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**Students' Revision Practices and Attitudes in Response to Surface-Related Feedback as
Compared to Content-Related Feedback on Their Writing**

by

Amy Elizabeth Covill

A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of

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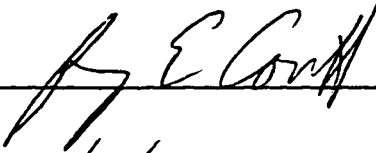
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Abstract

Students' Revision Practices and Attitudes in Response to Surface-Related Feedback As Compared to Content-Related Feedback On Their Writing

By Amy Elizabeth Covill

**Chairperson of the Supervisory Committee: Professor Deborah McCutchen
College of Education**

This study tested the assertion made by many writing instruction experts that teachers' written comments on students' writing should primarily concern the ideas or content of the writing and not the mechanics or surface features. The academic and affective responses of 10th and 11th grade students toward the two kinds of feedback (content-related and surface-related) were assessed using a between-subjects design. For examination of students' affective response, each student's gender and writing ability were taken into account. Specifically, I studied students' academic response to the two kinds of feedback by examining students' revisions (time spent revising, type of revisions, and improvement between drafts). I assessed students' affective response by examining their attitudes toward the feedback, revising, and writing.

Results suggest that students are starved for feedback that is useful for improving their texts; less important is whether that feedback relates to the surface features of their texts or the content. However, some positive effects of the provision of content feedback did emerge.

First, students receiving content feedback spent more time revising than did students receiving surface feedback. Second, content feedback recipients used the feedback to make more content-related revisions to their texts than did surface feedback recipients, but this effect of feedback does not carryover to when students are revising on their own. The condition effect for changes made in response to feedback is almost eliminated when changes made independently by students are added to the changes made in response to feedback. Only an effect for microstructure changes remains. Third, content feedback recipients may have a more positive attitude toward revising, especially

the females. Finally, it may be most important to provide content-related feedback to low skill female writers. This group had the most positive attitude toward content feedback, and their second drafts showed the most improvement over their first drafts compared to the other gender/skill groups.

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Introduction

Teachers' practice of offering written feedback on students' written work is a stalwart habit that is not likely to go away. There seems to be, in anyone given the job of "reviewer," an irresistible need to scribble reactions, corrections, and friendly advice in the margins of another's paper, perhaps echoing the tenor and style of critiques historically addressed to the reviewer. The purpose of the present study was to evaluate the recommendation by writing instruction experts that teachers should focus on the substance or content of students' texts, rather than the surface features, when giving feedback. This recommendation is made in response to much research showing that, in fact, teachers continue to focus their comments on the surface features of students' texts. The experts contend, with no reference to data, that a focus on surface features is relatively useless to students, and can be harmful to the psyche of budding writers who want a reaction to their message rather than to their delivery.

The goal of this study was to examine students' affective and academic responses to surface-related and content-related feedback. An additional goal was to conduct this study in a naturalistic manner. This secondary goal was important to enhance the generalizability of findings, and to ensure that feedback was studied as a small part of a larger, ongoing classroom dynamic. To this end, the researcher who provided the feedback became a regular member of the classroom community. This naturalistic approach also allowed the researcher to collect the qualitative data which surrounds, and provides a context for, the interpretation of quantitative results.

Literature Review

Despite researchers' recommendations that teachers use alternative modes of response to students' writing (see, e.g., Freedman, 1987), "written feedback is [still] the most common form of writing instruction" (Zellermayer, 1989, p. 146). (See also Searle & Dillon, 1980). Thus, as Zellermayer (1989) points out, "theorists are still searching for a way to describe the parameters of constructive response to student writing" (p. 146).

There have been numerous studies of written teacher feedback, but much of this work is inadequate. First, most researchers have examined written feedback in isolation, rather than as a small part of a larger, ongoing classroom dynamic (Sperling, 1996; Knoblauch & Brannon, 1981). Second, many of the earlier studies failed to examine the effect of feedback given during the writing process (Olson & Raffeld, 1987; Ziv, 1984): in many early studies feedback comprised written responses on a final draft (see, e.g., Stiff, 1967; Taylor & Hoedt, 1966). Third, previous studies have failed to adequately examine and relate the two most important ways in which teacher feedback affects students. That is, students are apt to have both an academic (involving revision) and affective response to teacher feedback given during the writing process, and the two have yet to be fully studied. The present study attempts to rectify these shortcomings found in much previous research.

In many of the recent studies of teacher feedback to student writers, researchers have examined teachers' natural responses to student writing (Anson, 1989; DeGroff, 1992; Dohrer, 1991; Wall & Hull, 1989). (Earlier studies, discussed below, involved feedback manipulated by the experimenter.) These natural responses have largely concerned the surface features of students' texts, rather than the content. Unfortunately, these studies do not report the number of surface and content errors contained in students' texts, which may determine the kind of comments teachers offer.

Dohrer (1991) found that 72% of college writing instructors' comments dealt with the surface features of students' first drafts. Dohrer observed that students "seemed to take exception" to the few teacher comments that suggested meaning-related, more global revisions (p. 51). Similarly, Anson (1989) found that 12 of 16 college writing

teachers responded "almost entirely" to surface features of basic writers' texts: "[o]n the whole, the student[s'] intentions or meaning were ignored" (pp. 343-44). Drawing on Perry's (1970) theory of intellectual development, Anson notes that "relativistic" students tend to be angered by content comments because these students believe that all statements are opinions (there are no right or wrong statements), and therefore the statements in a text should not be open to evaluation.

Finally, Wall and Hull (1989) asked 54 teachers (some from each of elementary, secondary, and college levels) to choose the most serious errors in a student text. Punctuation/grammar errors were referred to 53% of the time as "most serious," while errors in logic/clarity were considered "most serious" 26% of the time (p. 277). (Logic/clarity errors were defined as those which made the reader unable "to accept the sense of the text" as written, "either because it is confusing or because the words...do not fit the overall meaning that the reader is constructing" (p. 267).)

On the other hand, DeGross (1992) found that the comments of thirteen fourth grade teachers, trained in the process writing approach, most often concerned the content of students' papers (44%) and the students' writing processes (23%). Only 13% of these teachers' comments concerned the mechanics of students' writing.

The findings of DeGross (1992) and Wall and Hull (1989) suggest that the nature of teachers' comments may depend upon level of teaching and teacher background. Wall and Hull (1989) found differences between teachers' responses depending upon level of teaching. Elementary school teachers were most concerned with grammar/punctuation; secondary school teachers with style/structure (e.g., diction and sentence structure), and college teachers with logic/clarity. This is contrary to DeGross (1992), Dohrer (1991), and Anson (1989), who suggest an opposite trend: concern for content by elementary teachers, and concern for surface features by college teachers. These opposing findings suggest that level of teaching and teacher background both matter. DeGross's elementary teachers, trained in the process writing approach to teaching writing, may differ from teachers without such training (unfortunately, Wall and Hull do not state whether the elementary teachers they studied had training in the process approach). Similarly, Wall

and Hull's content area college teachers likely differ in their focus from the college writing teachers studied by Dohrer (1991) and Anson (1989). Indeed, Beason (1993) found that content area teachers directed nearly 33% of comments toward “development and support” issues, about 28% toward “the clarity or stylistic suitability of words and syntax,” and only about 6% toward “mechanics.”

This recent research concerning teacher feedback to student writers suggests three important points relevant to my study. First, three out of four of these recent studies, and numerous older studies (see, e.g., Searle & Dillon, 1980; Sommers, 1982), suggest that writing teachers' comments are predominantly concerned with the surface features of students' texts. Second, note that teachers tend to comment on predominantly surface errors, or less often, predominantly content errors, but providing an equal mix of surface and content comments is not common practice. Third, two studies suggest that students' affective response differs depending upon whether comments concern surface or content features (see Anson, 1989; Dohrer, 1991).

Older studies of written teacher feedback involved the manipulation of type of feedback: researchers compared the effects of positive and negative teacher comments (Taylor & Hoedt, 1966), marginal and terminal teacher comments (Stiff, 1967), directive and clarifying responses (Kelley, 1973), extended and brief comments (Hillocks, 1982), and one researcher compared corrections, explicit statements of error, and implicit statements of error (Ziv, 1984). The results of these studies were useful for designing the feedback given in the present study (see “Nature of Feedback Given” below). To my knowledge only one published study has compared the effects of surface and content comments (Olson & Raffeld, 1987).

Olson and Raffeld (1987) compared the effect on students of surface feedback with the effect on students of content feedback. They found that students in the content feedback condition produced better final drafts than students in the surface feedback condition, and that content condition students learned more of the course content than did surface condition students.

Unfortunately, there was a serious problem with how Olson and Raffeld (1987) operationalized the difference between surface feedback and content feedback. First, the content feedback had the tone of a friendly reader, while the surface feedback consisted of single, didactic words and phrases. Second, many of the examples of surface feedback given by Olson and Raffeld seem not to reflect the authors' purported goal of "focus[ing] on problems such as word choice, spelling, punctuation, and/or language usage" (p. 273). It is difficult to understand how the authors can claim that the following examples of feedback refer to surface level problems: "unclear," "what reasons?," "be specific," or "reread your notes" (p. 282). Thus, the attempt by Olson and Raffeld to study the difference between surface and content feedback is marred by the presence of a confound in the tone and style of the feedback, and by the poor distinction drawn between surface and content feedback.

Student response to teacher feedback has been studied in numerous ways. Students' academic response has been studied by examining the length and quality of subsequent first drafts (Gee, 1972), by analyzing additions, substitutions, and deletions in revised texts (Dohrer, 1991; Sommers, 1980), and by using think-aloud protocols during revision (Dohrer, 1991; Onore, 1989). A relevant and consistent finding of these studies is that, when revising, students make surface changes almost exclusively (Dohrer, 1991; Onore, 1989; Sommers, 1980).¹ A second relevant finding is that despite students' attention to and revision of only surface features, their second drafts are judged as better than their first drafts (Onore, 1989).

In her review of the literature on revising, Fitzgerald (1987) concludes that "[g]enerally, for high school age and older or more skilled writers, revisions appear to improve the quality of compositions" (p. 493). (See also Bridwell, 1980.) However, some researchers suggest that for inexperienced college writers, revision often diminishes text quality (see Faigley and Witte, 1981; Perl, 1978).

¹ However, as Dohrer points out, it is unclear "whether the students' view that revising is a polishing and editing exercise emanated from teachers' emphasis on superficial matters, or whether students had previously and independently developed this view" (p. 51).

I did not find any study which measured time spent revising, but given that students make mostly surface changes, it may be safe to assume for purposes of my hypotheses that students spend relatively little time revising their writing.

Students' affective response to teacher feedback has been studied using questionnaires (Gee, 1972; Lynch & Klemans, 1978; Taylor & Hoedt, 1966), interviews (Covill, 1991; Dohrer, 1991; Onore, 1989), and think-alouds (Sommers, 1980; Ziv, 1984). A relevant and consistent finding of these studies is that content comments can anger students (Anson, 1989; Covill, 1991; Dohrer, 1991), and may be viewed by students as "least useful" (Lynch & Klemans, 1978). A second relevant finding is that, despite these negative reactions, students believe the teacher is the authority, and that teachers' suggestions should be followed without question (Dohrer, 1991; Onore, 1989; Sperling & Freedman, 1987).

Further study of content versus surface feedback is necessary because it is unclear which type of feedback is most useful to students. Researchers have found that teachers persist in providing surface feedback (Anson, 1989; Dohrer, 1991; Wall & Hull, 1989). At the same time, writing instructors and experts insist that the provision of such surface-related feedback is often bad practice, recommending that teachers focus on content (Gilbert, 1990; Robertson, 1986; Sommers, 1982). However, Anson (1989) and Dohrer (1991) found that students were angered by teacher comments that suggested meaning-related, more global revisions. At best, students have been found to view content feedback as "least useful" (Lynch & Klemans, 1978). Students' negative attitude toward content-related comments may contribute to what Dohrer (1991) has termed their "unwillingness" to make substantive, meaning-related changes to their compositions (p. 52). Also contributing to students' revision habits may be teachers' focus on surface features when responding, and students' belief that the teacher is the authority (teachers' suggestions should be followed without question) (Dohrer, 1991; Onore, 1989; Sperling & Freedman, 1987).

It should be noted that many researchers believe the distinction between surface and content errors is not always clear. For example, Harris (1977) noted that when, for

the purposes of her study, she attempted to degrade only the mechanics of student texts that originally had strong content and strong mechanics, content quality also declined significantly. Harris concluded that "form is so integral a part of content that in some ethereal way form is content and content is form" (p. 181).

Similarly, Raforth and Rubin (1984) found that, when rating student compositions, college composition teachers "may not be very discerning in distinguishing between content and mechanics" (p. 456). They conclude that their results "call into question the very integrity of the content and mechanics dimension, at least with regard to" evaluation of compositions (p. 456)

Finally, in attempting to classify errors into categories such as punctuation/spelling, logic/clarity, or style/structure, Wall and Hull (1989) admitted that categories were "at best, crude," and "often the categories 'leaked'" (p. 267). They cite the use of "preformed" instead of "performed" in, "At my lesson I preformed my version of Heart and Soul," as an example of an apparent spelling error that could have also been viewed as an error in logic/clarity.

The important point here is that any claimed distinction between surface and content errors (or comments) is tricky (see Olson & Raffeld, 1987), and must therefore be carefully operationalized. The difference between surface and content errors forms a continuum. In the middle of that continuum might be, for example, comments suggesting the reordering of sentences or paragraphs. Such changes may or may not be judged to effect the meaning of a text: they may merely improve the flow of a text, or, conversely, they may effect the whole argument or story (the meaning). In this study I tried to avoid making comments that might fall in this "gray area" that forms the middle of the surface-content continuum. My goal was to provide feedback on each paper that, when taken as a whole, would reliably impress a reader as either surface-related or content-related. In a future study a standard text with existing errors and comments might be used so that reliability could be established before data collection, but this was not done here because this approach would go against an attempt to be naturalistic, and it would have made an exploration of students' affective responses to feedback impossible:

students' would not have an affective response to feedback that is not directed at their own writing.

In my study, content-related comments were designed to encourage students to reconsider the meaning they had conveyed, or were attempting to convey. (Of course, compared to negative content comments, praising content comments were less likely to engender much reconsideration of meaning.) Surface comments in my study were not designed to encourage students to struggle with the meaning of their text in any significant way, but rather were meant to encourage students to reflect on general rules of standard written English. Specifically, surface comments addressed matters of spelling, punctuation and capitalization, sentence structure, grammar, and paragraphing (when such reference had no discernible impact on meaning).

My review of the research literature suggests that any current study of students' affective response to feedback should include as factors students' writing ability and gender. I found only one researcher who looked for an interaction between student response to type of feedback and student ability, but "ability" was defined as IQ (high, medium, and low) (Gee, 1972). Writing ability was not considered. However, a pilot study I conducted suggested that writing ability may relate to students' attitudes toward feedback, revision, and writing (Covill, 1991). My pilot study suggested that high ability writers may be angered and insulted by surface feedback. In addition, at least one researcher suggests that certain college age, low ability ("basic") writers can be angered if the content of their texts are criticized, because such criticism represents mere opinion (Anson, 1989).

Another argument for inclusion of a writing ability factor is based on studies suggesting that teachers' responses to student writing differ depending upon a student's writing ability. Sperling's (1994) study of one teacher revealed that high skill writers got more positive feedback than low skill writers, and that low skill writers were expected to make more changes than high skill writers. Others have found that low ability writers receive more surface-related comments or instruction than high ability writers (Applebee, Langer, Jenkins, Mullis, & Foertsch, 1990; DeGroff, 1992). (All of these findings are

presumably a function of text quality.) Assuming students' past experiences with teacher feedback shape their attitudes toward feedback and revision, teachers' differential treatment of high and low writing ability students should translate into different affective responses by these students to the two types of feedback I plan to study.

The inclusion of a gender factor in a study of students' affective response to feedback is warranted by numerous studies showing gender differences in how subjects respond to feedback (Licht, Stader, & Swenson, 1989; Nicholls, 1975; Roberts & Nolen-Hoeksema, 1989; Wisniewski & Gaier, 1990). In general, females tend to believe that negative feedback reflects their abilities, whereas males discount negative feedback.

Nicholls (1975) found that on a "practice" task (given before a "test" task) only fourth grade girls "attributed failure to poor ability more than success to good ability" (p. 383). Boys were more apt to attribute failure to bad luck. Similarly, Wisniewski and Gaier (1990) found that seventh grade girls made more internal attributions (attributions to ability or effort) for failure than did boys. Wisniewski and Gaier noted that this effect was absent at the twelfth grade. However, Roberts and Nolen-Hoeksema (1989) found that college women, but not the men, believed that feedback, especially negative feedback, related to their abilities.

Licht et al. (1989) found that relatively infrequent and ambiguous feedback given to fifth graders led the girls to rate "themselves as significantly less smart than" boys as reflected by a comparison of girls' and boys' self-ratings (p. 258).

Lastly, at least one study suggests that teachers' responses to students differ depending upon a student's gender, with girls being more apt than boys to be praised for "intellectually irrelevant aspects" of their work, "such as neatness" (p. 272) (Dweck, Davidson, Nelson, & Enna, 1978). Again, assuming students' past experiences with teacher feedback shape their attitudes toward feedback and revision, teachers' differential treatment of girls and boys should translate into different responses by these students to the two types of feedback in my study.

There is considerably less research suggesting that students' academic response to feedback is likely to interact with their writing ability and gender. Beach (1979) found

that revision practices are different for females and males (females revise more). Also, Faigley and Witte (1981) found that, as compared to high skill writers, low skill writers make many more surface changes than they do meaning changes. Butterfield, Hacker, and Plumb (1994) found a positive correlation between writing quality and number of surface changes.

Because there is very little research suggesting an interaction between revision behavior and gender, I do not include gender as a factor when examining students' academic response to feedback. Likewise, writing ability was excluded from my central research hypothesis concerning students' academic response to feedback. The latter exclusion is consistent with Butterfield et al.'s (1994) observation of a confounding relationship between quality of first drafts and amount of revision.

In summary, my study was designed to improve upon previous research in at least three ways. First, this study involved a comparison between student response to surface feedback, and student response to content feedback, wherein the distinction between the two kinds of feedback was carefully operationalized. Second, in this study I examined both the academic and affective responses of students to feedback given during the writing process. Third, this study is the first of its kind in which the written feedback and responses are studied as part of the larger classroom context. I was present in participating classrooms three days a week during four months of this study in order to become part of the classroom community, to inform my construction of feedback, and to record my observations of the larger writing instruction context—observations I use to discuss my findings in this study.

This study also addresses the basic question as to whether students even bother to use teacher feedback. There is literature suggesting that the nature of feedback does not matter because students often do not understand or use teacher comments in subsequent revisions or writing (Sperling & Freedman, 1987). (But see Beach (1979) who found that students given teacher feedback revised more than students given no feedback.) If students do, in fact, understand and use teacher feedback, this would be evidenced by an effect of feedback condition on type of revisions made by students.

Hypotheses

1. Students who receive predominantly content-related feedback on their writing will spend more time revising, will make more content-related changes, will make fewer surface-related changes, and will show more improvement between first and second drafts as compared to students who receive predominantly surface-related feedback.

2. There will be a feedback by gender by writing ability interaction because

a.) females and low ability writers will have a more positive attitude toward surface feedback as compared to content feedback; females and low ability writers receiving surface feedback will have a more positive attitude toward subsequent revising and writing than will females and low ability writers receiving content feedback;

b.) males and high ability writers will have a more positive attitude toward content feedback as compared to surface feedback; males and high ability writers receiving content feedback will have a more positive attitude toward subsequent revising and writing than will males and high ability writers receiving surface feedback.

3. Students' attitudes toward the feedback will have some relationship to students' revision practices.

Methods

This is a naturalistic study, conducted in two sophomore and two junior English classes at a suburban high school. (All four classes were taught by the same teacher.) The four writing tasks used in the study were developed and assigned by the cooperating teacher: they would have been assigned had I not been present. Also, this teacher normally expects students to revise formal writing assignments, so my study did not impose a revision requirement in a classroom where one did not already exist. Peer review was used for some of the assignments, in addition to my feedback, because this is what the teacher would normally require.

The four assignments used in this study were given over the course of nine months for sophomores, and over five months for juniors. Assignments given to sophomores were different from the assignments given to juniors because the two groups had different curricula.

I attended all four of the involved English classes, three days each week, for over four months. In this way I was able to observe the teacher's attitudes toward writing and revising, and I earned status among students as a legitimate reviewer of their written work. In fact, at times I felt as though I had gained status as "teacher's assistant:" I helped the teacher guide students in developing their thesis statements for some of the assignments, and students occasionally asked for my opinion of their in-class work. (Students even mistakenly brought me official notes and permissions to sign.) Lastly, by attending classes regularly, I was able to gain information about the teacher's expectations regarding most of the assignments, which enabled me to make more informed written comments on students' papers. In my comments, I tried to reinforce what the teacher was emphasizing in class.

The teacher returned papers with my feedback to students. The first time the feedback was given, the teacher asked me to briefly explain my study. I told students that I was conducting a study in which I would give feedback and see how they felt about it. Unexpected by me, the teacher then advised students that the feedback I gave was "really good," that they "should really appreciate the detail of the feedback," and that my

feedback is the “best” or “most intense” feedback they will get on their writing while in public schools.

Subject Selection

Although there were 112 students in the four classes involved in this study, data for 68 students (33 sophomores and 35 juniors) were included in the analysis. Excluded were 26 students who did not hand-in a first draft of the first assignment; of the remaining 86 students, 18 were excluded because they were judged to be of average writing ability (see below). The 26 students who did not complete the first draft of the first writing assignment had to be excluded because this draft was used to determine writing skill classifications and, subsequently, feedback condition. Students who missed this sorting process could not be brought in later.

To determine students’ writing ability, I rated all 86 first drafts of the first assignment that were received. A composition teacher also rated 75 of these drafts. Because sophomores wrote on a different topic than did juniors, drafts were rated separately by topic. We gave the drafts a holistic quality rating. We used a 4-point scale, with 4 being the highest rating and 1 being the lowest. For each topic, we attempted to distribute the ratings evenly. In other words, we tried to make the number of drafts receiving a “1” equal to the number receiving a “2,” and so on.

Interrater reliability was .54 using gamma. The other reader and I discussed our ratings for the 12 drafts on which we were 2 (10 drafts) or 3 (2 drafts) points apart. After agreeing on some adjusted ratings, gamma increased to .82. (Reliability for only those papers by students who were ultimately used in the study (students judged to be of either high or low writing ability) was .70 before conferring and .81 after conferring, using gamma.) Ratings were then averaged across the two readers to give each subject a writing skill score. The eleven drafts that were rated only by me received my rating rather than an average. Nine of these eleven drafts were judged by me as reflecting either high or low writing skill, and thus data from these nine student authors were included in my analysis.

Assignment to Condition

The 14 highest rated male writers (at least two from each of the four classrooms) were randomly assigned to either the surface or content feedback condition. All 14 had been rated by both readers. Two high skill male writers rated only by me were then assigned to one of the two conditions. The 16 male writers deemed lowest in skill by both readers were assigned to the two conditions. Finally, 2 low skill male writers rated only by me were assigned. The same general process was followed for assignment of female writers to the two conditions.

I inadvertently failed to assign any high skill males from the first period sophomore class to the content condition. (However, there were three third period sophomores in this cell.) All other cells had at least one student from each of the four classes involved in this study.

Over the course of this study, all students, including those rated "average" in writing ability and those who failed to complete the first assignment, received feedback from me. Also, all students who returned appropriate permissions were invited to complete the surveys. I felt that it was only fair for all students to get what they might perceive as "special" treatment.

Design

Independent variables are gender, writing ability, and feedback condition. The between-subjects design is summarized by Table I below.

Table I: Number of Subjects in Each Cell (Mean Writing Skill Rating, and the Range)

	<u>Predominantly Surface Feedback</u>	<u>Predominantly Content Feedback</u>
<u>Males</u>		
<u>High Writing Ability</u>	n=9 (m=3.3, r=1.5)	n=7 (m=3.4, r=1.5)
<u>Low Writing Ability</u>	n=8 (m=1.4, r=1)	n=10 (m=1.3, r=1)

Table I (continued)

	<u>Predominantly Surface Feedback</u>	<u>Predominantly Content Feedback</u>
<u>Females</u>		
<u>High Writing Ability</u>	n=10 (m=3.5, r=1)	n=8 (m=3.6, r=1)
<u>Low Writing Ability</u>	n=8 (m=1.4, r=1)	n=8 (m=1.4, r=1)

Dependent measures relevant to students' academic response to the feedback were averaged over the first four tasks. They are: time spent revising, number of Formal changes, number of Meaning Preserving changes, number of Microstructure changes, number of Macrostructure changes, and improvement between first and second drafts. Formal and Meaning-Preserving changes are surface-related changes: they do not change the meaning of a text. Formal changes include changes in punctuation, spelling, and capitalization. Meaning-Preserving changes involve paraphrasing. Microstructure and Macrostructure changes are content-related changes: they change the meaning of a text. Microstructure changes affect meaning at a local level, whereas Macrostructure changes affect the overall summary of the text. (See Faigley and Witte, 1981.)

A survey administered to students after completion of the second and fourth writing tasks was used to collect data concerning students' affective response to the feedback. (See Appendix 1 for a sample survey.) Survey questions were developed based on the design and findings of previous studies (Gee, 1972; Lynch & Klemans, 1978; Taylor & Hoedt, 1966), including my pilot study (Covill, 1991). The question on the survey concerning whether students perform revisions on a word processor, typewriter, or with pen/pencil and paper was included to determine whether mode of revision relates to students' academic and affective responses (see Bangert-Drowns, 1993 for a meta-analysis of the effect of using a word processor in writing instruction). Because 90% of survey respondents reported using a computer for first and second drafts,

mode of revision could not have been a factor effecting the number or type of revisions made in this study.

Dependent measures from the survey are: attitude toward the feedback, attitude toward revising (prompted by the feedback), attitude toward writing (prompted by the feedback).

To keep the survey brief, a "Why?" prompt was added to only three of the nine survey questions. I chose to append this prompt to the three questions that measure attitude toward feedback because this (or a measure akin to it) is the most frequently studied of my three attitude measures, and it may be a more reliable measure than the other two.

Procedure

The four texts used in this study were revised after students reviewed feedback that was either predominantly surface- or content-related. I used predominance as the criterion to avoid making the experimental feedback seem too contrived: research indicates that teachers naturally provide predominantly surface feedback (Anson, 1989; Dohrer, 1991; Searle & Dillon, 1980; Sommers, 1982; Wall & Hull, 1989), or, rarely, predominantly content feedback (DeGroff, 1992; Freedman, 1982).

For each of the four assignments, I made a copy of each student's first draft. (The copies were left clean and used to compare with each student's revised draft.) I then placed either predominantly surface or predominantly content comments on the original first draft to be returned to students. Before the comments were returned, I copied the drafts with the comments.

When feedback was returned to students on the first assignment, students were told to consider the feedback, but to also make whatever changes they deemed necessary. Students revised their papers outside of class. Sophomores had an average of 2.2 days to revise, while juniors had an average of 8.2² days to revise. The difference between sophomores and juniors regarding days for revision seemed to be happenstance rather

² The average for the first three tasks is 4.7. The average of 8.2 is inflated because of the extended period juniors had to revise text 4: 19 days (the entire winter break).

than by teacher design. (Juniors seemed to be more skilled at negotiating with the teacher for deadline extensions.)

All but two of the eight writing tasks (four each for sophomores and juniors) required literary analysis, but genre could vary somewhat within task depending upon which prompt students chose from among those provided by the teacher. Appendix 2 provides an example of how a literary analysis assignment could take the shape of a description, a compare/contrast task, etc., depending upon the prompt chosen. The two assignments that did not involve literary analysis were juniors' text 1 and sophomores' text 4 (both expository).

Faigley and Witte (1981) warn that genre is likely to effect the number and type of revisions made by writers (see also Butler-Nalin, 1984). However, Yagelski (1985) found that genre had no significant effect on the frequency and type of revisions made by students in his study. Similarly, I compared revisions made by sophomores on an expository text (text 4), with revisions made by juniors on a literary analysis paper (text 4). There were no significant differences between these two groups regarding number of Meaning Preserving changes, number of Microstructure changes, or number of Macrostructure changes. Sophomores made significantly more Formal changes than juniors (an average of 16 versus 6), but this likely reflects sophomores' revisions to newly-learned form for citations and reference pages. For example, one surface comment correcting citation form often resulted in several Formal changes in a paper because the student would correct all citations according to the suggestion in the single comment.

To ensure that the difference in number of Formal changes was unrelated to age, I compared revisions by sophomores to those by juniors when both groups were writing literary analysis papers (text 2). No significant differences were found between the two groups for any revision type.

Recall that one of my dependent measures was reported time spent revising. This data was collected using a form I developed, attached as Appendix 3. Students used the form while revising and returned the completed form with their final draft.

As an attempt to gauge the reliability of this self-report measure, I included a question on each form regarding how certain the respondent was of the reported time spent. Students were asked to circle a “1” if they were “very unsure” of their response to the question regarding time spent. Circling a “2” meant they were “fairly sure,” and a “3” indicated they were “very sure.” For the first assignment, students reported an average certainty of 2.22 (SD=.46). For the next three assignments the average certainty was very consistent: 2.43 (SD=.54), 2.43 (SD=.57), and 2.45 (SD=.50), respectively.

The survey in Appendix 1 was given to students on the day that they handed-in the final draft of their second and fourth assignments. Students were asked to be honest in completing the survey, and they were told that any negative responses would not “hurt my feelings.” They were also told that their responses would only be seen by me, would not affect their grades in any way, and that any report of this information would only refer to students as a group, i.e., “80% of students did not like”

The rate of participation in survey completion was disappointing. Of the 68 students in the study, only 48 returned the parent and student permissions needed to allow them to complete the survey. (See Appendix 4 for sample permission letters.) In addition, despite my request to allow the sophomores to give their undivided attention to completion of the survey, the teacher turned on a movie at the time the first survey was distributed.

When the second survey was given, I told students that although they were receiving the same set of questions they answered previously, they did not need to give the same answers. Students were asked to answer the second survey according to how they were feeling at that time regardless of whether that was consistent with how they had felt previously.

I also interviewed seven students to gain more information about why some students responded to the survey as they did (i.e., why they agreed or disagreed with a particular statement). Interviewees were randomly selected from within each cell, and from among those who returned parent and student permissions. (See Appendix 5 for sample permission letters.) I was unable to interview a student from the cell entitled

Female/Low Writing Ability/Predominantly Surface Feedback despite repeated attempts to gain such an interview.

Interviews were conducted during the school day at a time that was convenient for the student. Interviews concerned the first survey, and lasted for ten to fifteen minutes. Interviews were tape recorded and transcribed.

Nature of Feedback Given

The main goal of this study was to manipulate one aspect of feedback type and assess the effect of this manipulation on selected student revision practices and attitudes. The fact that I wanted to manipulate one aspect of teacher feedback did not mean that I could ignore other aspects of feedback that have been studied. Feedback given to students in this study was consistent with recommendations arising from previous studies as to what is effective.

In general, previous research suggests that teachers' written comments on students' papers should be explicit (Ziv, 1984), detailed (Lynch & Klemans, 1978), and not "a series of vague directives" that could be "rubber stamped" from paper to paper (Sommers, 1982, p. 152). Response should be positive (not sarcastic) (Freedman, 1987; Lynch & Klemans, 1978), and selective: not every error should be marked (Freedman, 1987). Teacher feedback should be designed to help students revise, and not merely to justify a grade (Freedman, 1987).

Further, Brannon and Knoblauch (1982) argue that effective feedback should help a student see whether what the student intended to say is what exists in the text. Thus, teachers should not dictate changes, or appropriate a student's text (Brannon & Knoblauch, 1982). Lynch and Klemans (1978) add that effective teacher comments are clearly written, and factual rather than simply teacher opinion. Finally, comments should include praise along with criticism (Gee, 1972).

When giving feedback to students in my study, in addition to creating the surface and content manipulation, I heeded previous research by trying to make the comments explicit, detailed, positive, selective, revision-oriented, suggestive rather than dictatorial (although this was sometimes difficult with surface-related feedback), clear, factual, and

some comments were praising. A review of responses to the “why” prompts on the surveys suggests that I was successful in accomplishing at least some of these goals with the feedback (see Appendix 6 for a summary of these comments). I used a 2:1 (negative:praising) ratio for the comments, and the number of comments were equal across all papers in both conditions.

Because the texts used in my study were the only formal writing assignments these students did during the school year, I was unable to obtain a baseline measure of the kind of feedback the students were used to getting. Therefore, I could not assess what new factors, if any, were introduced by the experimental feedback, other than the surface/content manipulation. I did ask the seven interviewees about previous experience with teacher feedback and their responses are included as “Results” below.

Students in the surface-related condition received five surface-related comments that suggested a change, three surface-related comments that were praising, and one content-related comment that suggested a change. The surface comments concerned only mechanics and, specifically, spelling, punctuation and capitalization, paragraphing, sentence structure, and grammar.

Students in the content condition received five content-related comments that suggested a change, three content-related comments that were praising, and one surface comment that suggested a change. The content comments concerned the ideas conveyed in the text. These comments were designed to help students reflect on what they had said or wanted to say in their papers. Because, in general, comments regarding the content of a text could be more global than surface comments, I attempted to limit any potential confound of local versus global feedback. This was done by ensuring that some content-related comments were at the word, phrase, or sentence level.

Despite the controlled nature of the feedback, comments seemed natural for texts in both conditions. (See Appendix 7 for an example of feedback given in each condition.)

To ensure that the surface versus content feedback distinction was reliable, an independent reader sorted twenty percent of the papers with feedback according to whether she perceived the comments as predominantly surface or content-related.

Reliability of the surface/content distinction was high. There was disagreement on only 1 of 54 papers reviewed. The correlation between the independent reader's sorting and the original, intended distinction was 1.0 using gamma.

Analysis

Analysis of revisions involved examination of each subject's first and second draft for each of the four assignments used in this study. For every pair of drafts, I located every revision that had been made, including changes made independently (not in response to feedback). I then determined whether each revision was a surface change (one that does "not bring new information to a text or remove old information" (Faigley & Witte, 1981, p. 402)), or a content (meaning) change (one that reflects additions or deletions of information made in a way that such information "cannot be recovered through drawing inferences" (Faigley & Witte, 1981, p. 402)). For every revision that was judged to be surface-related, I then made a finer distinction as to whether it was a Formal Change (a typical proofreading change, such as changing spelling or punctuation) or a Meaning-Preserving Change (a change that involves paraphrasing). For meaning-related revisions, the finer distinction was whether it was a Microstructure Change (one that does not affect the summary of the text) or a Macrostructure Change (a change that does affect the summary of the text).

My judgment regarding type of revision was checked against a second reader's judgment for about twenty percent of the draft pairs. Interrater reliability using gamma was .92 for Formal Changes, .83 for Meaning Preserving Changes, .73 for Microstructure Changes, and .91 for Macrostructure Changes.

I performed an additional analysis that was not part of my proposal for this study. I noted whether or not each revision was in direct response to my feedback.

Improvement between drafts by each student was determined by a reader who was unaware of the purpose of the study, and unaware of which draft in each pair was the first and which was the second. This reader selected a "preferred" draft in each pair, based on his holistic judgment of quality. The reader then determined "how much better" the preferred draft was, when compared to the non-preferred draft, using a 3-point scale. A rating of "1" indicated that the preferred draft was "slightly better" than the other, a rating of 2 indicated that the preferred draft was "better," and a rating of 3 indicated that the preferred draft was "much better." If the reader perceived no

difference in quality between any two drafts in a pair, degree of improvement was recorded as 0. Later, I changed the reader's ratings to a negative number (a 1 was changed to a -1, a 2 to a -2, etc.) if I determined that the reader had chosen a first draft as better than a final draft, i.e., if a student's revisions had lowered the quality of their paper.

This reader perceived no difference in quality between the two drafts in 60% of the pairs. For 22% of the pairs, he chose the second draft as preferred. The average degree of improvement for these was 1.6. For the remaining 18% of the pairs, the reader chose first drafts as better than second drafts, with an average decline in quality of 1.2.

To gain a measure of interrater reliability, a second reader followed the same rating procedure for about twenty percent of the draft pairs. The correlation between the first reader's choice of preferred draft and the second reader's choice of preferred draft was .51 using gamma. The two readers judged both drafts in a pair as equivalent (no preference), or chose the same draft as "preferred," in 54% of the draft pairs (27 of 50 draft pairs). For these 27 pairs, the degree of improvement rating given by the two readers correlated .92 using gamma.

A third reader was enlisted to see if low interrater reliability would recur. The correlation between the third reader's choice of preferred draft and the original reader's choice (for the 50 pairs drawn as a subsample) was .58 using gamma. The first and third reader achieved perfect agreement on 30 of the 50 pairs of drafts, and the correlation between their degree of improvement ratings for these 30 pairs was 1.0 (gamma). The consistently low reliability of judgments regarding improvement between drafts underscores the fact that improvement from first drafts to second drafts was negligible.

Survey responses were coded as follows. For survey items that were phrased in a positive way (items 1-3, 6, 8, and 9), students were given a "1" for every "Strongly Disagree" response, a "2" for every "Disagree" response, a "3" for every "Agree" response, and a "4" for every "Strongly Agree" response. "Don't Know" responses were coded as missing data. For survey items that were phrased in a negative way (items 4, 5,

and 7), scoring was the opposite, with "Strongly Disagree" being scored as a "4," "Disagree" as a "3," etc.

Three dependent measures emerged from survey responses. One, attitude toward feedback, reflected each subject's average score for items 1, 4, and 9. The second dependent measure, effect of feedback on attitude toward writing, reflected each subject's average score for items 2, 3, and 7. The third dependent measure, effect of feedback on attitude toward revising, reflected each subject's average score on items 5, 6, and 8.

Responses to the "Why?" prompts on the survey were collated by item, coded, and summarized in tabular form. Interview transcripts were coded and analyzed qualitatively.

Results and Discussion

Hypothesis 1

My first hypothesis was that students who received predominantly content-related feedback on their writing would spend more time revising, would make more content-related changes, would make fewer surface-related changes, and would show more improvement between first and second drafts as compared to students who received predominantly surface-related feedback. Dependent measures used to test the first hypothesis were averaged over the first four writing assignments. I then conducted a MANOVA with Feedback Condition (Surface or Content) as the independent variable. Dependent variables were those listed in Table II. The omnibus MANOVA was significant ($p < .001$). The MANOVA was followed by univariate analyses.

Table II: Means and Standard Deviations Relevant to Hypothesis 1

Dependent Measure	Surface Feedback Condition	Content Feedback Condition
Reported Time Spent Revising	49 minutes (SD=27.77)	82 minutes (SD=82.87)
Formal Changes in Response to Feedback	4.85 (SD=1.71)	1.95 (SD=1.89)
Meaning Preserving Changes in Response to Feedback	0.97 (SD=0.64)	0.60 (SD=0.49)
Microstructure Changes in Response to Feedback	0.53 (SD=0.50)	1.63 (SD=0.85)
Macrostructure Changes in Response to Feedback	1.07 (SD=1.12)	2.48 (SD=1.75)
Formal Changes Made Independently	6.41 (SD=5.32)	8.78 (SD=8.13)
Meaning Preserving Changes Made Independently	3.02 (SD=3.41)	4.54 (SD=4.20)
Microstructure Changes Made Independently	1.60 (SD=1.89)	1.62 (SD=1.36)
Macrostructure Changes Made Independently	2.22 (SD=3.41)	1.91 (SD=2.08)
Improvement Between Drafts	.20 (SD=.45)	.08 (SD=.52)

As predicted, students receiving predominantly content-related feedback spent significantly more time revising than students receiving predominantly surface-related feedback ($F(1, 65)=3.99$, $MS_e=3483.24$, $p=.050$).³

Also, there was a significant effect of condition for each type of change made in response to the feedback. Students in the surface feedback condition made more Formal ($F(1, 65)=64.83$, $MS_e=2.50$, $p<.001$) and Meaning Preserving ($F(1, 65)=6.57$, $MS_e=.33$, $p=.013$) changes suggested by feedback than did students in the content condition. Students in the content condition made more suggested Microstructure ($F(1, 65)=41.84$, $MS_e=.45$, $p<.001$) and Macrostructure ($F(1, 65)=17.92$, $MS_e=2.07$, $p<.001$) changes than did students in the surface condition. These results indicate that students do use teacher feedback when revising. If students were ignoring teacher comments, these differences would not emerge.

There were no significant effects of condition for any type of change made independently. Apparently, when deciding what type of changes to make, students do not assume that what has been emphasized in teacher feedback (be it surface or content features) is what they should be concerned about when revising independently.

There was no effect of condition for improvement between first and second drafts. Students receiving content feedback did not show any more improvement after revising than did students receiving surface feedback.

Note that the condition effect for changes made in response to feedback all but disappears when changes are not separated according to whether or not they are made in response to feedback. Only a significant difference between the two groups with regard to microstructure changes remains ($F(1, 65)=7.13$, $MS_e=3.03$, $p=.010$). This is because students make many changes independently, and because the variability for all types of independent changes is large relative to variability for changes in response to feedback.

Given that content feedback contained suggestions for both macro and micro changes⁴, it is noteworthy that, when changes are considered together, students receiving

³ Note the difference between the two conditions in variability for reported time spent revising. Frequency distributions are provided in Appendix 8.

content feedback did not make more macro changes than students receiving surface feedback. (This may account for the lack of a condition effect for improvement between drafts.) Like most students (see Fitzgerald, 1987), students in this study seemed remarkably resistant to true re-vision of their writing. Because macro changes often require writers to abandon large amounts of existing text, and to rethink the central ideas in their paper, perhaps students sought to “take the easy way out” by trying to address macrostructure problems with microstructure changes. The “easy way out” explanation seems plausible given that, in interviews, students expressed little enthusiasm for revising. Expanding on their responses to item 6 on the survey, which asks whether the experimental feedback made them eager to revise, interviewees referred to themselves as “procrastinators:” as one student put it, “I don’t really like writing so I’m not eager to do anything.” The only two interviewees who expressed any eagerness to revise were in the surface feedback condition.

Another reason students may have made few revisions at the macrostructure level is a perception promoted by the teacher that revising involves minor editing. For example, for one of the assignments the teacher advised students that they would have only four days for revision because “you’ve done most of the work; you just need to change a few things now.” With regard to another assignment, the teacher informed me that students would have a day and a half after receiving my feedback to “play with it or change it a little.” Yagelski (1995) found that, although some teachers appear to be using the process approach to teaching writing, teachers’ ingrained, traditional attitudes about writing override such a purported approach and have a much greater effect on students’ view of writing.

Hypothesis 2

Hypothesis 2 was explored using the surveys. A MANOVA was conducted separately for data from each of the two surveys, with feedback condition, gender, and writing ability as independent variables. Dependent variables were attitude toward feedback, attitude toward revising, and attitude toward writing. The omnibus MANOVA

⁴ I reviewed the feedback I gave to those in the content condition for assignment 3. I found that 70 comments suggested macro changes, while 65 suggested micro changes.

was not significant for either survey, and effects found by analysis of survey 1 were marginal. Therefore, results for hypothesis 2 should be considered exploratory.

Hypothesis 2 a. states there would be a feedback by gender by writing ability interaction because females and low ability writers would have a more positive attitude toward surface feedback as compared to content feedback; females and low ability writers receiving surface feedback would have a more positive attitude toward subsequent revising and writing than would females and low ability writers receiving content feedback. This hypothesis was not confirmed.

Table III: Means (and Standard Deviations) for Attitude Toward Feedback, Survey 1, Survey 2

		<u>Surface Feedback</u>	<u>Content Feedback</u>
<u>Males</u>	<u>High Writing Ability</u>	3.62(.66), 3.13(.87)	3.32(.72), 3.60(.44)
	<u>Low Writing Ability</u>	3.38(.40), 3.55(.67)	2.90(.42), 3.43(.51)
<u>Females</u>	<u>High Writing Ability</u>	3.71(.45), 3.70(.34)	3.66(.48), 3.43(.51)
	<u>Low Writing Ability</u>	3.37(.55), 3.08(.78)	3.60(.30), 3.70(.00)

Survey 1 revealed no significant effects of attitude toward feedback. Survey 2 revealed one effect of attitude toward feedback, a Condition by Gender by Writing Skill interaction ($F(1,35)=4.11$, $MS_e=.35$, $p=.050$) depicted in Figure 1. Relevant, and contrary to hypothesis 2, is the finding that, although high skill females had a slight preference for surface feedback over content, low skill females showed the most dramatic feedback preference of all the gender/skill groups, and their preference was for content feedback.

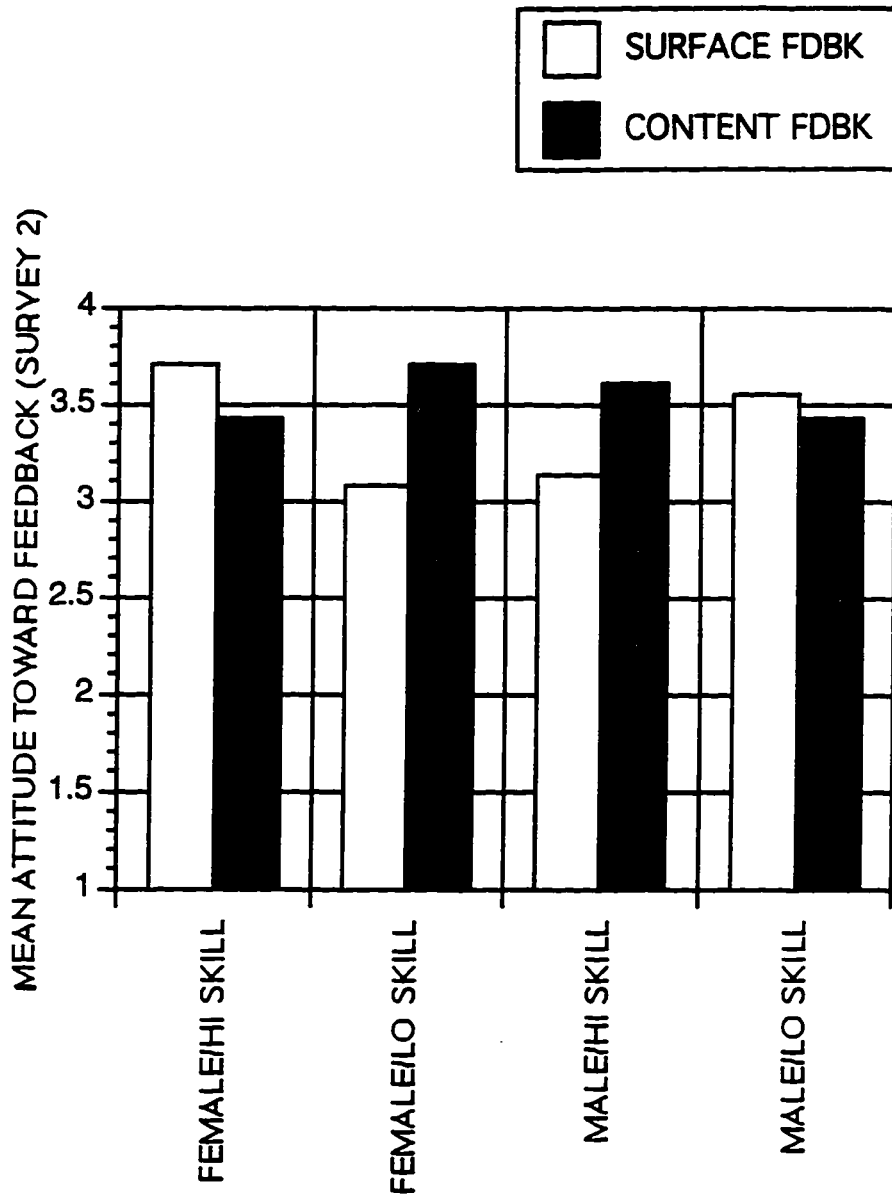


Figure 1: Effect of Condition by Gender by Writing Skill on Attitude Toward Feedback

Table IV: Means (and Standard Deviations) for Attitude Toward Revising, Survey 1, Survey 2

		<u>Surface Feedback</u>	<u>Content Feedback</u>
<u>Males</u>	<u>High Writing Ability</u>	2.78(.84), 2.73(.67)	2.86(.70), 3.00(.54)
	<u>Low Writing Ability</u>	3.30(.31), 3.30(.77)	3.35(.50), 2.83(.42)
<u>Females</u>	<u>High Writing Ability</u>	3.06(.45), 3.31(.29)	3.38(.70), 3.36(.42)
	<u>Low Writing Ability</u>	2.30(.87), 2.55(.71)	3.50(.23), 3.26(.29)

Regarding attitude toward revising, survey 1 suggests it is more positive among students who receive content feedback. With survey 1, there was both a marginal main effect of Condition on attitude toward revising ($F(1, 36)=3.99$, $MS_e=.38$, $p=.053$), and a marginal effect of Condition by Gender on attitude toward revising ($F(1, 36)=3.94$, $MS_e=.38$, $p=.055$). The Condition effect suggests that students receiving content feedback had a more positive attitude toward revising (3.24) than students receiving surface feedback (2.86). The interaction effect (Figure 2) suggests that, contrary to hypothesis 2, females in the surface condition had the least positive attitude toward revising; females receiving content feedback had the most positive attitude toward

revising.

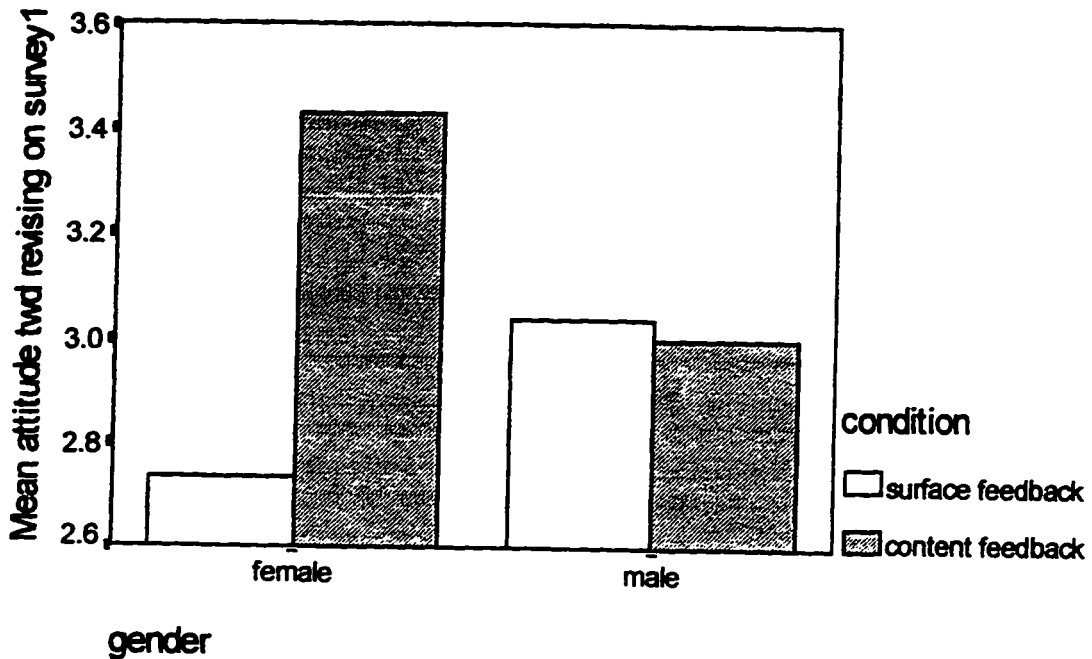


Figure 2: Effect of Condition by Gender on Attitude Toward Revising

Survey 2 suggests that, regardless of condition, high skill females had the most positive attitude toward revising, followed by low skill males. This Writing Skill by Gender effect ($F(1, 35)=4.66, MS_e=.31, p=.038$) is shown in Figure 3.

Table V: Means (and Standard Deviations) for Attitude Toward Writing, Survey 1, Survey 2

	<u>Surface Feedback</u>	<u>Content Feedback</u>
<u>Males</u>		
<u>High Writing Ability</u>	2.94(.25), 3.28(.18)	3.20(.58), 3.22(.46)
<u>Low Writing Ability</u>	3.05(.23), 3.10(.58)	2.67(.58), 2.80(.17)

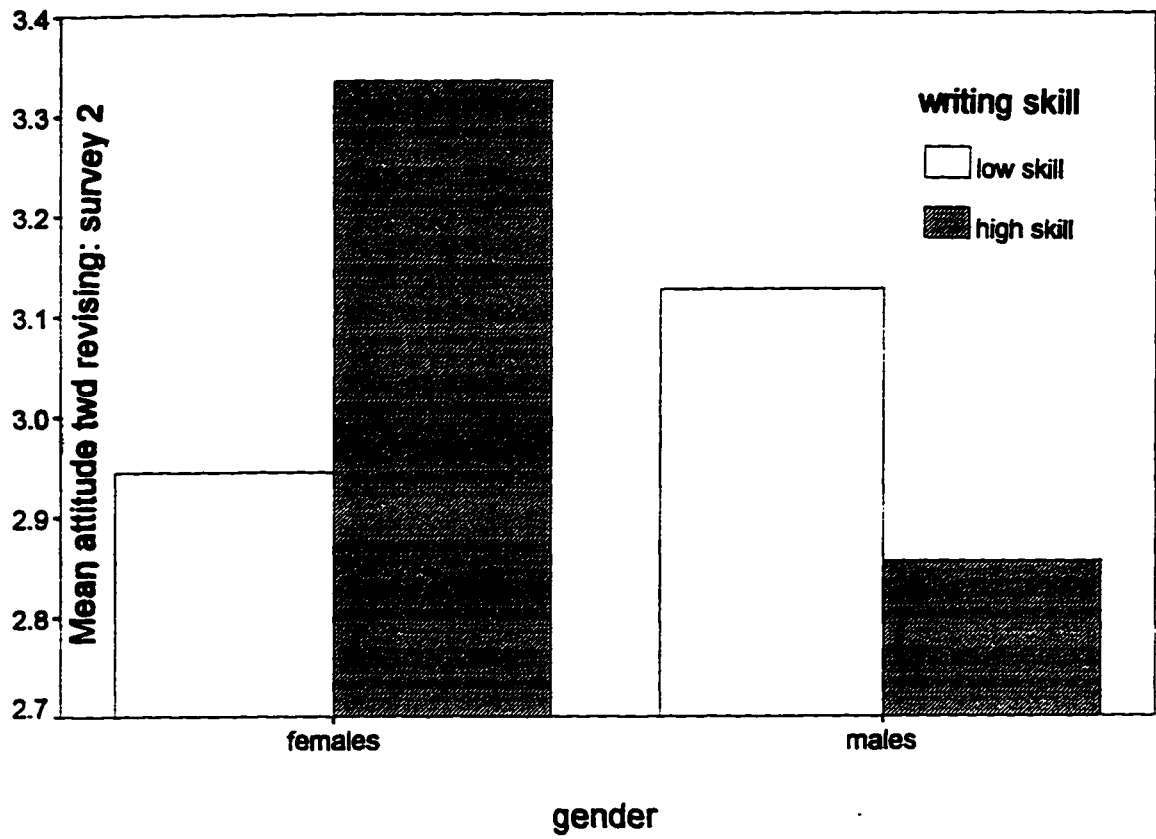


Figure 3: Effect of Gender by Writing Skill on Attitude Toward Revising

Table V (continued)

	<u>Surface Feedback</u>	<u>Content Feedback</u>
<u>Females</u>		
<u>High Writing Ability</u>	3.24(.57), 3.30(.55)	3.24(.13), 3.34(1.01)
<u>Low Writing Ability</u>	2.93(.29), 2.95(.55)	3.14(.38), 3.20(.24)

Contrary to hypothesis 2 a., surveys 1 and 2 suggested that Condition and Gender had no effect on attitude toward writing. Survey 2 revealed only a marginal effect of Writing Skill on attitude toward writing ($F(1, 35)=4.10$, $MS_e=.40$, $p=.051$). High skill writers may have a more positive attitude toward writing (3.29) than low skill writers (3.04).

Hypothesis 2 b. was that there would be a feedback by gender by writing ability interaction because males and high ability writers would have a more positive attitude toward content feedback as compared to surface feedback; males and high ability writers receiving content feedback would have a more positive attitude toward subsequent revising and writing than would males and high ability writers receiving surface feedback. This hypothesis was partially confirmed.

Referring to Figure 1, high skill males did prefer content feedback over surface feedback, but, again, so did low skill females, and in a much more dramatic fashion. Regarding attitude toward revising, Figure 2 reveals that, contrary to hypothesis 2 b., males in the content condition did not have a more positive attitude toward revising than females in the content condition. The opposite was true. Finally, as mentioned above regarding hypothesis 2 a., Condition and Gender had no effect on attitude toward writing.

Hypothesis 3

Hypothesis 3 stated that students' attitudes toward the feedback would have some relationship to students' revision practices. This hypothesis could not be examined in this study because virtually all students had a very positive attitude toward the feedback. The median value for attitude toward feedback was 3.7 on both surveys (out of a possible

4.0). (The mean for this measure was also high and consistent across surveys: 3.47 on survey 1 and 3.45 on survey 2.) With these high attitude scores, I did not have a group of students who I could meaningfully identify as having a negative attitude toward the feedback.

The strongly positive attitude toward the feedback is detailed in students' responses to the "Why?" prompts appended to the three questions on the survey related to attitude toward feedback (see Appendix 6). These responses suggest that students are fairly "starved" for feedback that helps them improve their texts. In fact, of the students who agreed with the statement in survey item 1, "I appreciated the comments I received on my last paper," 40 explained why by saying that the comments helped them know what needed changing or how to improve their paper.

A hunger for useful feedback is again evident in the explanations by those who agreed with item 9: "I would like to continue getting the kinds of comments I received on my last paper." Students who agreed cited the fact that the feedback was "helpful" (n=17), it "helped with revising" (n=15), it "helps [their] writing" (n=12), and it "helped [them] see errors" (n=11).

Thus, contrary to prior research findings, an overwhelming number of survey respondents viewed the content (and surface) feedback as helpful, rather than "not useful." Also, contrary to previous research, content feedback did not appear to anger students in this study. Students said they were not angered by the feedback because it was "helpful" (n=18), "constructive criticism" (n=8), or because comments were complimentary (n=5) or "written so as not to hurt (students') feelings" (n=5).

The fact that students in this study were so grateful for useful feedback raises a question about their previous experience with feedback. Interview data suggest that previous feedback was not useful. When asked about previous feedback, interviewees gave a range of responses: "I don't recall," "it was not in-depth or specific," "not detailed," and "teachers gave a general comment at the end." One student said that he had never had to revise before this year, and another student said that previous feedback had been only on the final draft. One interviewee said that previous feedback varied depending upon how much the paper was worth toward her grade for the quarter. For

papers that greatly affected her grade, there were more specific comments. However, positive comments were always general. This last interviewee's experience may demonstrate how a teacher's behavior can reinforce the strong influence of grades on students' writing processes. (See Ronald & Volkmer's (1989) study of influences on students' writing processes.)

Other Findings

Writing Skill

I conducted two analyses using the same dependent measures as in the analysis for hypothesis 1. The independent variable for the first of these analyses was gender instead of condition. There were no effects of gender. The second analysis used writing skill as the independent variable, and the MANOVA was significant ($p=.005$).

Specifically, there was an effect of writing skill on Formal changes made independently ($F(1, 65)=15.98$, $MS_e=37.83$, $p<.001$), with low skill writers making more independent Formal changes (10.67) than high skill writers (4.44).

There was also an effect of reported time spent revising ($F(1, 65)=6.19$, $MS_e=3375.92$, $p=.015$) with low skill writers spending 85 minutes ($SD=79.46$) and high skill writers spending 45 minutes ($SD=30.10$). Finally, there was an effect of improvement between drafts ($F(1, 65)=4.89$, $MS_e=.22$, $p=.031$), with low skill writers receiving an improvement rating of .27 ($SD=.58$) and high skill writers receiving an improvement rating of .02 ($SD=.32$).

In sum, low skill writers made more surface changes, spent more time revising, and showed more improvement between first and second drafts than did high skill writers. This may reflect the fact that low skill writers have more room for improvement than high skill writers, due to the relatively lower quality of low skill writers' first drafts. (See Butterfield et al. (1994) for a discussion of the "built in relationship between quality of unrevised text and amount of revision" (p. 105).) Perhaps not surprising then, recall that I also found that high skill writers had a more positive attitude toward writing (3.29) than did low skill writers (3.04) (survey 2) ($F(1, 35)=4.098$, $MS_e=.40$, $p=.051$).

Average Improvement

I conducted a MANOVA using the same dependent variables as in the analysis for hypothesis 1; in addition to feedback condition, I included gender, and writing ability as independent variables. This omnibus MANOVA was not significant, thus these additional findings should be considered exploratory.

There were two unhypothesized effects related to the dependent variable average improvement between first and second drafts. First, there was a Gender by Writing Skill by Condition effect ($F(1, 59) = 6.28$, $MS_e = .19$, $p = .015$) shown in Figure 4. High skill females and low skill males showed a decline in draft quality when given content feedback, and a modest increase in draft quality when given surface feedback.

Of all the skill/gender groups, high skill males showed the greatest resistance to improvement. Neither the provision of surface nor content feedback resulted in any real improvement for high skill males. On the other hand, low skill females showed the most improvement over the two drafts in both feedback conditions, but most dramatically in the content condition.⁵

Although all students seemed “starved” for useful feedback, the low skill females were particularly hungry for content feedback. The reason for this may relate to past experience. Historically, females have received feedback on the non-intellectual aspects of their work; low skill writers have received more surface feedback than high skill writers. Perhaps the excess of surface feedback directed at females and low skill writers has caused females with low writing skill to be particularly eager for content-related feedback.

The second unhypothesized effect related to average improvement was a Gender by Writing Skill effect ($F(1, 59) = 5.01$, $MS_e = .19$, $p = .029$). Figure 5 shows that for males, average improvement did not vary according to writing skill. For females, average improvement was related to writing skill: low skill females showed a relatively large improvement between drafts, while high skill females showed no improvement.

⁵ Note that low skill females in the content condition had a mean improvement rating of .61, and low skill females in the surface condition had a mean improvement rating of .365. The practical significance of these improvements seems dubious given that an improvement rating of 1 represents “slight” improvement.

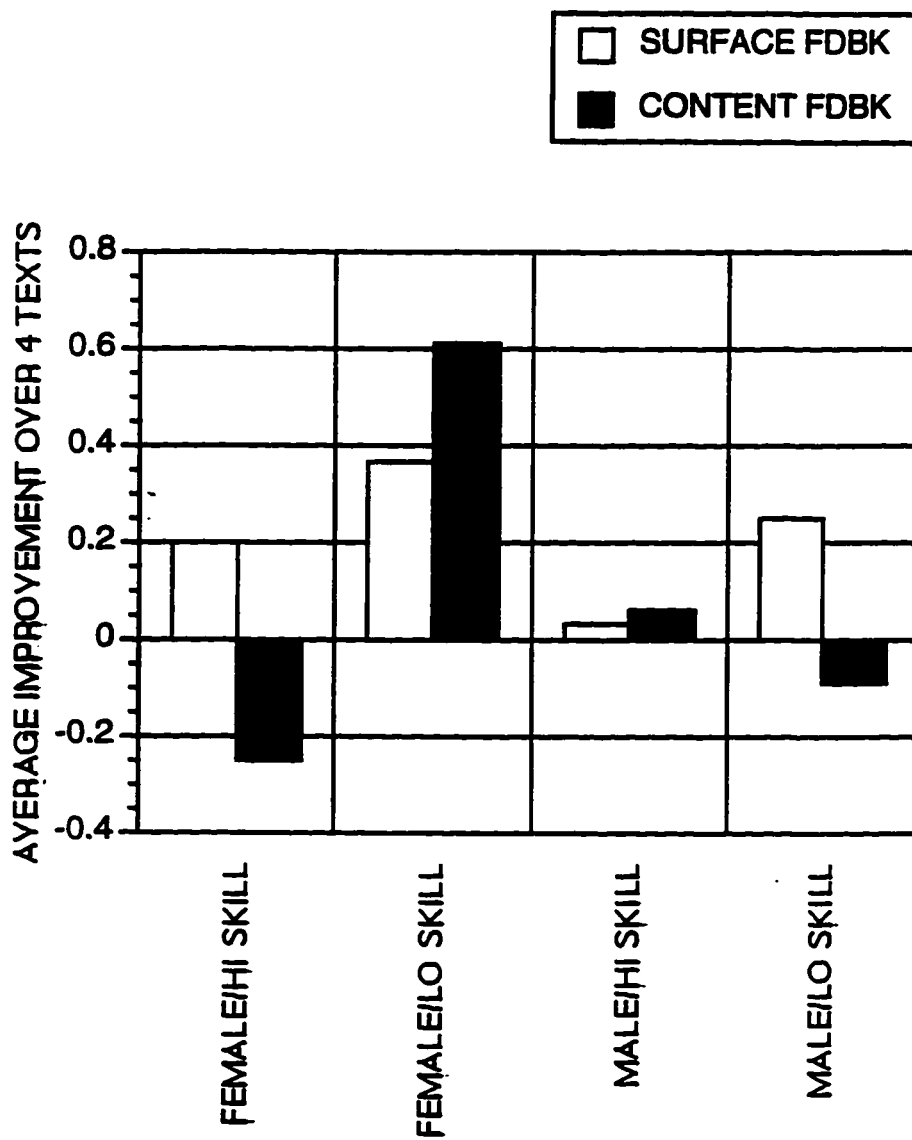


Figure 4: Effect of Gender by Writing Skill by Condition on Average Improvement

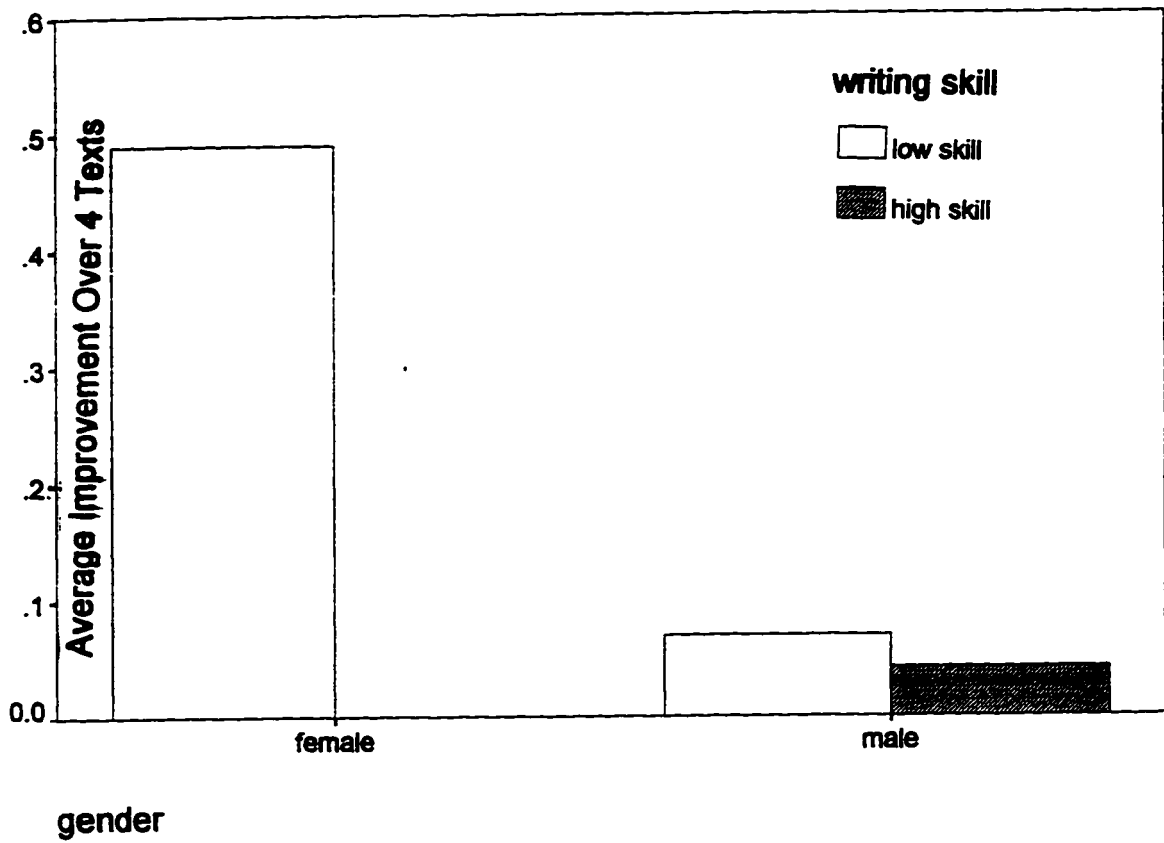


Figure 5: Effect of Gender by Writing Skill on Average Improvement

Implications and Limitations

Because writing teachers spend a great deal of their time responding, in writing, to students' texts, it is important for teachers to respond effectively. The recommendation by writing instruction experts that teachers' written feedback should address the content, rather than the surface features, of students' papers is somewhat supported by the results of this study. However, the positive effects of content feedback may not be as dramatic as these experts might have predicted.

First, content feedback recipients spent more time revising than did surface feedback recipients, however, the benefits, if any, of this extra time spent are unclear. More time spent revising by content recipients did not translate into more improvement between drafts when compared to improvement among surface feedback recipients. This study was not designed to address the question of whether, in the long-term, there is improvement in revising or writing ability related to simply spending more time on task.

Second, content feedback prompted more content-related revisions than did surface feedback, but this finding is occluded when independent changes are not separated out. When feedback-prompted changes are combined with changes made by students independently, the only significant condition effect is for micro changes.

Third, gender and writing ability affected students' response to content feedback: low skill female writers were most apt to appreciate and benefit from content-related feedback. Finally, content feedback recipients may have a more positive attitude toward revising than surface feedback recipients, especially females (marginally significant findings only on survey 1).

If teachers continue to choose written feedback as a method of teaching writing, this study suggests that teachers must ensure that such feedback is explicit, detailed, selective, and suggestive enough to be viewed by students as useful. This study showed that such written feedback is hardly ignored by students; students made many changes suggested by the feedback. In fact, students seem "starved" for feedback that is useful: far less important is whether that feedback is surface or content-related.

However, as some researchers have warned, mere provision of feedback may not be enough (see Hansen, 1978; Knoblauch & Brannon, 1981). It is likely that writers must be shown how to use feedback. (It may be particularly important for teachers to model revising at the macro level if students are to master true revision of their texts, and thereby achieve a practically significant degree of improvement between drafts.) Teachers must also internalize and project the notion that writing is a process involving much reconception and rewriting, not a one-shot exercise followed by minor editing.

Some may argue that student-teacher conferences are the best way to teach writing. Others may favor using peer review, a method that may be more palatable to teachers who do not have time for conferences. Although this study was not designed to examine students' response to peer feedback, there is evidence that, as practiced here, students had a negative attitude toward it and did not find it useful. While students were filling out peer feedback forms in class, I heard students describe the exercise as "useless" and "stupid." Three out of four interviewees who talked about peer feedback said that, in general, it was "not helpful," especially when teacher feedback was available. The only interviewee who was not completely negative about peer feedback said that it is only helpful when he is the reviewer. If peer review is to be viewed as useful by students, the teacher must invest time training students how to respond effectively (see Zhu, 1995; Hoyne, 1996).

This study raises at least one question for future research: why do low skill females differ so much from low skill males in terms of attitude toward the feedback, and improvement between drafts?

One limitation of this study is the low number of students who participated in survey completion. Only about 70% of study participants completed the surveys. Low skill males had the lowest participation of all the gender/skill groups, with only 61% of these students participating. This makes findings relevant to hypothesis 2 merely suggestive.

A second limitation of this study is the lack of data regarding typical feedback students would have gotten from their teacher. Also useful would have been a baseline measure of students' attitudes toward this usual feedback.

A final limitation of this study may arise from the fact that only one round of feedback was offered and students had only one opportunity for revision. Students' response to surface versus content feedback may depend upon where they are in the writing process. Content feedback may be favored on an early draft, but it may be less welcome on a third draft. However, in a typical high school English class, this limitation may be highly theoretical. It is likely that in even the most progressive classrooms, teachers are rarely able to offer their students more than one opportunity to revise.

Teachers who choose to provide written feedback should worry most about whether the feedback is explicit and detailed enough to be useful to students. Teachers should worry far less about whether to focus their feedback on surface or content features. On the other hand, some content feedback, especially at the macrostructure level, is essential if teachers want students to brave an attempt at making global content-related revisions. Students are relatively fearless about making unsuggested surface changes, but students are probably unlikely to make major content changes without explicit guidance.

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Appendix 1: Student Survey

INSTRUCTIONS: Please circle "Strongly Disagree," "Disagree," "Agree," or "Strongly Agree" after each statement below according to how much you disagree or agree with the statement. That is, if you intensely disagree with a statement, circle "Strongly Disagree." Circling "Disagree" means you disagree, but not strongly so. The difference between "Strongly Agree" and "Agree" again depends on the intensity of your feelings about the statement. Circle "Don't Know" if you can't choose any of the other answers.

Also, please print your name below. Your responses to this survey will not be seen by anyone at your school (and will not effect your grades). Your answers will be reviewed only by a researcher at the University of Washington.

YOUR NAME: _____

PLEASE INDICATE YOUR GENDER (CIRCLE ONE): MALE FEMALE

1. I appreciated the comments I received on my last paper.

Strongly Disagree Disagree Agree Strongly Agree Don't Know

Why? _____

2. The comments I received on my last paper made me feel like trying harder when I write.

Strongly Disagree Disagree Agree Strongly Agree Don't Know

3. The comments I received on my last paper made me feel confident about my writing ability.

Strongly Disagree Disagree Agree Strongly Agree Don't Know

4. The comments I received on my last paper made me angry!

Strongly Disagree Disagree Agree Strongly Agree Don't Know

Why? _____

5. The comments I received on my last paper were not useful for making my second draft better than my first draft.

Strongly Disagree Disagree Agree Strongly Agree Don't Know

6. The comments I received on my last paper made me eager to revise.

Strongly Disagree Disagree Agree Strongly Agree Don't Know

7. I haven't enjoyed writing lately because of the comments I received on my last paper.

Strongly Disagree Disagree Agree Strongly Agree Don't Know

8. Revising seems more worthwhile lately because of the comments I received on my last paper.

Strongly Disagree Disagree Agree Strongly Agree Don't Know

9. I would like to continue getting the kinds of comments I received on my last paper.

Strongly Disagree Disagree Agree Strongly Agree Don't Know

Why? _____

Please circle whichever applies:

I revised my last paper using

a computer

a typewriter

paper and pen/pencil

Appendix 2: Sample Assignment .

Students were to choose one of the following prompts.

EMERSON AND THOREAU

1. In your own words, explain what Emerson has to say about self-reliance in his essay by that name. Choose two or three quotes that speak to you and explain them carefully. Some sentence starters might be... “It seems to me that Emerson is saying...” or “It appears to me that Emerson means...”
2. In a well-written essay, explain where Thoreau lived and what he lived for (from Walden). In a parallel essay, tell where you live and what you live for. Use comparison and contrast if appropriate. Some good sentence starters might be “Like Thoreau, I believe...” and “Unlike Thoreau, I live for...”
3. Through the miracle of contemporary technology, young Henry David Thoreau (same character, personality, and principles) has been transported to the present. He is seventeen years old and living in “Bigtown” (pseudonym for city in which study was conducted). In an essay, describe **six things** he possesses that reflect his personality, character, and concerns. Explain what each possession reveals about him. Be sure to show an understanding of the man and his philosophy from our talking and reading.

Some other subjects to entertain in question three:

Which of the four (if any) Bigtown schools does he attend? Why?

Does he like any contemporary elements of the arts? (Music, movies, etc.)

Appendix 3: Form Used to Report Time Spent Revising

Name: _____

How much time did you spend *revising* your last paper?

_____ hour(s)/ _____ minutes

How sure are you of this estimate?

1
very unsure
(I'm just guessing.)

2
fairly sure
(It's a good estimate.)

3
very sure
(I kept good track of
the time.)

Appendix 4: Permission Letters for Survey

**Student Assent Form
University of Washington
College of Education**

Survey of Attitudes Toward Feedback on Writing

Investigator: Amy Covill, Graduate Student, College of Education, 543-1846

Investigator's statement

PURPOSE AND BENEFITS

You are being asked to participate in a research study. I have chosen to conduct this study in partial fulfillment of the requirements for a graduate degree in Education. The purpose of this study is to better understand effective teacher feedback on student's writing. Participants in this study may benefit by gaining insight into their revision processes and their feedback needs.

PROCEDURES

This study involves completion of a brief survey during the first ten or fifteen minutes of two of your regular class meetings. The survey concerns your attitudes toward the feedback you will receive on your writing over the course of four writing assignments. You may refuse to answer any item on the survey.

RISKS, STRESS, AND DISCOMFORT

Participants are not expected to experience any risks, stress, or discomfort during, or as a result of, this study.

OTHER INFORMATION

Survey responses will be confidential. Your names will be converted to numbers and removed from the surveys shortly after data collection. The written report of the results of this study will be placed in the thesis section of the University of Washington Library. You may refuse to participate or may withdraw from the study at any time without penalty.

Signature of investigator Date

Subject's statement:

The study described above has been explained to me. I voluntarily consent to participate in this activity. I have had an opportunity to ask questions. I understand that future questions I may have about the research or about my rights as a subject will be answered by the investigator listed above.

Signature of subject Date

cc: Subject
Investigator's file

**Parent Consent Form
University of Washington
College of Education**

Survey of Attitudes Toward Feedback on Writing

Investigator: Amy Covill, Graduate Student, College of Education, 543-1846

Investigator's statement

PURPOSE AND BENEFITS

Your child is being asked to participate in a research study. I have chosen to conduct this study in partial fulfillment of the requirements for a graduate degree in Education. The purpose of this study is to better understand effective teacher feedback on student's writing. Participants in this study may benefit by gaining insight into their revision processes and their feedback needs.

PROCEDURES

This study involves completion of a brief survey during the first ten or fifteen minutes of two of your child's regular class meetings. The survey concerns your child's attitudes toward feedback he or she will receive on his or her writing over the course of four writing assignments. Your child may refuse to answer any item on the survey.

RISKS, STRESS, AND DISCOMFORT

Participants are not expected to experience any risks, stress, or discomfort during, or as a result of, this study.

OTHER INFORMATION

Survey responses will be confidential. Students' names will be converted to numbers and removed from the surveys shortly after data collection. The written report of the results of this study will be placed in the thesis section of the University of Washington Library. Your child may refuse to participate or may withdraw from the study at any time without penalty.

Signature of investigator Date

Parent's statement:

The study described above has been explained to me. I voluntarily consent to allow my child to participate in this activity. I have had an opportunity to ask questions. I understand that future questions I may have about the research or about my child's rights as a subject will be answered by the investigator listed above.

Signature of parent Date

cc: Parent
Investigator's file

Appendix 5: Permission Letters for Interviews

**Student Assent Form
University of Washington
College of Education**

Interview Concerning Attitudes Toward Feedback on Writing

Investigator: Amy Covill, Graduate Student, College of Education, 543-1846

Investigator's statement

PURPOSE AND BENEFITS

You are being asked to participate in the second phase of a research study. You have already participated in the first phase by completing two surveys. I have chosen to conduct this study in partial fulfillment of the requirements for a graduate degree in Education. The purpose of this study is to better understand effective teacher feedback on student's writing. Participants in this study may benefit by gaining insight into their revision processes and their feedback needs.

PROCEDURES

This phase of the study involves participation in a 30 minute interview during a free period or after school. You will be asked to give more information about your responses in one of the two surveys you completed. You may refuse to answer any questions raised during the interview. The interview will be tape recorded. You have a right to review and delete any portion of the interview.

RISKS, STRESS, AND DISCOMFORT

Participants are not expected to experience any risks, stress, or discomfort during, or as a result of, this study.

OTHER INFORMATION

Recorded interviews will be confidential. Your name will be removed from any record of the interview shortly after completion of the interview. The written report of the results of this study will be placed in the thesis section of the University of Washington Library. You may refuse to participate or may withdraw from the study at any time without penalty.

Signature of investigator Date

Subject's statement:

The study described above has been explained to me. I voluntarily consent to participate in this activity. I have had an opportunity to ask questions. I understand that future questions I may have about the research or about my rights as a subject will be answered by the investigator listed above.

Signature of subject Date

cc: Subject
Investigator's file

**Parent Consent Form
University of Washington
College of Education**

Interview Concerning Attitudes Toward Feedback on Writing

Investigator: Amy Covill, Graduate Student, College of Education, 543-1846

Investigator's statement

PURPOSE AND BENEFITS

Your child is being asked to participate in the second phase of a research study. Your child has already participated in the first phase by completing two surveys concerning his or her attitudes toward feedback received on his or her writing. I have chosen to conduct this study in partial fulfillment of the requirements for a graduate degree in Education. The purpose of this study is to better understand effective teacher feedback on student's writing. Participants in this study may benefit by gaining insight into their revision processes and their feedback needs.

PROCEDURES

This phase of the study involves participation by your child in a 30 minute interview during a free period or after school. In the interview, your child will be asked to "tell me more" about why he or she chose certain responses on one of the surveys. Your child may refuse to answer any questions raised during the interview. The interview will be tape recorded for later transcription. Students have the right to review and delete any portion of the interview.

RISKS, STRESS, AND DISCOMFORT

Participants are not expected to experience any risks, stress, or discomfort during, or as a result of, this study.

OTHER INFORMATION

Recorded interviews (and transcriptions) will be confidential. I will be the only person with access to the original records. Your child's name will be removed from any record of the interview shortly after completion of the interview. One other researcher will review these records once names have been removed. The written report of the results of this study will be placed in the thesis section of the University of Washington Library. Your child may refuse to participate or may withdraw from the study at any time without penalty.

Signature of investigator Date

Parent's statement:

The study described above has been explained to me. I voluntarily consent to allow my child to participate in this activity. I have had an opportunity to ask questions. I understand that future questions I may have about the research or about my child's rights as a subject will be answered by the investigator listed above.

Signature of parent Date

cc: Parent

Investigator's file

Appendix 6: Summary of Responses to Survey “Why?” Prompts

Table VI: Responses to Survey Item 1, "I appreciated the comments I received on my last paper."

<u>Agree</u>		<u>Disagree</u>	
Reason	# of S's Giving That Reason	Reason	# of S's Giving That Reason
Helped to know what needs changing/how to improve paper	40	Deserved a stronger grade	2
Helps with future papers/improved my writing	6	Did not help paper much/not helpful in anything more than grammar	2
Gave different point of view	6	There were fewer comments at the end of the paper	1
Helpful	5	Not very in-depth	1
The positive comments	5	Misused/vague	1
Comments were specific and detailed: understandable	4	Want severe criticism, not compliments	1
Constructive criticism	3		
Explained <u>why</u> change was needed	2		
Time spent by the teacher	2		
Quantity of comments	2		
Put in a nice way/encouraging	2		
Intelligent comments/insightful	2		
Helped me get an "A"	1		
Agree with comments	1		

Table VII: Responses to Survey Item 4, "The comments I received on my last paper made me angry!"

<u>Agree</u>		<u>Disagree</u>	
Reason	# of S's Giving That Reason	Reason	# of S's Giving That Reason
Disagreed with comments	2	Helpful	18
Compliments did not help	1	Constructive criticism	8
Deserved a better grade	1	Like to see how to improve	5
Did not show me much about my paragraph structure	1	There weren't many corrections/ they were all positive/many were compliments	5
Frustration because comments did not tell what to change	1	Comments written so as not to hurt my feelings	4
Some conflicted with advice given by teacher	1	I did not put forth any effort/ I knew my paper wasn't perfect/ It wasn't that important to me	3
Unhelpful to overall paper	1	They were good ideas/ gave me ideas to add/ I agreed with the comments	3
I did not want to write paper all over again	1	No negative comments, only helpful hints	2
		Comments were well written: specific and well-explained	2
		Helps to know what the teacher thinks is good writing style	1
		Little things I need to work with	1

Table VII (continued)

<u>Agree</u>		<u>Disagree</u>	
Reason	# of S's Giving That Reason	Reason	# of S's Giving That Reason
		Overjoyed that she noticed my mistakes	1
		Did not make me feel like I did a good job, but did not say I did a bad job	1
		Comments were reasonable	1
		They're just opinions	1
		No one was putting my work down	1
		They were telling me what was confusing	1
		They're honest	1
		I know what I write wrong	1
		Comments were supportive	1
		Comments made me happy	1

Table VIII: Responses to Survey Item 9, "I would like to continue getting the kinds of comments I received on my last paper."

<u>Agree</u>		<u>Disagree</u>	
Reason	# of S's Giving That Reason	Reason	# of S's Giving That Reason
Helpful	17	I want harsh comments	1
Helped with revising	15	More in-depth comments would be better	1
Helps my writing	12	Would like more comments that are more useful	1
Helped me see errors	11	Comments were unclear	1
The positive comments	6	Grammatical checks are helpful, but would like more corrections about the "context" of my writing	1
Comments gave other opinion	3		
Helps me feel good about what I've written	3		
They were very specific	2		
Explained <u>why</u> a change was needed	2		
Helped me be more understandable to the reader	2		
Presented in a non-offending way	1		
They're good as long as I get good grades after I fix what she said	1		

Table VIII (continued)

<u>Agree</u>		<u>Disagree</u>	
Reason	# of S's Giving That Reason	Reason	# of S's Giving That Reason
Makes me understand how good grammar sounds	1		
Did not involve work from me	1		
They're from someone who is (supposedly) knowledgeable about writing	1		
Motivating to know what someone else thinks	1		
Like to know someone is carefully considering my work	1		

Appendix 7: Sample Feedback

Note: The following examples of feedback were all given on students' third formal writing assignment. The first two texts are by students in the surface feedback condition: the first text is by a sophomore and the second is by a junior. The third and fourth texts are by students in the content condition: the third by a sophomore and the fourth by a junior.

English 10, P. 3
1/30/95

Marcus Brutus;

In the book Julius Caesar, Marcus Brutus played an important role. Brutus was an noble and an honorable man. He slew Caesar in the interest of [saving Rome from tyranny.] Unlike Cassius and the other conspirators who killed Caesar out of jealousy and for personal gain, Brutus' reason for killing Caesar was that [he loved Rome more than he loved Caesar.]

Brutus did not kill Caesar for personal gain or out of jealousy, unlike the other conspirators.

That lowliness is young ambition's ladder, where to the climber-upward turns his face; but when he attains the utmost round, He then unto the ladder turns his back, Looks in the clouds, scorning the base degrees by which he did ascend. (Act 2, Scene 1, Line 22-27)

This quote [provided] that he was worried that Caesar was too ambitious and that he would cast aside the people that helped him gain his power. This was a totally different reason that Cassius and the other conspirators had for disposing of Caesar. Cassius was more concerned about why Caesar's name was mentioned more than theirs (Act 1, Scene 2, Lines 148-49). This statement provides proof that the other conspirators were motivated by jealousy and not for keeping Rome a democracy. Brutus thought out what he was doing, and decided that it would be in the best interest of Rome if Caesar was disposed of.

Brutus killed Caesar because he loved Rome more than he loved Caesar. He loved Caesar, but in his eyes killing Caesar was a necessary step to prevent tyranny.

good use
of comma
here to make
this sentence
smoothly

"his" would be more grammatical,
(it agrees with the singular "Cassius")

"a" would be
more standard here

good use of
possessive form here

"suspects" or
"shows" would
be smoother
here

"birds" would be cleaner

good to
give citation
for quote

Had you rather Caesar were living, and die all slaves, than that Caesar were dead, to live all freemen.

Brutus truly believed that Rome would have gone down the drain if Caesar gained more power. He would have to truly believe that this was true to go out and kill a good friend.

Not every one shared Brutus' views on Caesar, which lead to his exile and suicide. Brutus hoped to gain nothing by killing Caesar except that there was a guarantee that there was not going to be a tyranny in Rome. Brutus was caught up in a conspiracy where everyone but him was killing for personal gain. [If Caesar had been such a great danger more people would have wanted to kill Caesar off.] But his assassination was driven by greed and lacked logic and common sense.

ambivalence
needed
here.

This sentence seems to suggest that Caesar was not truly a danger to Rome -- that Brutus might have misjudged Caesar. Is this what you mean to say?

"A person" would be more grammatical here because in the rest of this sentence you refer to a single person.

THOREAU. WHAT DID HE LIVE FOR?

Some people may be viewed as an outcast and it may be apparent to the viewers that this person does not have any companions. They may be categorized as a loner or a lonely person; when in fact they may be very content with the way they live. In every society there will always be a segment of the population who will choose to live alone. Thoreau would be one of many to take it upon himself to fulfill this opening in his society.

spelling error

Thoreau lived in Concord Massachusetts, he was a surveyor and pencil maker among other things. Thoreau tried not to do anything twice, "for what has been done once does not need to be done again". He thought that people should live "simply and wisely", only obtaining the things that are needed to live, such as shelter, clothing and food. Thoreau also enjoyed his own company. He once said, "I find it wholesome to be alone the greater part of the time. To be in company, even with the best, is soon wearisome and dissipating. I love to be alone".

A period or semi-colon would make this ungrammatical ('run-on') sentence more grammatical.

It is standard to put the quotation mark after the punctuation: "...again." "wisely."

He retreated from society and built a cabin next to Walden Pond. He lived "simply and wisely", owning a cabin with one bed, desk and fireplace; he also cultivated a garden from which he grew food. Thoreau spent the majority of his time observing nature and trying to unravel the mystery that lies behind it. (I can understand his quest.) When I am left alone in the wood, I find myself pondering, not being able to find a question for the unspoken

great use of a semi-colon.

great use of a short sentence for emphasis and variety

what do you mean here?

answer. The silence of the wood leaves a defining ring in my ear and leaves my soul with a sense of fulfillment but at the same time I realize the conflict that is already brewing, the fact that this fulfillment will leave me when I step into society. The forest possesses an air of mystery that is so beautiful, so powerful, it captivates the mind and compels you to seek an answer, or question for that matter, where one can not be found. This I presume, is what Henry David Thoreau set fourth to do. *spelling error*

Living in Bellevue would not permit me to live the life Thoreau pursued. For instance, land taxes would soon declare me bankrupt if I was working one day a week and following the trails of nature the other six days. However I do perceive myself as having a high opinion of nature; how it lives in harmony and abounds to the outer most limits of this world. I do take the time to stand back and draw in my surroundings. Even though I do not live for nature, like Thoreau did, I do appreciate it and I do realize the free must remain free and nature is not always best tamed.

good use of commas to make this sentence read smoothly.

In addition to my love of nature, I highly value my family and like Thoreau, I value my relationship with God. I like to help people and I love to make people laugh. I sincerely think that laughter is the best medicine. Like Thoreau, I do value and enjoy the time that I spend alone; but not to the extent that I would live in solitude for approximately two years. Hopefully I will never be alone, I hope and pray that the Lord will always be

with me, for he says "I am closer to you than a brother". If Thoreau really believed in God, then he was never alone.

(It's actually a play)

Per.3 English
January 30, 1995

In the novel Julius Caesar, written by William Shakespeare there are many characters. One of these characters is a very noble and respected man by the name of Marcus Brutus. Brutus is the type of man that likes to have everyone's respect. Because of this, he spends most of his time throughout the play trying to prove to the people of Rome that his participation in the assassination of Caesar was for the best.

good introduction to your paper

When Cassius first mentions the idea of killing Caesar, Brutus opposes. But in due time Brutus finally realizes that in fact Caesar is not doing a good job as king and decides to be a part of the assassination. Not only does he decide to take part but instead of just sitting back while others plan he dives in head first and ends up leading the group. This action shows that Brutus is not one to just be a part of a group but to take over and lead them on.

all this a significant part of Brutus's you need to include this?

Brutus' goal throughout the play is to make the public acknowledge the fact that Caesar's assassination was not for his own benefit or beliefs but for the good of Rome. He wanted to assure them that it was not that Caesar wasn't a good person and friend but that he felt that he wasn't a good leader. "It was not that I loved Caesar less, but that I loved Rome more." Act II sc. 2 line 22-23 The fact that Brutus would put aside his feelings of friendship and go ahead with killing Caesar for the city shows his loyalty.

This is a good paragraph you stick with one idea and explain it thoroughly

starting with "Brutus says" might be clearer here.

All of Rome think of Brutus as a "noble" and "honorable" man. They look up to him and support his opinions. Even Caesar thought of Brutus as someone to be trusted. During the stabbing the conspirators all took turns. Brutus was the last to take his turn and when Caesar saw who it was he said, "et tu, brute? - Then fall Caesar".

Caesar figured that if Brutus thought it right to kill him also that it must be true and gave up his fight to live. Brutus has no problem convincing the people that killing Caesar was the right thing to do. But the people of Rome are easily persuaded, so even though Brutus got them thinking on his side he made the mistake of speaking first. Antony spoke last and got the crowd to turn against Brutus.

So are you saying that even in death, Caesar shows his respect for Brutus' judgment?
 I'm not sure why you mention this - you might want to tie it into your argument

One of the main themes during the play is the back stabbing of friends. It seemed to most that Brutus stabbed Caesar in the back for his own benefit, to gain power. Yet Brutus feels that his purpose was to do what was necessary for Rome. For he was not one to put himself before others.

how does this fit in this paragraph?

a comma would help here to make this sentence read easily

good phrase to use!

Emerson Essay

Period 6
 "beliefs about" would
 be more standard English

Ralph Waldo Emerson was a man who didn't follow the norm of society during his life time. He had many strong **believes** on how man should live his life. He wrote an essay entitled "Self-reliance". In the essay he explained that man can only rely on himself and in order to be a strong person one must truly believe in the self. He challenged man to not always rely on institutions for knowledge but to gather knowledge from life itself and from fellow human beings. Within the essay Emerson made many powerful statements and brought up many ideas through his quotes.

good point
 bring out

There were a couple of quotes that really said something to me. They affected me in the way I look at life today. The idea "nothing great was ever achieved without enthusiasm" made me realize that if people don't care about what they are doing in life, our society would not be as advanced in technology as it is today. In order to put the effort into something, whether it be a person's job, a sport or raising of children, a person must enjoy what they are doing in order to stick with it through the thick and thin. If the desire to follow through with a duty in life is lost then why put any effort into it at all. No matter what a person is doing, if they put all they have into it then there is bound to be a good out come.

good, clear explanation of the quote's meaning

A second quote that I found interesting is, "What is the hardest task in the world? To think." It appears to me that Emerson is suggesting that many people don't use their minds to the fullest potential. Mankind, if he used his mind to the fullest ability would be so much more advanced in the way of technology and in the interaction with others. The idea of this quote is very visible in schools today.

The idea of pushing students to learn as much as they possibly can has made many students feel overloaded thus making their mind shut down. Many teachers may feel that most of the kids would have so much more to offer if only they learned how to use their brain and apply themselves to the task at hand. Although as a student I feel that many people do their best and are learning how to think, it is not necessarily benefitting them because all the emphasis is on science, math. The ideas of every day life have become lost. Granted the general subjects are important, but the lessons of life are too.

How do these points relate to the quote? Can you not completely clear... Is Emerson referring to a particular kind of thinking?

Is this the word you want? If so, I don't think it's wrong here.

In another of Emerson's quotes I think the message is indirectly geared towards the political word: "Don't trust children with edge tools." Don't trust man.....with more power that he has, until he had learned to use the little better."

what do you make of this part of the quote?

It appears to me that not only does this idea apply to the political word but also in the work force. People all through history have gained and lost power. When power is gained it seems to be misused. The power becomes abused because the person who gained the power forgot what it was like to be powerless.

Interesting point.

Can you give an example?

Thus Emerson is saying that if mankind has a tendency to gain a little amount of power and misuses it, then humans must learn to use the power that they have wisely. If our society today would take this idea and practice it I feel that society in general would benefit greatly.

→ Can you give an example of a wise use of power?

People interpret ideas and books very differently. No matter how different mankind is in understanding ideas from Emerson's quotes and essays there is one major thought that shines through them all. That is, no matter what kind of person you are, learn to think, feel and act for yourself. For if you don't do that, then you will never know what you are fully capable of.

Appendix 8: Frequency Distributions for Average Reported Time Spent Revising

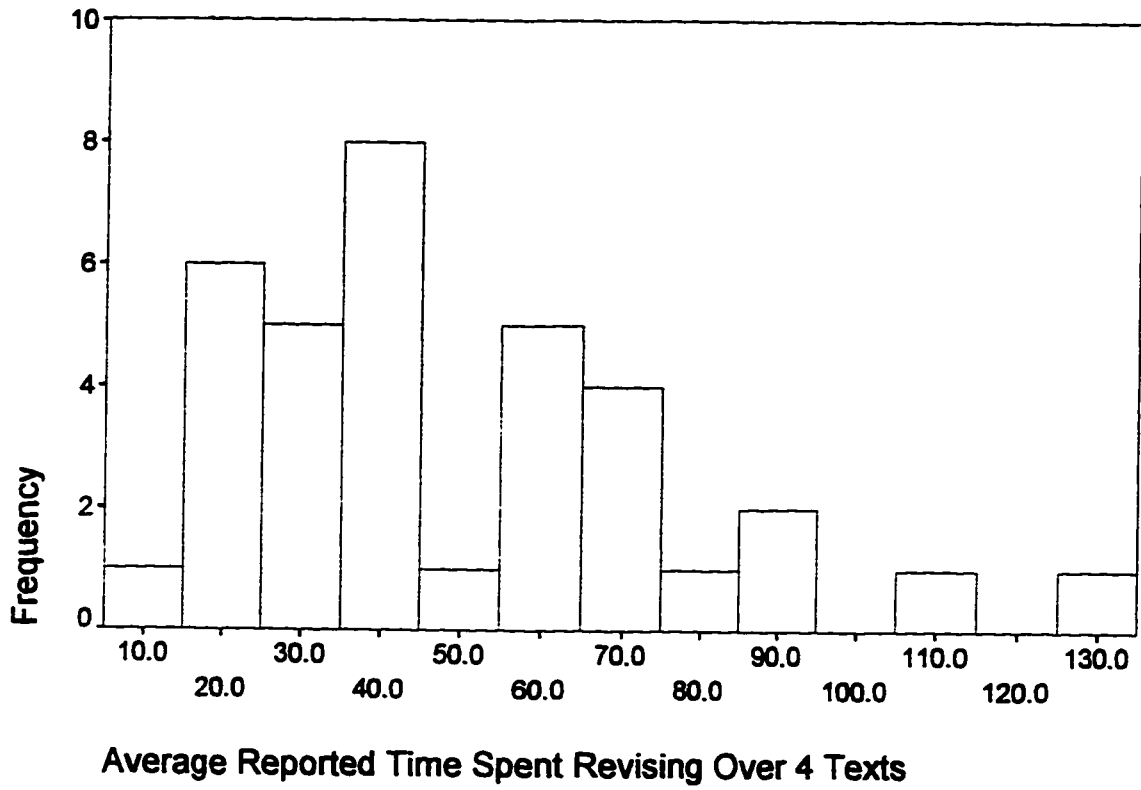


Figure 6: Frequency Distribution for Surface Condition

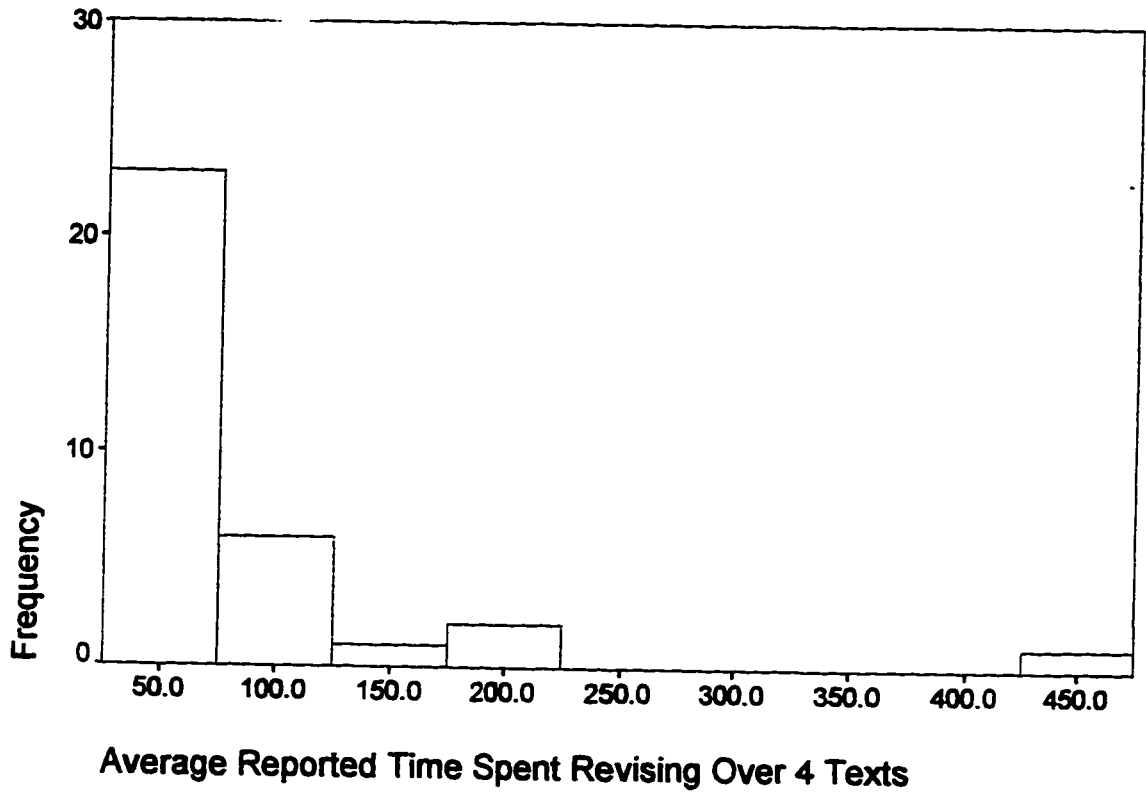


Figure 7: Frequency Distribution for Content Condition

Amy E. Covill

E D U C A T I O N

- University of Washington** 1991-1996
Seattle, Washington
PH.D., COLLEGE OF EDUCATION, EDUCATIONAL PSYCHOLOGY (HUMAN DEVELOPMENT AND COGNITION). DISSERTATION: STUDENTS' REVISION PRACTICES AND ATTITUDES IN RESPONSE TO SURFACE-RELATED FEEDBACK AS COMPARED TO CONTENT-RELATED FEEDBACK ON THEIR WRITING.
- University of Washington** 1989 - 1990
Seattle, Washington
M.ED., EDUCATIONAL PSYCHOLOGY.
- Colgate University** 1978 - 1982
Hamilton, New York
B.A., MAJOR IN MATHEMATICAL ECONOMICS.

T E A C H I N G E X P E R I E N C E

- University of Washington** 6/94 - 8/94
INSTRUCTOR FOR BASIC EDUCATIONAL STATISTICS (EDPSY 490).
SUPERVISING PROFESSOR: ALAN KLOCKARS, COLLEGE OF EDUCATION.
- Fortune Society Volunteer** 10/82 - 12/83
New York, New York
TUTORED EX-OFFENDER IN HIGH SCHOOL MATHEMATICS.
- Professional Figure Skater** 1977 - 1982
ORGANIZED AND CONDUCTED GROUP AND PRIVATE LESSONS IN NEW YORK AND CONNECTICUT.

P U B L I C A T I O N S A N D P R E S E N T A T I O N S

COVILL, A. & McCUTCHEN, D. (1991). TRANSLATING PROCESSES AND INDIVIDUAL DIFFERENCES IN WRITING SKILL. PAPER PRESENTED AT THE ANNUAL MEETING OF THE AMERICAN EDUCATIONAL RESEARCH ASSOCIATION, CHICAGO, IL.

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