

名ライティングサマーキャンプの紹介

Introduction to Mei-Writing Summer Camp

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Abstract

Mei-Writing summer camp is an icon of general education for all university students, regardless of their fields of studies. It is an intensive and comprehensive program that covers all the necessary academic skills, including logical thinking, academic writing, presentation, team-building, leadership. Its primary goal is to transform general education outside the classroom setting so that a suitable learning environment can be created to promote student's active learning and develop their self-confidence in thinking, communication and leadership.

名ライティングサマーキャンプは、学問分野を問わず、すべての大学生にとって必要な一般教育のアイコンとなりうる活動であり、論理的思考、アカデミックライティング、プレゼンテーション、チームビルディング、リーダーシップを含む大学生にとって必要なアカデミックスキルを全てカバーする集中的で包括的なプログラムである。その主な目的は、一般教育を教室環境の外の適切な学習環境に変えることで、生徒の積極的な学習を促進し、思考、コミュニケーション、およびリーダーシップに対する自信を養うことである。

Keywords

Summer camp (サマーキャンプ), general education (一般教育),
academic writing (アカデミックライティング), logical thinking (論理的思考教育)

1. What is Mei-Writing Summer Camp?

Mei-Writing Summer Camp is a general education program organized by the Department of Academic Writing Education (Mei-Writing), Nagoya University. It is open to all graduate students and undergraduate students of Nagoya University and Gifu University, regardless of their fields of study. Students will learn some of the most important academic skills in four days, including how to (i) think logically for research, (ii) write a clear and convincing research paper, (iii) communicate and present effectively in English, (iv) uphold a high standard of research integrity, (v) work together as a team, (vi) lead a team of people of different backgrounds, races, and nationalities.

What makes the camp special is the learning environment it creates. On top of the essential academic skills it provides, a primary mission of the camp is to boost students' self-confidence in learning those skills. For this purpose, it is vital to create a positive learning environment. Every summer the camp takes place at a beautiful campsite in the mountain areas of Nagano prefecture to make the learning activities more pleasant. All the learning activities are conducted within a team setting. Each student will work with three or four members within a group throughout the four-day camp to compete with other groups for a group prize. In this competitive environment, students will have to learn how to support each other as a team. And through the collective efforts and mutual support, students will naturally become more active and confident in learning.

By creating a group-based learning environment that is situated outside a conventional classroom setting, the ultimate goal of the camp is to show how general education can be the essential and positive learning experiences for all university students.

The camp started as a program for graduate students of Nagoya University who wanted some additional support for their studies. In 2015 the program was expanded to include a graduate common course, "Research Skills D-1: Academic Writing and research integrity", meaning that the graduate students could choose to take the camp as a course, and gain two course credits upon completion of the camp. In 2019, the summer camp program was expanded further. In addition to the graduate course, the program went on to cover an undergraduate course, "特別講義 - Summer Camp", allowing undergraduate students of Nagoya University to gain course credits after completing the camp. But more significantly, Gifu University students were allowed to join the camp for the first time in the history of Nagoya University.

2. History of the summer camp

The origin of the summer camp can be traced back to the English Camps that I organized at Hokkaido University between 2008 and 2010. In those two years, two summer camps and two winter camps were held, each of which attracted around twenty participants, including four group leaders.

At Hokkaido University, the camps were specifically designed for the graduate students of the Graduate School of Letters. At that time, most of the graduate students were Japanese, and they told me that they were not confident in expressing their research ideas in English.

To help them develop confidence, I came up with the idea of creating a relaxed learning environment that can promote collective learning through mutual support, which became the English Camps. At the camp, students were divided into groups and asked to accomplish some fun tasks in English with their group members. First, every group had to write a funny story together and turn the story into a group play with every member in it. Then all the groups would take the turn to perform their creative art to compete for a top prize. The prize would be awarded to a winning group, chosen by every camp participant based on the story contents and acting skills. It was found



that the relaxed and entertaining learning environment helped boost the students' confidence in English communication significantly (Lai 2010).

2.1. The first Mei-Writing summer camp

The first Mei-Writing Summer Camp was launched in 2011 after I had moved from Hokkaido University to Nagoya University. The motivation for organizing the camp was basically the same as the one that gave rise to the English Camps at Hokkaido University, which was to create a positive learning environment for university students to boost their self-confidence in research and communication.

Like those of Hokkaido University, many graduate students of Nagoya University were also suffering from the problem with their self-confidence. But the problem was not only about feeling unconfident in expressing their research ideas in English. Rather, it was about feeling unconfident in communicating their research ideas in general. Many graduate students who came to my tutorial sessions told me that the higher they study at a graduate level, the more they lose their self-confidence in research. Sadly, it is not difficult to see that this could be a common problem for all graduate students. Graduate students tend to feel isolation and discouragement in their research life, mainly because everyone is studying something quite different, and most of them do not take classes together. And when they have the chance of sharing their research idea with others at a research seminar, most likely they would receive criticisms rather than praises.

Solving the problem required basically the same solution created for Hokkaido University students. But unlike the English Camps, the first Mei-Writing Summer Camp did not only focus on English communication. The program covered a more comprehensive set of academic skills such as logical thinking, writing, presentation, etc. (see section 3 for details).

The first Mei-Writing Summer Camp attracted twenty-four participants from ten different schools and departments. All of them were graduate students, and twelve of them were Japanese. All the participants were divided into four groups, each of which was led by a group leader. Working together as a team, the group members helped each other to create a funny and entertaining group play to compete with other groups for a top prize. The winning group was decided by votes from all participants, based on the content of the play and acting performances of the members.



1st Mei-Writing Summer Camp. August 3-5, 2011. Photo taken in front of the Toyota Symposium Hall before the departure. Prof. Ichiro Yamamoto, Prof. Michiko Maeno, Prof. Chad Nilep, and Mr. Kazuma Takashita came to see us off.

2.2. The first summer camp with Gifu University students

By 2019, eight Mei-Writing Summer Camps have been organized in basically the same way as the first one, driven by the same motivation and aspiration. Every year there were about twenty participants, coming from different academic disciplines, nationalities and cultural backgrounds¹. In 2019, the diversity of the camp participants was further expanded to include students from Gifu University.

In 2019, a total of five undergraduate students of Gifu University joined the Mei-Writing Summer Camp for the first time. All of them were Japanese from different academic disciplines. The figure below details the academic disciplines of all the camp participants from the two universities.

All the students were evenly distributed across four groups, to create a balance between universities, nationalities, disciplines, genders, and academic years. In the four-day period, they had to learn many important academic skills together



Photo taken at the campsite in 2019, with students and professors from both Nagoya University and Gifu University.

¹ For detailed reports about these camps, please go to the Mei-Writing website: <http://meiwriting.ilas.nagoya-u.ac.jp/past-reports.html>

Affiliation	University Level	School	Participants
Gifu University	Under-graduate	School of Engineering	3
		School of Education	2
Nagoya University	Under-graduate	School of Education	1
		School of Law	1
	Post-graduate	Graduate School of Medicine	2
		Graduate School of Environment Studies	1
		Graduate School of Education and Human Development	1
		Graduate School of Engineering	3
		Graduate School of International Development	1
		Graduate School of Humanities	3
		Graduate School of Bioagricultural Sciences	1
		Graduate School of Science	1
Total			20

through mutual support, and the groups had to compete with others to win a top prize.

Based on the feedback from all the participants, the camp was proven to be an ideal platform for students from the two universities to learn together. First of all, the location of the campsite was ideal for both universities. The campsite, *National Shinshu Takato Youth Outdoor Learning Center*, is located in Nagano prefecture, which lies completely outside the areas of Nagoya and Gifu. The positive learning environment that the camp aims to create was ideal for bringing together students of different backgrounds and levels. The differences in backgrounds and levels could be turned into a significant advantage when learning collectively the academic skills that are necessary for all students. Indeed, at the camp I saw senior-level and junior-level students helping each other to solve problems to accomplish the common goals; while the senior-level students brought in the experiences from their established expertise, the junior-level students brought in the creativities from fresh perspectives. The summer camp showed that learning together through mutual supports is no longer a hypothesis. It really worked!

3. The summer camp activities

3.1. Camp Orientations

There are two orientation sessions for the camp. One will take place one week before the departure date, and the other upon arriving at the campsite.

Both the camp instructor and organizer will take charge of the first orientation session. The instructor, Dr. Paul Lai, will first give a colorful introduction about the camp. He will show videos and photos of the past camps, explain why collective learning with mutual support is a valuable learning experience for all university students. Then the organizer will give a detailed explanation about how the four-day camp will be conducted. He or she will introduce the facilities at the campsite and explain the safety precautions. The gathering time and location on the departure date will be clearly pointed out to avoid any misunderstanding. An important part of the first orientation session is the ice-breaking activities among the participants. Team leaders and members will get to know each other, and discuss how they can build a strong team to compete with the others. A welcome party will be held after the orientation session.

Upon arriving at the campsite, a second orientation session will be held. This is usually conducted by the staff at the campsite, who will inform the safety precautions and other important information regarding the four-day stay.

Note that all camp participants must attend the orientation sessions. The attendance is a course requirement for students who participate in the camp as a course.



3.2. Workshop series on Logical Thinking and Academic Writing

A total of four workshops will be held during the camp, one for each day. Three of them are about logical thinking and academic writing skills, which will be conducted by Prof. Lai on Day 1 (afternoon), Day 2 (morning), and Day 3 (morning). The objective of these workshops is to teach students how to think clearly and convincingly for academic writing.

The workshops are developed from the one-year regular course for graduate students, *Research Skills A1 and A2: Research Writing and Logical Thinking Skills I and II*, which are also taught by Prof. Lai. But unlike the regular course, the workshops will focus on collective writing, which is learning how to write as a team. During the camp, every team will be asked to write a group essay based on four common keywords that are randomly chosen before the camp. The essay must satisfy two conditions; it must have (i) one clear thesis statement, and (ii) two major reasons that provide convincing support for (i). Each team will have four days to complete the essay. The team members need to work together to first turn the keywords into a unique thesis statement that is interesting and well-organized. Then they need to think about the reasons that can provide convincing support. And finally, they need to develop and elaborate the ideas into a full-blown essay.

Working together as a team enables the team members to overcome common difficulties and challenges when learning how to write a research paper. For example, team members can support each other when one of them is struggling to find the right vocabulary or phrase to express what he or she wants to express, unsure if one idea is logically connected to another, unable to anticipate a counter-argument, etc. The interactive process of collective writing not only significantly enhances the critical thinking process but also brings in different perspectives into the writing. Based on the results of the past camps, the experience of writing as a team has been proven effective for improving one's self-confidence in writing, discussion, and communication in general.



3.3. Workshop on Research Ethics

Besides the workshop series on logical thinking and academic writing, there is one workshop devoted to the discussion about research ethics. It will be conducted by Prof. Todayama on Day 4 (morning). The objective of the research ethics workshop is to help students understand the importance of upholding high ethical standards for scientific research and academic writing. Students will be shown some actual cases of plagiarism, data fabrication, and falsification. Then they will be asked to discuss with their team members regarding why plagiarism and other forms of research misconduct are wrong.



3.4. Team-Building Training

The entire camp will be conducted in the spirit of “cooperate to compete”. Every student participant will be allocated to a team of 4 or 5 members throughout the camp period. Team members are selected on the basis of creating a good balance between different nationalities and disciplines. Under the multinational and multidisciplinary environment, team members need to learn how to communicate in English, explain their ideas clearly and convincingly to the audience from different fields.



And most importantly, they need to learn how to support each other and work together. All the teams will compete with each other for a top prize based on their group-works. The prize will be awarded on the final day.

3.5. Leadership Training

Five students from the camp participants will be chosen to form the leadership and management team of the camp. One of them is the organizer, and the other four the team leaders. Together they will manage and lead the camp. The camp organizer will (i) lead a team of four team leaders, (ii) make plans about the camp location, period, schedule, activities, (iii) conduct PR activities for the camp, (iv) chair leadership meetings, etc. Each of the team leaders will (i) lead a team of four or five students, (ii) help the organizer plan the camp schedule and activities, (iii) conduct PR activities for the camp, (iv) participate in the leadership meetings, etc. Through the practical experiences of how to manage and lead, the student organizer and leaders will learn valuable lessons about how to become managers and leaders. The leadership training will start four or five months before the camp.



3.6. Presentation Training



Every team is asked to give a final group presentation on the last evening of the camp. The presentation is the final competition among the four teams, which is a decisive factor for choosing the winning team of the camp. After the presentation, all the camp participants will vote to decide which one of the teams wins the top prize. Every team member will work from Day 1 for the final group presentation. To win the votes from the audience, every team member will contribute to making their group presentation unique and attractive. By working together with other team members in this way, students will learn important presentation skills that are missing from the ordinary presentation course.

3.7. Morning Exercises

Every morning during the camp period, each team leader will take the turn to lead the morning physical exercises. The exercises are usually the dances that are invented by the leaders. They are extremely fun and exciting!

3.8. Campfire & BBQs

Campfire and BBQ are the symbols of summer camp! They are important for making the camp fun and enjoyable. Participants can take these opportunities to bond with their fellow camp members and strengthen their friendship.



3.9. Other leisure activities

In addition to the campfire and BBQ, the camp organizer and leaders will also organize many other leisure activities such as sports activities, hot spring tour, short-distance hiking, etc., to make the camp as fun and enjoyable as possible.

4. Other information about the camp

4.1. Time and Location

Since 2018, the camp has been held at 国立信州高遠青少年自然の家, Nagano prefecture. It lasts four days and three nights, usually taking place at the end of August or the beginning of September every year. To find out the exact dates about the next camp, please visit the Mei-Writing website at the beginning of the next academic year.

4.2. Camp Capacity

The maximum camp capacity is set at 31 participants, including 2 instructors, 1 student organizer (TA), 4 student leaders (TA). But the capacity could be increased in the near future.

4.3. Eligibility for being a camp participant

All university students from either Nagoya University or Gifu University, regardless of whether they are postgraduates or undergraduates, are eligible for the camp participants.

4.4. Eligibility for being a camp leader

To be employed as a student leader (TA) for the camp, he or she must be (i) a graduate student (Master or Doctoral) of Nagoya University, and (ii) fulfill one of the following conditions:

- (a) Completed the course of either Research Skills A-1 or Research Skills A-2.
- (b) Completed the course of Research Skills D-1 (summer camp).
- (c) Completed a series of Nagoya University library workshops on “Logical Thinking Skills and Academic Writing”.

Note! The eligibility for being a camp leader could be changed from 2020 to the following:

To be employed as a student leader (TA) for the camp, he or she must be (i) a graduate student (Master or Doctoral) of Nagoya University or Gifu University, and (ii) fulfill one of the following conditions:

- (a) Completed the course of either Research Skills A-1 or Research Skills A-2.
- (b) Completed the course of Research Skills D-1 (summer camp).
- (c) Completed a series of Nagoya University library workshops on “Logical Thinking Skills and Academic Writing”.

4.5. Eligibility for getting the course credits

All university students from either Nagoya University or Gifu University are eligible for getting course credits after completing all the camp activities. The eligibility equally applies to both postgraduates and undergraduates.

4.6. Transportation

Participants of the camp will be transported to and from the campsite by bus. Below is a brief travel plan:

To the campsite:

- (i) Depart from Toyota Symposium Hall, Nagoya University (Higashiyama Campus)
- (ii) Stop at Gifu JR Station
- (iii) Arrive at 国立信州高遠青少年自然の家

From the campsite:

- (iv) Depart from 国立信州高遠青少年自然の家
- (v) Stop at Gifu JR Station
- (vi) Arrive at Toyota Symposium Hall, Nagoya University (Higashiyama Campus)

4.7. Accommodations

All participants of the camp will stay at the accommodations provided by the campsite. One or two big lodges will be allocated to

male students. One or two big lodges will be allocated to female students. Two teacher's rooms will be allocated to the camp instructors.

4.8. Insurance

All participants of the camp are required to buy insurance that covers the entire camp period. A JTB staff will come to Nagoya University to collect the insurance fee two or three weeks before the camp departure date.

4.9. Cost

Transportations to and from the camp are free. Accommodations are also free, as long as they are provided by national campsites like 国立信州高遠青少年自然の家. Participants only have to pay for what they consume at the campsite, such as food, drinks, snacks, etc. Some of the voluntary leisure activities such as hot spring tours, etc., may also require payment. In general, we ask everyone to bring around 15,000 yen for the whole camp.

4.10. The overall schedule of the camp

Day 1

- (1) Arrive at the campsite
- (2) Lunch
- (3) Camp orientation
- (4) Workshop on logical thinking for academic writing – introduction
- (5) Teamwork (let's build a great team!)
- (6) BBQ
- (7) Welcome party

Day 2

- (1) Morning exercise
- (2) Breakfast
- (3) Workshop on logical thinking for academic writing – thesis statement
- (4) Lunch
- (5) Teamwork (prepare for the group presentation 1)
- (6) Teamwork (prepare for the group presentation 2)
- (7) Dinner/BBQ
- (8) Hot spring tour (optional)

Day 3

- (1) Morning exercise
- (2) Breakfast
- (3) Workshop on logical thinking for academic writing – logical argumentation
- (4) Lunch
- (5) Teamwork (prepare for the group presentation 3)
- (6) Teamwork (prepare for the group presentation 4)
- (7) Dinner
- (8) The final group presentation! (and the awards ceremony!!)
- (9) Celebration party with campfire & fireworks

Day 4

- (1) Morning exercise
- (2) Breakfast

- (3) Workshop on research ethics
- (4) Lunch
- (5) Sightseeing and outdoor activities
- (6) Going back home

5. Application for the camp

To apply for the summer camp, you need to download and fill out an updated application form. The form is updated every April. If the applications exceed the maximum capacity of the camp, a selection will take place based on the answers given in the form. And priority will be given to those who submit the form earlier.