

Academic Writing in the Graduate School of Law, Nagoya University

R. Paul Lege

Legal Institution Design Program, Nagoya University

David Green

Legal Institution Design Program, Nagoya University

With a large influx of students coming to Japan to obtain graduate degrees in English, many universities face a growing problem. In general, Japanese faculty are untrained in writing pedagogies, the assumptions about student writing are misleading, and the department may be unprepared to handle student needs or expectations. Moreover, recruitment and time constraints restrict just how much a law department may be able to invest in assisting the learner. The problem remains acute because resources are wasted, students are frustrated and the quality and depth of the final work suffers. As part of the on-going dialogue on academic writing, this paper looks at the development and use of the social interactive model as applied within the constraints confronting the Graduate School of Law at Nagoya University. The paper describes the issues and model adopted and presents results from the independent readings of 110 theses over the period 2014-2017. Results indicate that students who partake fully in the implemented model show positive improvements in clarity and coherency.

1. Introduction

The aim of this paper is to provide a narrative description of an English writing program developed for those Master's students in the law department at Nagoya University. Instructors in the GSL Leading Program formed an "academic writing team" (AWT) in 2012 to assess and address two fundamental needs within the graduate departments of Political Science and Law. The first need encompassed the obvious fact that language learners within these programs were struggling to write coherent theses and dissertations in English, while the second need involved a frustrated faculty wrestling with the time consuming task of reading poorly written theses and dissertations. The AWT endeavored to construct a writing program to meet the immediate needs of L2 graduate students and Japanese faculty communicating in a targeted language (English) that was not their own. By employing a "social interaction" approach to writing, the AWT believes that some success is being made in bridging these two critical needs. This paper presents the results from the approaches and methods employed to construct a writing program seeking to enhance the student's ability to express complex ideas in law to the academic forum.

2. The general problem

Regardless of language, the need for clarity in the global exchange of ideas is imperative for both transparency and ethical reasons. In order to be viable in the world market place of higher education, universities will need programs in which research is open, accessible, and reliable as well as expressed reasonably and responsibly. Japanese universities, however, face the additional burden of providing services and degrees in English as a second-language in order to attract students and faculty from overseas. In order to compete in the global arena and meet some of these needs, the MIRAI 2020 initiatives were introduced to encourage programs in Nagoya University to deal with these concerns (Matsuo, 2012). Some advances have been made but more is needed given the increasing influx of learners from abroad.

In the Graduate School of Law, for example, over 85% of the student body comes from abroad (approximately 196 students) with 69% of the learners in the Master's program and 71% of the doctoral candidates participating in the English track programs.¹ A significant majority of these students come from Asian countries where English is a second or third language. Thus, the law school has invited and opened their doors to students who speak functional English and perhaps limited Japanese and who are constrained by a developmental lag in their capacity to write theses or dissertations in either language. Furthermore,

¹ Data collected by Graduate School of Law (GSL) International Student Office, Nagoya University GSL Student Enrolments (2016).

scholarship programs place restrictive time constraints on final completion of their thesis or dissertation (most scholarships require a two-year completion date).

None of this is meant as a criticism but rather reflects the extent to which the law school is attempting to meet the overall challenges of the reform initiatives. The students themselves are highly motivated, knowledgeable, and cooperative as well as in possession of a wealth of experience to share with the rest of the world. The main problem rests in the fact that they are expected to complete a major piece of research work within the same time frame normally allotted to those who are more fluent in the language despite their limited abilities. Additionally, some students have only a rudimentary understanding of research at this level while others lack the basic technological skills to even compose the most basic written form of text.

Many of the students actually speak English well (others just functionally) having participated in basic language communication classes in their home countries. However, writing instructors in the Nagoya University law school discovered that few, if any, have had any real experience in writing in English (other than the application form submitted to the university). In many cases, the departmental writing instructor was unable to determine whether the student was simply weak at research and writing, failed to put in the time to edit or revise their work, or lacked the knowledge and experience of a more fluent writer. In total, this problem has had a direct impact on the department in terms of resource allocation, burdens on the faculty (many of whom are L2 as well), and stress on the student and other staff in terms of meeting tight completion dates.

Prior to 2010, the L2 students in the GSL program were expected to skip through the developmental phases of general and compositional writing that most L1 students experience over a lifetime. The faculty erroneously presumed that such sophisticated young minds could simply parachute in to the demands of academic discourse, which is often more formal, constrained, and analytical. Such outdated presumptions proved counter-productive and ineffective in terms of satisfying both short and long term needs of the learners entering the program seeking an advanced degree in comparative law in the GSL program.

In dealing with these assumptions, the writing team took the position that it would be better to find pedagogies about writing that matched both the needs of the L2 student and faculty in the law program rather than seeking ideological dispensation or sanction as to what actually constituted academic writing. Basically, a model was needed to balance the needs of faculty for writing coherency and the student's desperate attempts to complete the writing task on time. However, some assumptions first needed to be addressed in order to form a basis of understanding.

3. Addressing assumptions and assessing needs in the GSL program

In many ways, the organization of the AWT represented a form of intervention into what really had been a rather modest effort to triage individual cases of incoherent writing. Students and faculty assumed that such bodies of work, bleeding profusely from incoherency, could actually be "fixed." Out of necessity, many of these young legal scholars invented their own forms of syntax, ignored style and organization, and labored hard to saturate their written product with layers of contextual prate. In the end, instructors and students sought out someone else to magically repair their work, which was similar to what Rebuck (2014) found in the Graduate School of International Development (GSID) at Nagoya University. As with Catterall and Ireland (2010), the AWT concluded that such an approach was counter-productive, failed to empower the student with an understanding of writing, and damaged the reputation of the department.

The initial challenge was to deal with false, weak or contradictory assumptions that many students and faculty in the department held with regard to academic writing. Many students assumed that the intended purpose of all writing was the same; therefore, legal and academic writing was the same. As a result, many of the drafts appeared to be an opaque form of expository document rather than an actual thesis of any profound insight. Furthermore, some students remained under the misguided impression that large quantities of verbiage in a paper represented the fruition of real scholarship. Such poor assumptions spoke to a lack of understanding of writing in general and about the importance of balancing the form (grammar and syntax), the function (organization and meaning), and usage (discourse) of an academic paper.

Compounding these assumptions, were the students' own limitations in usage and experience with the target language and the varied cultural perspectives on writing a research paper. Meanwhile, in discussions

with some faculty members, it was found that there was a presumption that a good standardized test score alone indicated that a student should be able to write a thesis (or dissertation). Ascher (2017) argued that such tests do not measure a students' active use in either speaking or writing nor can they directly assess how well they will perform in a university setting. Deeringer (2005) insisted that such tests fail to adequately measure how well an L2 student can write or deal with academic discourse such as law.

Some assumptions made by the GSL department were connected to cultural misunderstandings. As with Myles (2002), the AWT found a cultural discrepancy between what the GSL faculty perceived was a thesis or dissertation (which might be referential or persuasive) and that which many students thought they should write, which according to their tradition might be an explanatory regurgitation of facts and opinions. As Paul Nation (2009) suggested, issues related to logic, critical thinking, presentation of evidence, transitioning between ideas, interpretation, and grammar comprehension can all be constituted and expressed differently from one culture to another. Even more seriously, some of our learners believed that by literally copying elements or fractions of style from an American or British scholar this validated their own expository work because it recognized and complemented the work of the original author. Marginson *et al.* (2011) believed that such writing indirectly served the student as a way to maintain a sense of social harmony in their own country.

While much of the learning associated with self-expression is culturally bound, Maxwell *et al.* (2008) found that such issues connected to cultural misunderstandings about research writing can be affectively diluted (though not easily over-night) with a properly structured writing program. Unfortunately, some of the content based faculty in the GSL expressed a common misperception that such cultural differences are negligible in the written exercise and could easily be corralled by hiring native speakers to fix the English. Such views are even stronger when the student speaks English fairly well (most notably if the student happens to come from a European country). Matsuda and Hammill (2014) noticed that such views persist even in American colleges.

Indeed, as Connor (1996) believed many of the assumptions and issues mentioned above are not restricted to the concerns of Japanese universities. Spanbauer (2007) looked at 47 graduate writing programs in law schools in the United States and discovered that they also had to confront many of these same issues before tackling the problem of a lack of writing proficiency in L2 students. However, contextually speaking, the situation in American law schools is quite different than the problem at Nagoya University. First, L2 students who attend American universities are there primarily to earn a law degree and therefore are working with L1 professors and tutors to learn legal writing (documents, wills, court opinions, and law). Second, many of these students are transitioning from college compositional writing where they have more significant base knowledge of at least the form (syntax, grammar) of English writing. Third, for those who need work many of the institutions that Spanbauer (2007) surveyed developed ESL writing courses that focused more on these formalistic aspects of writing to assist L2 students (440-444).

In contrast, L2 students entering the English law program are under the expectation that they will complete an academic thesis or dissertation in comparative law, which has different requirements in form and function than found in legal writing (Morris, 2011). Unlike the United States, the L2 student in this law program is paired with an L2 faculty supervisor who often struggles over ascertaining some degree of base meaning in the final written work. Third, prior to 2012, there was no real systematic way of tackling the problem as writing was seen mostly as an individual activity. While there were a few elective courses, such classes were primarily designed to triage the writing at the source rather than help students and faculty find shared meaning in the final thesis. As meaning here refers to not only base knowledge but shared knowledge as well, it meant looking at academic writing as a social phenomenon rather than simply as an individual cognitive activity.

Essentially, then, an academic writing team was created to develop a program that reduced some of these stress points while ensuring that the students could write clearly and coherently as part of a high stakes project that satisfied the basic expectations of the faculty department. As the expectations were culturally bound, some negotiation over the direction of the writing was needed between the team (largely L1

individuals) and the L2 faculty. This was crucial to also ensure a reciprocal understanding over the form, function and usage that a text would also be set for the L2 students and the L1 readers.

4. The social interactive theory

The social interactive theory emerged as a pragmatic response to the limitations of the cognitive approach to writing, which tended to focus on the structural problem a learner might have in writing and the social constructionist view that writing was primarily dependent on the discourse community (MacArthur et al., 2006). According to Nystrand (1989), the written text is a form of communication “whose features are best understood for their capacity to bridge writer and reader interests and purposes” (82). For Nystrand (1986), meaning in a text is not simply the result of individual activity but is a negotiated phenomenon of knowledge sharing or a written form of dialogue. Depending on the type (or discourse), there always exists various degrees of reciprocal understanding as to the form or function that a text will take, which is a learned behavior. Even in the most self-expressive forms of writing, such as in a diary, a person will follow certain forms (rules, guidelines) that are learned; for example, the use of dates, keeping in margins, correct spelling, syntax, and grammar. All of these things are learned and are done because the author assumes that one day their diary may share its meaning with some reader. As such, even in the case of a diary, the function of a text balances the reciprocal needs of a writer for expression with a future reader’s comprehension (Nystrand 1989, 81).

However, the issue is not simply about form over function or vice versa but rather how these two go together in the usage of a text so that shared meaning occurs. In the social interactive model, the successful writer is able to do three things in the writing process: 1) initiate the text (organization); 2) elaborate (deal with issues of form); 3) sustain the discourse (expanding or modifying the idea). However, as the learner or potential writer moves into different genres they must learn the moves that are required within these three tasks. Ideally, the moves should be taught so that students are not simply regurgitating second hand knowledge but learning how to disseminate new ideas.

Hyland (2004) noted that this approach is particularly relevant to academic and professional writing as the prospective writer must learn to anticipate the expectations of the reader in order to be effective (even for the L1 writer). A breakdown in any one of these procedural moves can result in potential miscommunication. A “move” in this context essentially means understanding the rhetorical elements that operate within the writing process of a specific genre. For example, the moves in an abstract in academic writing might include an introduction, the methods, the results, and a conclusion, and how this is explicitly laid out will differ from field to field. As such, the challenges in academic writing represent a monumental undertaking for L2 students with little or no writing experience in the target language, and they cannot be expected to learn this on their own initiative.

Prior to 2012, the faculty provided no guides or explanations as to what was expected in making the moves needed to write a thesis in comparative law. Students were primarily left to discover the moves on their own, and the faculty simply expected a quick fix-up by a native English speaker. Unfortunately, the end result was that the student writers became entangled in their own invented discourse that included a perplexing use of the English language. In many cases, faculty struggled to comprehend the actual reference point, and most papers appeared to be a simple acknowledgement to old knowledge without an analytical conclusion.

Thus, as a matter of practical expediency and due to certain constraining factors, the academic writing team in the GSL drew upon the axiom of the social interactive theory that meaning in a text is a bridge between the writer and the reader. Taking this as a fundamental point, the AWT endeavored to first develop a complete set of writing guidelines that would serve the needs of the students, provide acceptable standards for the faculty, and give reading examiners a comprehensive target by which the information in the processed text (in this case thesis papers) can actually be measured for understanding. Ideally, this approach endeavored to have students learn to form a textual bridge to an L1 reader rather than have the native writer simply fix a respective paper for the faculty members.

For Paul Nation (2009), a good writing program for L2 learners includes not only a design of the bridge but a suspension plan that allows students to work on fluency development as well as elevate their usage of

language and meaning. The AW program in the Graduate School of Law endeavored to implement these points into the new writing program. Classes, for example, were renovated to integrate the key expectations of the guidelines while meeting student needs for additional work in issues related to form (grammar and syntax) and function (meaning and organization). The goal was to enrich the learning process with interactive classes and also provide strong support for dealing with the fundamentals of writing so students can eventually articulate their ideas.

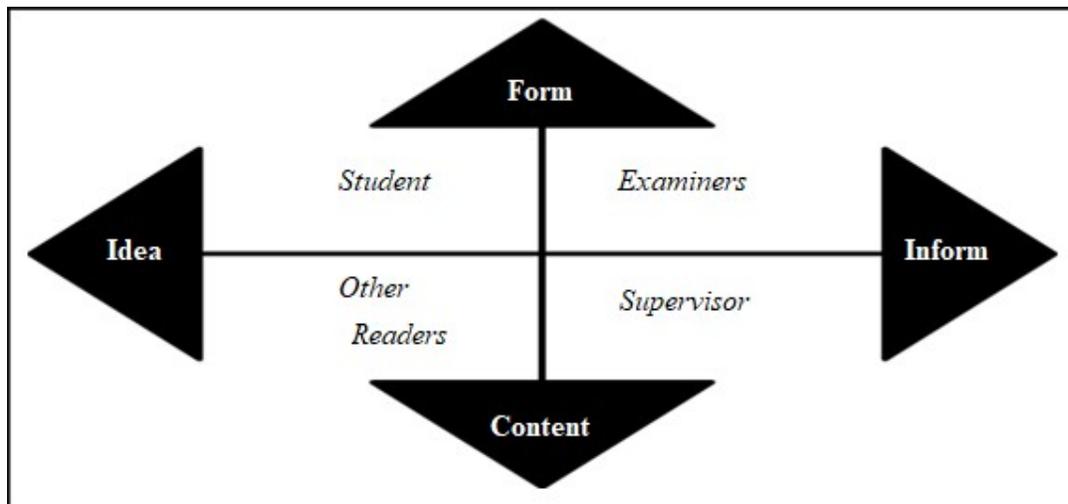


Figure 1. Bridging between the text and reader

Adapted from Mewburn 2012, *How to Tame your PhD*, 77.

Figure 1 above represents a simplified conceptual view of what this bridging entails in terms of what a student writer would be expected to do as part of the iterative process in writing. While researching a given idea, the student writer would need to initiate the topic and deal with the form as based on the expectations within the genre and discipline in which they were expressing their ideas. As students proceed through the process, they should be meeting with a faculty member to deal with any issues related to the content. The paper is then evaluated by an L1 examiner for both lower and higher order issues as well as a general comprehension of the frame of reference (whether the paper meets the aim of being an expository, referential or persuasive form of discourse).

While such a model would work for either L1 or and L2 writers, the approach does not fully address the magnitude of the developmental gap that exists between the two learning groups. In reality, the L2 students entering the GSL program have divergent needs and do not always have practical support of faculty and staff in dealing with the logistics of writing in English. Ferris and Hedgcock (2014) have collected an enormous amount of data that highlights the major differences between the two major groups of two learning groups. In terms of both research and writing, the differences are not just in the experience gap in writing but relate to how the learner perceives, arranges, sequences, and constructs their understanding of such complex ideas.

Part of the purpose in developing the new GSL writing program was to ensure that students with such divergent needs did not feel overwhelmed by the enormity of their tasks, which was to write about their newly acquired knowledge in a thesis of higher quality. The issue was not simply about the primacy of logic, rhetoric or grammar in the writing of such work but rather the best way to balance the three so that the faculty could actually read the papers. Prior to 2012, nearly all the theses suffered from a lack of clarity, coherency and conciseness so that the aim of the discourse was indiscernible. The aim of the writing guidelines, then, was to help move students through the form (initiation stage) and into the information stage (sustain the discourse) so that more class time could be devoted to working on analysis and learning the moves at the academic level.

In general, GSL class surveys have indicated that students not only have concerns about issues of form but desire to understand the nature of academic writing and what moves are necessary to meet faculty

expectations. Such student views comport with other findings in Asia. Cai (2017, 140), for example, undertook a needs analysis of Chinese students interested in academic writing in English and found that their main concerns were in learning the moves in writing (77%), summarizing (58%), and designing research methods (45%) rather than simply learning correct grammar (16%).

This does not mean to imply that learning grammar, spelling, or vocabulary are unimportant, but simply that students do realize that they need more in terms of meeting the task of writing a thesis or dissertation in English. Even for a class of advanced students in Japan, Suzuki (2016) found that in the early stages of learning academic writing some students needed either a review or boost in their understanding of grammar and vocabulary at this level of writing. This fact was also apparent in the case of the GSL program at Nagoya University. In fact, actual class time in writing instruction was so limited and student needs so divergent, it was necessary to put in place a scaffold of support to deal with learners in need of more remedial assistance.

5. The social interactive model in action

Succinctly, writing is a socially interactive process because it involves the assistance of many individuals (faculty, tutors, librarians, and peers), and the aim is to share knowledge with others (Nystrand, 1989). At any level of discourse, a writer needs a reciprocal understanding of the reader's expectations (rules in form, function, and usage) in order to share knowledge. Mutual understanding of a text might occur in a poorly crafted text when both parties have some basic comprehension of the material (which was probably what was happening in the GSL department). Furthermore, the meaning of text can best be assured by a negotiated understanding of what is expected in a discourse community. Essentially, this was the aim of the guidelines; that is, to establish a reciprocal understanding of what was expected in the discourse so that the student could learn to share their ideas with a L2 faculty member and L1 examiner. However, the guidelines alone were insufficient to develop writing proficiency.

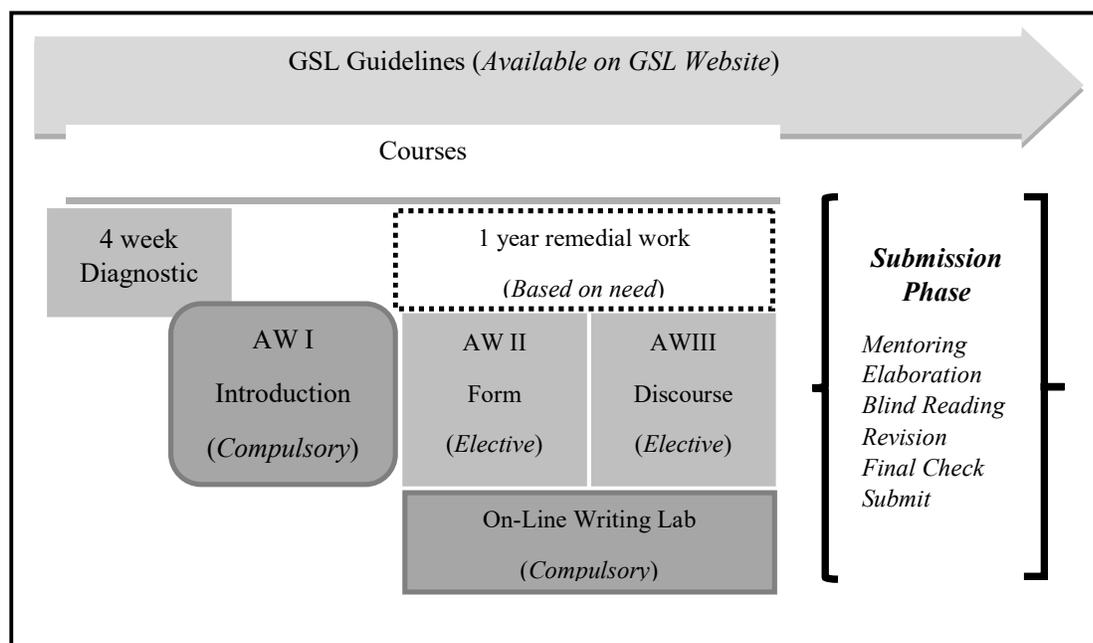


Figure 2. Composite design of the GSL academic writing program

Figure 2 above highlights what services are available to a Master's student in need of English writing assistance in the Graduate School of Law. All students on the English track program are required to become familiar with and apply the writing guidelines, which are made available on the GSL website. Students in the department are in both law and political science. A particular cohort will include a diverse student body from mostly Southeast Asian countries, but can include learners from other regions as well (China, Mongolia, Uzbekistan and Europe). A specific class size can range between 15 and 35 students.

Upon first entering the English track, most of the students will enter a four week diagnostic seminar to assess writing needs, which takes place prior to the onset of official classes. When classes do commence, all students on this track must sign up and complete Academic Writing I, which is a compulsory course (2 credits) designed to introduce learners into the basic approaches to research and writing in this discourse. This class is largely limited to those students who are directly attending the graduate law program (darkened border in diagram). After completing AWI, students can elect to take either of the two following courses (AW II or III).

Academic Writing II & III are more opened and receptive to students from other programs. It is not unusual to see students from other programs join in these classes for credit and non-credit. While these two courses are elective (2 credits each), students are strongly urged to participate further beyond the first course, particularly those learners found with writing deficiencies in the early diagnostic stage. AW II focuses on the form and function of writing and AW III leans toward sustaining the discourse in writing, though there are limitations in the second course (faculty requirements include work on oral presentations and defense which further restricts writing practice). These classes are designed to be interactive and involve experiential work that is based on the negotiated needs of the students (Frodeson, 1995).

As this is an interactive class, a requirement within the AW II & III is that students work with an on-line lab course, entitled *MYWRITINGLAB*, which is a curative platform contracted through Pearson Education. This lab offers a variety of applications that can be customized to class need. The lab course has received positive feedback from students and participation is high as long as it remains part of the credit requirement. The on-line course does entail instructor management and supervision in order to ensure its effectiveness. The idea in these classes is to use the blended and flip class approaches so that students can work in class on what they feel they most need (usually more on form in AWII and function in AWIII).

In addition, those students in need of supplementary work have a remedial class available to them for extra assistance. In order to monitor individual progress, this supplementary course is coordinated between a part time instructor and the instructor of AW II & III. In general these extra classes deal with improving vocabulary use and other issues related to grammar and sentence construction.

The last few months of a Master's student's career represent the submission phase of their program. In this last stage, a writing mentor is assigned to work with several students on a one-to-one basis to iron out any difficulties in the writing and to work with the supervisor in elaborating on the thesis. The student is generally expected to have a first draft of their thesis ready during this phase. The idea is not to "fix" the paper but offer concrete solutions on how to improve the writing.

With the approval of the supervisor, the paper will be read by an independent L1 examining reader who has been trained to follow the guidelines according to a rubric set-up by the AWT. All rubrics, whether in class or used by the examining readers, are similar to those suggested by Hale and Wadden (2013) but are aligned closer with the guidelines. The examiners are trained to look for both lower and higher order issues in the thesis writing. Prior to sending it to the reader, the thesis is put through a plagiarism check and general evaluation.

The examiners consist of five L1 readers who have at least a Master's degree (one is a lawyer) and an average of 15 years of experience in teaching writing. The papers are read "blind" in the sense that the examiners have little or no contact with students and are unaware as to the degree to which the learners have participated in the overall program. The readers are instructed not to "fix" the thesis writing but to provide guideposts and suggestions for revision in-line with the minimum standards of the guidelines. After students have revised their theses, they send their work back to the supervisor for a final approval.

In total, this represents the full application of the social interactive model, which attempts to empower students as much as possible throughout the learning experience. Rather than simply fixing papers for students, the aim has been to set up a program that efficiently meets the needs of students to learn to write and to assist faculty struggling with finding meaning in the text. In order to do this, a reciprocal understanding of expectations was needed so that the student, faculty, and reader might share in the meaning of the final text.

6. Findings from the Graduate School of Law

With the exception of the AW I course, students are not compelled to complete the entire program as this is not compulsory. However, the AWT has been collecting data to assess the difference between those who take only AW I and those who go through the entire program. Between 2014 and 2017, 110 Master's students went through the English track GSL program. Because AW II and AW III courses were not compulsory, 21-30 students (22-27%) did not participate in all the classes and the full writing program as a matter of personal choice. In general, students who only took AWI may or may not have participated in the mentorship programming later in the submission phase (Figure 2), while all students who elected to take AW II and AW III classes also partook in the mentoring phase.

The AWT was primarily interested in understanding the comparison between those who only took AW I (as point zero) and those who partially or completely finished the rest of the writing program because AWII & AWIII are the interactive classes directly linked to the guidelines. Though 30 students did not complete the full program, all 110 theses were effectively read and measured according to the same matrix regardless of the extent to which the learner participated in the writing program.

While plenty of research validates student attendance or participation with learning performance (Credé et al., 2010), such studies were restricted to the influences of attendance on immediate grades in a class. Furthermore, many studies have not taken in to account other factors that could affect performance as well (motivation, habits, and peer influence). Nevertheless, recent studies by Kassarnig *et al.* (2017) confirmed that not only can attendance improve performance but non-attendance can result in low achievement. Few studies, however, have looked at attendance and writing performance taking place months after the writing classes ended (the GSL theses were evaluated approximately six months after the classes finished).

Variable	Definition
Score	Rubric score, scale = 1 (poor) through 5 (excellent)
Attendance	Average of AWII & AWIII variables (unit: percentage)
AWII	Class attendance during Academic Writing II course (unit: percentage)
AWIII	Class attendance during Academic Writing III course (unit: percentage)
AWII-attend	Class attendance during Academic Writing II course, excluding non-attendees (unit: percentage)
AWIII-attend	Class attendance during Academic Writing III course, excluding non-attendees (unit: percentage)

Table 1: Variable Definitions

Our interests lay in understanding whether attending a writing program based on the social interactive theory would improve student writing. If students showed no improvement in their writing, then either the theory was wrong or we misunderstood how the theory should work. The results discussed below indicate a strong positive relationship between full attendance in the program that we designed and improvement in student writing. While the data does not indicate that non-attendance, alone, will result in a poor reading score, the results suggest that those who attend all the writing courses are more likely to show improvement.

Table 1 above lists the variables included in this analysis, where the dependent variable represents the master's thesis score on a scale of 1 (poor) to 5 (excellent) as evaluated by the readers in the final rubric. The independent variables were the attendance levels in either AWII or AW III. Some students did not attend either of these classes; some attended only AW II (88), some only AW III; while others attended both of these writing classes (81). Thus, Academic Writing II and III are included here as they reflect the optional classes taken at the student's discretion and relate directly to the guidelines and interactive activities. Attendance was calculated as the percentage of these classes attended by all 110 learners. A student who attended AW I, but none of the other classes, would be at the zero point of the graph (see Figure 3 below).

Students who missed some classes or only took AW II or III would show up on a point in the middle of a graph, while those who attended all of the AW II and III would show up to the right on a graph.

Figure 3 below provides a scatterplot of the students' thesis scores along with the total composite of the attendance rates, graphically illustrating the positive association between not attending at all, partial attendance, and full attendance. The correlation was very significant ($p < .1$). Put simply, the more a student attended and participated in these classes, the greater the chance that they would receive a higher score on the rubric. The most dramatic difference can be seen in the range of the composite scores. On the far left (no attendance) scores on the rubric ranged between 1.0 and 3.6 while the range for those who fully attended AWII & AW III ranged between 2.4 and 4.8.

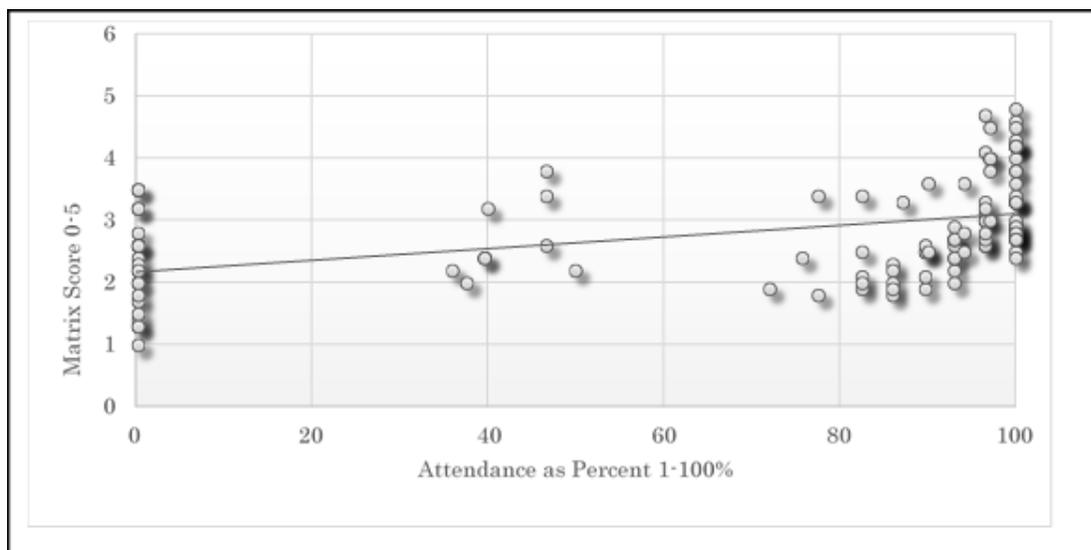


Figure 3. Correlational regression score between attendance and matrix score
Data collected and tabulated by GSL Academic Writing

Between 2014 and 2017, the “blind checkers” read through and evaluated all 110 theses assessing for issues related to form, function and usage in accordance to the guidelines and lessons from AW II and III. The readers graded the papers on a matrix score of 0-5. Depending upon the number of theses per year, each reader was assigned 4-6 theses within a three-week period. Due to the large volume of text and short deadlines, inter-rater reliability could not be conducted; however, to help reduce “rater drift,” periodic meetings were held to discuss the guidelines and results of the matrices. In addition, the independent readers were allowed to make additional comments on the readability of content, which were then conveyed to supervisors.

Year	Mean	No attendance	Attended
2014	2.62	2.24	2.73
2015	2.47	1.83	2.60
2016	3.07	2.10	3.20
2017	3.23	2.54	3.48
Mean	3.10	2.18	3.00

Table 2. Mean score by attendance and year, 2014-2017

We used STATA software to calculate the correlational regression above and to calculate a comparison of the mean scores on a year by year basis in Table 2. Understanding the mean scores over this time span will further illustrate the differences between those who did not attend these classes at all and those who partially or fully attended. The data in Table 2 also shows that the overall mean scores on the Master's degree theses have been improving in recent years across all categories according to the reader evaluations. For example, the mean scores for those who attended rose steadily from a score of 2.73 to 3.48, while the mean scores for those who did not attend fluctuated between a low of 1.83 in 2015 to a high of 2.54 in 2017. While non-attendance does not mean an individual student will score poorly, widening gap in the data between the two groups does suggest that attendance in these classes is having some impact on a student's chance to improve their final paper.

In sum, the data gathered thus far shows a distinct, positive relationship between academic writing course attendance and the evaluated Master's thesis score. Students who attend Academic Writing II and III are more likely to achieve a higher rubric score on their master's thesis compared to students who do not attend these courses. Because all students took AW I and had access to the guidelines, the data indicates that learners who participated in the full exercise of the additional classes, which followed a social interactive approach, did finish with clearer and more coherent written products. The fact that the mean scores for non-attendees also went up may suggest a residual effect, though this needs further investigation.

7. Conclusion

The aim of this paper was to provide a descriptive narrative of the writing program introduced into the GSL from 2012. The academic writing team was formed to assess the assumptions and needs of the L2 student and faculty and establish a reciprocal understanding as to what was expected in writing an academic thesis. As such, the AWT designed guidelines and classes based on the social interactive model in order to more efficiently deal with past problems of poor performance.

A stronger measure of the social interactive model is needed to understand its overall effectiveness and whether it would work in other genres or disciplines. However, the data above and general student feedback have indicated that the learners find the courses effective and appealing, particularly the hybrid aspect of the course, which includes the on-line digital component. Attendance, motivation and completion of assignments have been high, and those learners who stick with the classes show clear improvement. Furthermore, faculty response has noted improvement in the form and discourse of the papers, but that more work is needed in the area of elaboration. Put simply, thesis papers are increasingly more coherent but still lacking in terms of the depth of analysis. However, Spanbauer (2007) found such problems persist even in law schools and programs in American universities.

Such a program also requires an investment of time and money. Setting up and managing the on-line course, for example, requires an average of 6-7 hours commitment per week by the instructor to supervise and monitor for problems, not to mention the initial learning curve needed to understand how to best apply the program. Students must commit about 60-90 minutes per week, and it costs the department about 7,000 yen per learner per year to run the on-line course (there is an initial group subscription fee as well). In addition, time and money are needed to train and coordinate with the independent readers as well as with the remedial instructor. Finally, the readers are paid a set amount per page to complete a full check of the paper and fill-out the rubric for each thesis.

While more needs to be done, the data collected so far indicates that the L2 students in the GSL who work within the framework of this designed program are showing notable improvements in terms of the form and function of their written expression, but more is needed in terms of developing the elaboration in the discourse. Progress will be incremental because each cohort that enters the GSL program has its own characteristics and distinctive needs. Nonetheless, the AWT feels that this small success speaks to the strength of the model and the dedication of the students. The overall effort reflects the importance of seeking ways to improve upon the quality of education in the law school and in complying with the initiatives introduced in the MIRAI 2020 reforms.

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