BACKGROUND

When students make independent choices for writing tasks and draft improvement, writing and language skills become part of their individual experience.
EAP 220 English Grammar and Composition Course Objectives:

• Identify and produce purpose- and audience-appropriate writing.

• Understand and follow a writing process that includes generation of ideas, drafting, revising, and editing.

• Use a variety of sophisticated cohesive devices effectively.

• Write short answers under time constraints to questions from class material.

• Accurately use a variety of simple and complex grammatical structures and sentence types.

• Develop an awareness of and ability to monitor recurring individual grammar and editing problems.
The following “Writing Tools” are taught using the toolbox approach.

• Dependent Noun Clauses
• Dependent Adjective Clauses
• Reason and Purpose Clauses/Phrases
• Adverbial Conjunctions / Transitions
• Subordinators: dependency, conditionals
• Concession
• Hedging
• Rhetorical Styles, including argument
• Academic Essay Composition

Materials:

Internet-sourced and Teacher-created (see handout)

Textbooks:

Sourcework (2nd edition) by Dollahite & Haun, NatGeo Learning/Cengage 978-1-111-35209-7

The ESL Writer’s Handbook by Carlock et al., UM Press 978-0-472-03403-1

The ESL Writer’s Handbook Workbook, 978-0-472-03404-8
EAP 220
REAL-WORLD WRITING TASKS

“However, the difference between ‘real’ writing and display writing* [sic] isn’t a binary distinction; it’s more of a continuum. Our job, as teachers, is to bring the two ends of the spectrum closer together, and help students to see the links.”

-Rachael Roberts

*classroom assignments

- Student-generated List of Real-world Writing Tasks
  - Respond to someone/something
  - Reviews: products, movies, books, games
  - Blog – Personal or Professional – Comments to others’ posts
  - Online Discussion Board
  - D2L, WeChat, Facebook Group, Twitter
  - Email: Company (shopping, jobs), Teachers, Students, Work, Advisors
  - Request or on-going communication: Apartment, Housing (LiveOn)
  - CV, cover letter
  - Texting
  - Personal Statement or Statement of Purpose
  - Lists, Notes, Cards, Letters
  - Giving Directions, Process, How to do something
  - Protests – Political involvement
  - Forms: Applications, Bank Accounts, Driver’s License, Medical, Passport
  - Official Statements: Police Report, Insurance
  - Voting Ballot, Survey
Resources:


Materials:


This project began as:

1. a way for EAP students to revise and edit more independently, and
2. for me to contextualize discrete grammar points to create more meaningful lessons.

Maryellen Weimer’s book was my primary source material for these goals.
THE TEACHER INDICATES AN AREA OF WRITING THAT NEEDS ATTENTION (FOR CONTENT OR LANGUAGE USE).

THE STUDENT MAKES THE CHOICE OF WHICH WRITING TOOL TO USE FOR IMPROVEMENT.
STUDENT CHOICE: CONCESSION

Real-world writing task: Personal Statement
Writing Purpose: Express and Reflect

At first, the student wanted to minimize the company’s name, but the choice to use concession allows for the truth of experience and provides cultural sensitivity.

EARLY DRAFT

Working with BL Group, one of the most well-known construction groups in S.A., as a mechanical engineer for more than a year and dealing with TBMs (Tunnel Boring Machines) helped a great deal in forming my perception of the practical reality of the field.

FINAL DRAFT

While the name “bin Laden” means something specific in the U.S., in my country, it’s a family name. I worked for the bin Laden Group, one of the most well-known construction groups in S.A., as a mechanical engineer for more than a year, and dealing with TBMs (Tunnel Boring Machines) helped a great deal in forming my perception of the practical reality of the field.
**STUDENT CHOICE: ADJ CLAUSES, HEDGING**

Real-world writing task: Personal Statement  
Writing Purpose: Express and Reflect

*The student had a “list” of goals, but with the teacher comment to try for sentence complexity, the student added adjectives clauses and hedging as a bonus.*

**EARLY DRAFT**

People in computer science dream about developing computer games. That’s my dream as well. I want to develop a computer game with real life experience as they are in the game. Most game people play just 3D game. People can’t feel anything from the game.

**FINAL DRAFT**

*Most people who study computer science have a dream, which is to develop their own computer game. That’s my dream as well. I want to develop a computer game that gives people a very real life experience just as they are in the game. Most game people play just 3D game. People can’t feel anything from the game.*
REAL-WORLD WRITING TASK: REVIEW OF ADIDAS STAN SMITH WITH WHITE/GREEN

WRITING PURPOSE: EVALUATE AND JUDGE

The student confidently labeled an ADJ clause and concession but not accurately. This became a class example for writing tools and language. The benefit was group effort to revise.

EARLY DRAFT

Generally, as we know, it has a very classic look and its colors with white and green is awesome that it can fit with most colors of clothes.

(Language mistakes, writing tool misuse, and content revisions all needed. The class worked on this as group revision.)

FINAL DRAFT

Although not every college student wants to wear green and white if these are not your school colors, green and white are awesome colors that can fit with most of your clothes, generally.

(Students chose to keep concession but to concede that not everyone likes the awesome colors. The adjective clause was kept and moved. Hedging was strengthened.)
STUDENT CHOICES: HEDGING

Real-world writing task: Personal Statement (perspective on a topic)
Writing Purpose: Express and Reflect / Inquire and Explore

The student chose to use a combination of newly taught and previously learned hedging vocabulary. While minimal in complexity, the choices are accurate.

EARLY DRAFT

The special effects **appear to be** an advanced skill to start the movie development to a new area.

I **usually** watched other movie in this serial on weekends.

There are many youngsters like me willing to put effort in film, so it’s **possible** we can have our own “vigilantes” some day.

FINAL DRAFT

(This student chose to keep this hedging and not revise. In the future, it might be good for a teacher to require some revision effort for practice, but students may end up using tools accurately in the first draft.)
DRAWBACKS

THE TEACHER INDICATES AN AREA OF WRITING THAT NEEDS ATTENTION (FOR CONTENT OR LANGUAGE USE).

THE STUDENT MAY KNOW A WRITING TOOL BUT STILL STRUGGLES TO KNOW HOW BEST TO APPLY THE TOOL FOR OPTIMUM EFFECT.
STUDENT CHOICE: HEDGING

Real-world writing task: Personal Statement
Writing Purpose: Express and Reflect

The student was assertive in giving work experience details but not specific enough with “knowledge” details. The choice was to add hedging to explain, which didn’t.

FIRST DRAFT

In 2014, several schools in my city held a collaboration showcase, and I was responsible for the assistant director. I caught many opportunities to grow up in this field. After I was in college, I learned more academic knowledge.

FINAL DRAFT

I caught many opportunities to grow up in this field. After I was in college, I learned more academic knowledge. It’s very useful to have the fundamental lessons because I believe I can be more professional through these courses. (Added hedging is weaker than other language and doesn’t explain the lessons, knowledge, or professionalism learned.)
STUDENT CHOICE: ADJ CLAUSES, ADVS

Real-world writing task: Product Review (similar to Amazon)
Writing Purpose: Evaluate and Judge
The student needed to add content to show: user preference, reasons, or connection between sweet and vitamins. The writing tool is good, but the content is still weak.

FIRST DRAFT

(flavored health drink) It actually tastes good with different flavors, especially those flavors of drink all taste sweet enough for me. However, when I google it online it shows those kinds of drink have no vitamins in it.

FINAL DRAFT

It actually tastes good with different flavors, especially those flavors of drink all taste sweet enough for me, who is a double-sugar supporter. However, when I google it online it shows those kinds of drink have no vitamins in it.
(Reason clause(s) may be better, but when language use and content are still weak, it’s difficult to address everything at once.)
STUDENT CHOICE: SUBORDINATOR, TRANSITION

Real-world writing task: Travel Blog (review, advice)
Writing Purpose: Evaluate and Judge / Inform and Explain

Strong choice making is a wonderful outcome, but even if students recognize and accurately use a writing tool, their language use may still demonstrate weak control with mistakes they can’t see.

FIRST DRAFT

When I visited there in the spring and autumn afternoon, there was so crowded because not only famous, but also there cherry blossom in spring and colored in autumn are so beautiful. Consequently, I recommend you’ll start trip from here.

FINAL DRAFT

When you visit there in the spring and autumn, I recommend going in the afternoon because it can be so crowded. It’s not only famous but also popular for the cherry blossoms in spring and colors in autumn which are so beautiful. Even so, I recommend you start your trip from here. (These changes required a longer writing conference to explain and change.)
Real-world writing task: Review
Writing Purpose: Evaluate and Judge / Inform and Explain

Students struggle with content vocabulary, so they use translators, as in this case with "oil", but sometimes acquired vocabulary, here with “however”, is known but misidentified as concession.

**FIRST DRAFT**

Audi R8 is a two-door sports car, this car has 500 horsepower, and the V10 engine allows the car to accelerate from 0-60 miles in just 3 seconds. However, the oil consumption is one of the big problems of R8. If an engine has more cylinders, it will improve the oil consumption.

**FINAL DRAFT**

Audi R8 is a two-door sports car with a 500 horsepower engine, and the V10 engine allows the car to accelerate from 0-60 mph in just three seconds. However, the gas consumption is one of the big problems of the R8. If an engine has more cylinders, it will use more gas. (If students struggle with vocabulary or other grammar, learning new writing tools can be an added challenge.)
ADVICE

IF YOU WISH TO BE A WRITER, WRITE.

- EPICETUS, 55-135 BCE, GREEK STOIC PHILOSOPHER
Real-world writing tasks can solicit more student buy-in and interest than essay assignments alone.

- Potentially, these tasks are already familiar, drawing from prior knowledge or L1 writing efforts.
- Students may have a greater connection, or a personal one, to the writing task topic/content.

A teacher-assigned real-world writing task may meet course objectives and outcomes better than student-chosen tasks only.

However, students did attempt, at least in part, to consider how a writing tool could help them better express content (ADJ or Reason clauses, Concession) during writing reflection.

Teacher guidance is necessary to help students connect writing tools to their purpose in use.

FINDINGS 1 OF 2

These anecdotal findings could be measured in future administrations of this project through participant surveys or production.

In general, students may already be more familiar with some real-world writing tasks, but in an EAP class, students still need instruction and practice with language use and application.
Students might choose the same/similar writing tasks repeatedly, but greater confidence was shown during writing reflection, even if language mistakes were present.

Anxiety over ideas within content continued, as students expressed difficulty with ideas, thoughts, or general content, but not language.

At the beginning of the semester, students declared that they did not need grammar instruction, only essay writing.

Now, students are recognizing language needed for accuracy through writing tools, and one student said about language mistakes, “Maybe that’s why I can’t score higher than a 24 on the TOEFL.”

While complexity and/or accuracy did not necessarily increase from the start of the semester, what did increase was:
1. student confidence with language
2. length of student-generated texts.

Future research questions could seek to measure CAF in EAP students and/or perceived fluency increases due to an increase in student confidence.
Changes for better content:

- Prepare real-world writing tasks within units, grouping similar tasks in order to address grammar or writing tools discretely and then contextually later.
- Contextual choices for the whole class (cover letter, review, personal statement, etc.) provide guided class effort in choice making and language use to learn from each other and share in the learning process.
- Students may know the writing tools but not necessarily the reasons for choosing a given tool. Establish and demonstrate reasons for writing tool choices through a guided assignment.

Building the Class or Small Units

Choice-making as a life-skill is regularly done, but when making choices for writing in a foreign language, it is a skill that’s learned over time as language develops.

Beginning by identifying and editing can be more helpful when students are just becoming familiar with writing tools.
Greater need for writing and reading practice

- Have students identify targeted writing tools in other forms of real-world writing from authentic sources (Amazon, Twitter, Facebook, blogs, etc.)
- Then have the students revise and edit those writing samples, before working on their own.
- You may need to guide students through reading these authentic texts for meaning.
- If the reasons in the text aren’t clear, have the students revise the text for clarity using appropriate writing tools and then explain their choices.
- Break-out lessons on idioms, modals, phrasal verbs, or prepositions (or other lessons) may be needed for students to continue to build their vocabulary and grammar knowledge.

In the future, I’ll consider different lessons for class to strengthen content:
- Idioms
- Opinions
- Advice
- Responding to Others’ Opinions or Advice