

## A Systemic Approach to Continuation Writing

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### ABSTRACT

Continuation writing, a new form of testing students' comprehensive English competence, is also a way to better English as a foreign language. The author here, aiming to use it as an efficient way of boosting students' English competence, proffers a systemic approach for students to getting familiar with and getting close to the writing to improve their ability based on writing after reading. Therefore, this paper is all about the systemic way of approaching continuation writing, including the recognition of the criteria, the ideal writing steps or procedures, the writing evaluation and so on. With all the work done here, the author had hoped to provide the frontline teachers and students a bird view of the continuation writing and a practical way to it.

### 1. Background

Continuation writing, an emerging type of integrated writing and creative writing which is very popular in the overseas countries, has been first adopted in the newest round of CEE (College Entrance Examination) reform in Shandong. Writing ability, as the utmost interpretation of one's language competence and thinking, is commonly considered second only to the ability of speaking for a foreign language learner to measure his or her language ability. According to Professor Wang Chuming(2012)<sup>[1]</sup>, the combinations of promoting a language learner's language ability include listening-speaking, listening-writing, reading-speaking and reading-writing, among which reading-writing can better illustrate the skills that a learner needs improving. Therefore, integrated writing methods, such as continuation writing, summary, comment, the last two appearing in the IELTS (International English Lan-

guage Testing System) or TOEFL (Test of English as a Foreign Language), are undoubtedly the preferred ways of facilitating students English learning process.

However, never has anyone put forward a certain approach or certain approaches for students to upgrading their continuation writing. During her three years of teaching while learning, the author has sought to systemize a way for students to be able to get accustomed to such a kind of writing, thus applying it to improve their English language ability. Research upon research has proved there isn't an efficient method of teacher's teaching or students' learning and practicing concerning continuation writing, according to Zhao Wenchao (2020)<sup>[2]</sup> and Fang Dan (2018)<sup>[3]</sup>. The creative writing or integrated writing is bound to improve students' English competence, making tests of continuation writing part of language learning process rather than a sheer way of grading or measuring students' ability. However, without the evaluation criteria or rating

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scale available, it would be very inconvenient for teachers and students to guide their teaching and learning practice. Need to say, the criteria or scale should be tailored beforehand to guide practice and afterwards to evaluate their compositions.

Given the openings in continuation writing theory and practice as well as the consideration of the current urgency of adopting continuation writing to wind students reading and writing, the author intends to propose a systemic approach to continuation writing teaching so as to promote students learning with such a means. The approach consists of an input process and an output process, entailing a clear presentation of evaluation criteria, the reading and analysis of the original text, the study of example writings (when students are firstly introduced to this kind of writing) or plotting individually (when students are quite familiar to the writing), a draft on a continuation writing exercise, the revision of the draft by referring to the evaluation criteria or rating scale and the feedback from peers or teachers. Besides, the improvement of English competence is a tough and time-consuming process, which means teaching should include the knowledge of writing criteria, the recognition of the writing process, the down-to-earth practice on the language application and logical thinking, the realization of potential misunderstandings and mistakes and the journey of learning from mistakes.

## 2. Criteria for Continuation Writing

In order to implement the idea of adopting continuation writing to enhance students' English competence, as mentioned above, the author is meant to firstly offer an evaluation criteria (refer to table 1 below) based on the *Test Explanation* issued by China's Ministry of Education. In the first place, the Criteria should be aired to for students to know what they are required to do and what they are expected to display while improving English by means of continuation writing. By so doing, they will have a better understanding of the task they are going to complete. In the second place, taking the sheer task into account means students can use the criteria as reference to align their writing activity so as to ensure writing efficiency; meanwhile, after drafting, one procedure of the writing which will be elaborated later, the criteria will be very useful for students to adopt as a checklist to roughly polish their pieces of writing (Jin Jianliang 2017)<sup>[4]</sup>. In the third place, any kind of writing evaluation or feedback is essential for students to draw lessons (Bian Meili & Chen Bohua 2017)<sup>[5]</sup>, thus making the criteria or a more detailed marking guide/rating scale a must for students to know where they are and how they will get improvements.

**Table 1.** Criteria/Checklist for Your Continuation Writing

Aspects	Specific Items	√/×	Notes
1. Basic Criteria	Handwriting		
	Words count		
	Layout		
2. Structure	Two paragraphs		
3. Logic (plot)	Logical words		
	Connection with the text		
	Connection between the two paras		
4. Content (plot)	Make sense		
	Ideas		
5. Language	Verbs-tense		
	The first/second/third person		
	Nouns-singular/plural		
	Adj./Adv.		

As for how the criteria can be used, firstly, students must keep in mind that the first aspect, i.e., basic criteria, consisting of handwriting, words count and layout, in any piece of writing. So it is the same with continuation writing. Secondly, the structure means the ideal paragraphs. To be specific, there are only two paragraphs required in continuation writing, entailing that students should be informed of that (only two, no more) in advance. Thirdly, content and logic, which should be intertwined in any writing, refers to the plotting or idea of the writing, thus finding their paramount significance in continuation writing. Logical reasoning is of vital importance in plotting a reliable story, continuing or extending a story in particular, while content is the literal presentation of the logical reasoning, which makes English language its carrier. Fourthly, though content and logic together can produce ideas, language is the carrier of ideas, which means writing in English, a second language for Chinese students, also poses challenges for many. In other words, given that continuation writing has been proposed as an approach to promoting students' English competence, the aspect of language is also a display of students' language ability. By being informed of the criteria well, students can gradually get close to such a new kind of writing and tap their po-

tential.

### 3. Steps for Continuation Writing

When it comes to the writing process, after a one-term experiment, which contains questioning students on their individual writing procedures over time and analyzing their pieces of writing, and observation of students' performing continuation writing, the author, together with experienced students, have safely summed up the following writing process (Table 2) to implement the task.

**Table 2.** Steps for Your Continuation Writing

Steps	What	Why
1. Read&analyze	2 first sentences	(find out key words)
	Original text (using 5W1H)	(find out key clues)
2. Plot	figure out a theme (if possible)	
	figure out a positive ending	
	map the story	
3. Draft	Chinese	
	English	
4. Revise	Use the checklists	
5. Write	pay attention to language	

The first step is about reading the original text and the two first given sentences for each of the to-be-extended paragraphs<sup>7</sup>. Hu Yinghui (2003)<sup>[6]</sup>, Xing Yan (2015)<sup>[7]</sup>, Zhang Lingling (2015)<sup>[8]</sup> and Tong Li (2016)<sup>[9]</sup> say that writing is composed of pre-writing, drafting, revising, editing and publishing, while for continuation writing, there is no doubt that pre-writing should be better interpreted as reading and analyzing. While reading, students are supposed to circle or underline the possible key words in the two first sentences (pay special attention to pronouns or logic words). Besides, considering that continuation writing is a kind of writing-after-reading, reading original text and analyzing it is a must. While reading the original text for the first time, any threads probably related to the two to-be-extended paragraphs should be circled or underlined. After a brief reading, it's high time that students analyzed the original text by referring to an analytical tool (Table 3) which sees the partial story in the matrix of 5W1H. What needs to be illustrated is that WHAT can be thought to cover other three elements, WHO, WHEN and WHERE included, while the other two elements containing WHY and HOW do not necessarily present in each

original text or not always are of great importance. Being clear about that, students can go about filling in the exhibit to figure out the plot of the text. Most importantly, students will have learnt, through figuring out the main plot, the *Actions, Emotions or Characters* of the key characters or roles so that they might have a sense of the linguistic style of the original text, which assist students in imitating the author's writing style in language.

**Table 3.** 5W1H Analysis of Original Text

WHAT			
WHO	Actions	Emotions	Characters
character 1			
character 2			
character 3			
character 4			
WHEN			
WHERE			
WHY			
HOW			
Things			

Concerning the second step, students can come forward to blueprint a complete story. Here comes some essentials. On the one hand, the first to-be-extended paragraph (or its last sentence or sentences) should be closely connected with the very beginning of the second one (Wang Chuming 2012)<sup>[1]</sup>, making it a must to refer to the first sentence of the second to-be-extended paragraph. On the other hand, the two to-be-extended paragraphs should both be closely associated with the original text, thus requiring especially the second paragraph to echo the overt or latent clues in the original text. What's more, there must be a positive ending in the second to-be-extended paragraph as the political aspects of CEE are considered. Sometimes, it's even better to map out a theme to sublimate the main idea, which, of course, all depends on the types of the original text.

The third step, with all the above analysis done, demands that students should be probably exposed to the clues of continuing the story so as to finish the two paragraphs. It is suggested that students should draft for the final writing in the way of outlining the main storyline of the two to-be-extended paragraphs. Certainly, it is ac-

ceptable for students to write a drafted version in either English or Chinese. Whatever language they choose, it doesn't matter so much as far as the content and logic of the composition are concerned. The point is for them to clarify their ideas in the story. Students always skip the process of drafting for the two following reasons. One is the limitation of time; the other is lack of the awareness. Drafting can actually beautify students display of the composition. Anyway, a kind of neat and nice handwriting and layout for a composition is always appreciated (Kimberly Abels 2020)<sup>[10]</sup>.

The fourth step is for students to go over their draft writing by referring to the checklist (or criteria). Possibly, they will consider whether the words count is enough, whether the plot, composed of content and logic, is coherent, and whether the display of the plot, namely, the English expressions are natural and fluent enough to present the plot. More importantly, it is expected that students achieve basic expressive criteria, tense consistency, person concord, conjunctions correctness and so on, as well as linguistic-level logic coherence.

Then comes the final step of finalizing the writing, which exploits students' years of linguistic accumulation. Seeing from the marking guide of the 2020 Shandong CEE (Zhang Meng 2019)<sup>[11]</sup>, the markers say the scores allotted are mainly dependent on students ways of expressing their ideas, which means the ability to order words and ideas accounts for a large part, while whether or not the plot is similar to the reference version is not the determining factor. Under such circumstances, the author holds the belief that, instead of focusing too much energy on beautifying the story or prompting fancy ideas in order to make it highly similar to the only-one possible version, which is unreasonable and almost impossible, a systemic way of polishing students' English expressions so as to enable them to express in a normally logic manner is of greater vitality. Based on the author and students' writing practice, the systemic way should be formulated over days of writing practice in forms of micro-writing (Richard Nordquist 2020)<sup>[12]</sup>. Micro-writing may contain words-level practice, sentences-level practice or even paragraphs-level practice. By resorting to a variety of micro-writing classes, students are supposed to have a good mastery of how to make a composition effective and communicative. Anyway, a good writing, being effective enough to make sense for readers, especially the one in English as a second language, should be scaffolded through lexical and clausal levels writing practice to make the writing expressions cohesive, coherent and full-blown, according to Cheryl Malanek (2020)<sup>[13]</sup> and Kimberly Abels (2020)<sup>[10]</sup>.

Being informed of the criteria and steps of continuation

writing, students may get access to practice making perfect by means of various micro-writings, which opens the field for students to equip themselves with down-to-earth linguistic writing. By so doing, students can, through files of reading and writing, get to the core of Western way of thinking so as to polish their writing skills to be more authentic and more English-like.

#### 4. Writing Evaluation

As a natural procedure of writing, it is convinced that any writings should be assessed, while for continuation writing, its evaluation, apart from teachers' face-to-face appraisal, which is too time-consuming and doesn't always have universal effect (Chunlin Yao 2019)<sup>[14]</sup>, can also take the following two forms, self-reflection and peer review included, as reflected by Weiyu Lian (2020)<sup>[15]</sup>, which are also means of polishing the composition.

In the author's teaching practice, it is found that self-reflection after teacher's summary of students' overall performance in a writing exercise displays agreeable effectiveness for each student to implement the idea of learning something from his or her mistakes. Peer review, or students' mutual review, has long been considered an efficient way to make writing evaluations, though, according to Qin Wang (2013)<sup>[16]</sup> and Katherine (2015)<sup>[17]</sup>. Criticizing one's own work may lead to thinking about the work in the true sense, let alone for students who are not mature enough to offer professional and all-round evaluative views of others' works. That's why the author prefers self-reflection to peer review in the evaluation process of continuation writing. Peer review may take on some fixed forms (Weiyu Lian, 2020)<sup>[15]</sup>, things like a peer review scheme. However, that should all depend on what type of essay the text is.

Certainly, there are other ways of making assessment. For instance, sheer linguistic mistakes erasing in public in a class also serves as a very important means for Chinese senior high school students learning English as a second language. In the daily practice, the author has tried to offer students' some reference possible expressions ahead of students' drafting for them to beautify their writing, which doesn't give rise to students' perfection language presentation in their writing. That is to say, erasing linguistic mistakes should always exist in writing activities, a belief especially true for students learning English as a foreign language. Another way is to try shadow writing. Shadow exercises, deriving from simultaneous interpretation (Wang Xiaolin 2017)<sup>[18]</sup>, can be adopted as an effective way for students to gradually idealize their expressions. The thing is, they require the teachers to filter the suitable sample expressions for students to follow suit.



Upon self-reflection and peer review, students should be given chance to rewrite. Rewriting is a must for some of the writing activities where students initial understanding of the original text is biased or their plotting is far-fetched. By so doing, students will really learn from such a writing after reading activity, which will in a long run benefit students' language acquisition.

## 5. Practice Makes Perfect

As a kind of pioneering composition, continuation writing in teaching and learning actually takes on different ways, which is quite understandable. No matter how it looks like, either giving precedence to model essays over students' down-to-earth practice or prioritizing students' practice over model essays, it is important that students were given a systemic approach so that they could know where they are heading.

Actually, in the author's teaching practice, it is found that students are easily informed of the criteria and writing steps, yet it is tough work for students to take them in during their practice exercise, which really takes time and efforts. The only way out is for them to practice more and more from the aspects of sharpening their plotting, polishing their language use, even aligning their logic expression and then all of them at the same time. As far as sharpening their plotting is concerned, it is better for students to refer to several exercises. They are supposed to read, analyze and plot one by one by consulting Exhibit 3 so as to get a feel of how to perfect a story. When it comes to polishing the language, students should be required to organize their language, draft their pieces of writing, revise it and learn from their mistakes after correcting them. As for aligning their expressive logic, students can make improvement in this regard during reading after writing, especially the long-term practice of the first two aspects of continuation writing. What's more, rewriting which follows students' self-reflection and peer review will

With all the efforts, a good piece of continuation writing may take its shape.

## 6. Conclusion

As a new form of testifying students' comprehensive English competence, continuation writing unfolds a totally new world for both teachers and students in senior high, while there is opportunity for students to promote their integrative language ability at the same time. The author holds a systemic approach to continuation writing, starting with offering a criteria as knowledge base, which is later used as a checklist for students to revise their draft writing, integrating then the writing steps into the system

and winding it up by rewriting after students' self-reflection and peer review. As the steps are concerned, the author presents a detailed way of analyzing the original text, which is pervasive for most of the continuation writing exercise, for students to get involved in hands-on trial. Besides, the author believes that a systemic way of extended writing entails long-term, scientific, sustaining, intensive and intensive practice, which will surely have students English competence promoted.

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