major
- 30-minute, F2F appointment
- Fall semester
- For a course assignment
- ?
- 3.7 appointments during the AY

# Ideas for future research

- To what extent do writers actually want only grammar help?
- What do they mean when they say “grammar”?
- How can L1 writing confidence serve as a strength when writing in the L2?
- Is a writer’s confidence level the same for all stages of the writing process?
- How can tutors be trained to identify & navigate confidence issues?
- How do L2 writers understand the difference between revising & editing?
- Do writers have a document-focus or an improve-as-a-writer focus or both?
- Do professors share writers’ concerns about writing & language skills?



# Questions?

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