# GROWING STUDENTS’ WRITING FLUENCY USING FREE WRITING ACTIVITY

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# ABSTRACT

For most EFL students especially novice writers, writing English was hard to do. They were often stuck with a lot of obstacles. The obstacles were not only about students’ knowledge in linguistic elements, such as grammar, structure, vocabulary, spelling, punctuation, capitalization but also about students’ attitudes toward writing. Writing was not easy and not fun for students. To solve this hardship, students required a particular activity which helped them improve their writing ability and change their attitudes. Free writing was the activity chosen to overcome this case. It was done in series over five times with time limit, and after that students did reflection on their five results of free writing. The purpose of this study was to examine the beneficial effects of using free writing activity toward students’ writing fluency and writing ability. The method used in this study was descriptive qualitative. This method described how effective free writing activity on students’ writing. Data were taken from students’ free writing samples as primary data, and the reflection as the secondary data. There were 75 free writing samples and 60 reflection samples. This study revealed that free writing made students get used to writing, improve linguistic elements, and be confident and comfortable in writing. Finally free writing gave beneficial effects for learners, it could make learners write more, write easier and write better.

**Keywords**: *Free writing, reflection, writing fluency, writing ability*

# INTRODUCTION

Writing was the most impossible short distance in the history of humanity. The saying described that how difficult writing was. Everything that we wanted to write was in our head, we just had to transfer it from our brain to paper or computer with the distance was only a couple centimeters, but it was so hard to do. Students experienced obstacles in writing: they were confused to start to write, they focused on some linguistic elements, such as grammar, structure, spelling, vocabulary, or the others, and they had negative attitudes toward writing. It happened to most students as novice writers. This difficulty needed to be solved since writing skill was very important for students, especially college students. They would be assigned to make reports, do assignments, or complete paper as their final project to finish their study.

What should I write? That was the first problem that most students experienced when they were asked to write. Mostly students chose a topic that they did not have knowledge about it or they were not interested in the topic. So that they had difficulties to develop their writing. It was necessary for them to know how to choose a topic. Students had to know that selecting topic was important to make their writing easy to develop. The second problem was about linguistic elements, it was the biggest problem for students. The elements of grammar, structure, vocabulary, spelling, punctuation, capitalization often made students stick in writing. They were not confident with their writing whether it was right or wrong. They were worried of making mistakes. The last problem was they had perspective that writing was not easy and not fun.

All the problems required utmost attention from the researcher. She thought that she needed a method or technique which could help students overcome their problem. Gerlach & Ely (1980, p. 187) said that “the effective teacher has a multitude of techniques and must be prepared to select the ones which will be most efficient in leading the learner to desire terminal behavior”. Researcher as a lecturer had role and responsibility to seek and implemented a technique that facilitated her students to understand and master the subject, and also be able to complete the study.

Free writing was a method chosen to grow students’ writing fluency. It has been implemented since a long time ago, and was designed to help student fluent in writing. It was done in series and with time limit. Elbow (1998) mentioned that “the best way to improve our writing is to do free writing exercises routinely” (as cited in Nurfiryalianti, 2014, p. 2). Any activities done regularly would make the doers be accustomed to it, like writing.

Observing the problems faced by students in writing and the existence of a technique called free writing, the researcher was interested in conducting a research with the title: “Growing Students’ Writing Fluency Using Free Writing Activity”.

Free writing is an effective way to help students fluent in writing as it is done in series and in specific length of time (ten to fifteen minutes). Students do free writing without stopping and without thinking it is good or bad. This statement was supported by Li (2007, P. 42) “free writing refers to the act of writing quickly for a set time from ten to fifteen minutes, just putting down whatever is in the mind, without pausing and worrying about what words to use, and without going back to modify what has been written”. Free writing is a training process to find an idea as a topic that students can write without worrying about linguistic elements. Hogue (1996, p. 24) stated that “when you free write, you choose a topic, and then you sit down and write whatever sentences come into your mind about the topic, don’t worry about grammar, spelling, or punctuation, and don’t worry about putting the ideas in order”. Free writing was done to make students fluent in writing. They were trained to be spontaneous and encourage to explore their writing in their comfort with the matter they chose. The results of their free writing were not corrected and graded. Bellanof et al. (1991) described “the non- stopping and non-edit act of free writing facilitates the process of putting thoughts into words in a spontaneous way, yet some students might tend to write with their habitual pauses and corrections and not feel comfortable about writing without stops and corrections” (as cited in Li, 2007, p. 50).

The process of practice free writing must be instructed by clear procedure. Lecturer have to set the guidance how to do it. Based on what Brown’s explanation (2001:350), you may follow these steps of how to make a free writing:

1. From your list of changes, choose one idea that interested you.
2. Write the idea at the top of a clean sheet of paper.
3. For ten minutes, write about this topic without stopping. This means that you should be writing something constantly.
   1. Write down everything that comes to your mind.
   2. Do not judge your ideas.
   3. Do not worry about your spelling and grammar.
   4. If you run out of things to say, continue writing whatever comes to your mind.

According several previous researchers, free writing has a lot of good effects:

1. Krashen (1984, p. 29) praises the technique and notes that the most remarkable discovery of this approach has been that in tree writing, persons who think they have no skills frequently find themselves exploring major strategies of writing (as cited in Thomas, 1989, p. 10). Free writing helps students to write easier as they know how to write.
2. Collin (1990) says a vehicle for student self-expression and discovery (as cited in Li, 2007, p. 42). Free writing helps students to show their thought or idea and their interests.
3. Clarkson (2009) explains several advantages of free writing technique (as cited in Nurfiryalianty et al, 2014, p. 4):
   1. It makes you more comfortable about writing.
   2. It helps you get around your inner critic, the one telling you cannot write.
   3. It helps release inner anxiety.
   4. It helps you discover topics to write about.
   5. It helps you improve your formal writing.
   6. It is fun.

Free writing changes students’ attitudes in writing, they become confident, enjoy and have fun with writing. Moreover, students realize their strengths and weaknesses in writing, especially in their writing skills, they know that they are bad at grammar, vocabulary, spelling, mechanics, and others. Knowing their weaknesses, they tried to improve it for the next writings.

As known that a lot of students were still confused how to start to write and what they have to write. To overcome the obstacles faced by them, they required repetitive writing practice to make them get used to writing and do it fast. According to Brand and Brand (2006, p 2), the general meaning of fluency is defined as completing an activity or a task effortlessly so that students’ complete activities or tasks “automatically, fluidly, rapidly, quickly, and accurately” (as cited in Hwang, 2010, p.101). Regardless the convention of English writing made students not focus on English writing elements, they were pushed to write what they wanted to write or express what they want to. As the first step to grow students’ habit in writing, free writing was really helpful and useful to be applied in class.

# METHOD

**Participants**

The free writing was composed by undergraduate students at Telkom University. The participants were 15 students of Telecommunication Engineering Faculty, and they were first year undergraduates. They came from non-English faculty and they have different abilities and interests in English, especially in writing.

# Instruments

The data were obtained by giving task and homework. The primary data were given as classwork tasks for five weeks, and secondary data were given as homework. The researcher collected the data after students completed their semester. The data were assigned as one of final score components. There were two data collected:

1. The primary data were the samples of free writing results. There were 75 samples which were completed by 15 participants. Each participant collected 5 samples
2. The secondary data were samples of reflection toward the free writing results. There were 60 samples which were taken from 15 leaners. Each learner collected 4 samples.

# Procedures

Free writing was conducted in English writing class. Students did free writing at the beginning of class with specific length of time, and it was done in series for five weeks. The lecturer gave procedure before the students started to do free writing. The procedures were as follows:

* 1. Do on a sheet of paper.
  2. Do in ten minutes. Lecturer set a timer. Start and stop writing when the timer was sounded.
  3. Write about any topics. Find topics that are interesting for students, such as hobby, interest, memorable experience, activities, surrounding environment.
  4. Write without stopping and do not worry about grammar, structure, spelling, or mechanics.

After free writing was completed over five times, students were asked to save each paper of the free writings, and pushed them to give personal feedback on them, then called reflection. The reflection was done as homework. Students gave evaluation for each free writing. Free writing 1 was evaluated and then compared with free writing 2; free writing 2 was evaluated, and then compared with free writing 3; free writing 3 was evaluated, and then compared with free writing 4; free writing 4 was evaluated, and then compared with free writing 5. From the reflections, students knew their progress and their weaknesses that needed to be improved.

**Data Analysis**

Table 1. Series of Free Writing

|  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Participants | Number of Words | | | | |
| FW 1 | FW 2 | FW 3 | FW 4 | FW 5 |
| Student 1 | 60 | 192 ↑ | 204 ↑ | 204 ↑ | 252 ↑ |
| Student 2 | 72 | 180 ↑ | 168 ↓ | 180 ↑ | 96 ↓ |
| Student 3 | 60 | 108 ↑ | 84 ↓ | 96 ↑ | 168 ↑ |
| Student 4 | 132 | 192 ↑ | 156 ↓ | 156 | 216 ↑ |
| Student 5 | 156 | 228 ↑ | 216 ↓ | 264 ↑ | 269 ↑ |
| Student 6 | 144 | 132 ↓ | 96 ↓ | 144 ↑ | 168 ↑ |
| Student 7 | 72 | 75 ↑ | 84 ↑ | 156 ↑ | 132 ↓ |
| Student 8 | 120 | 180 ↑ | 168 ↓ | 192 ↑ | 168 ↓ |
| Student 9 | 120 | 132 ↑ | 108 ↓ | 72 ↓ | 156 ↑ |
| Student 10 | 120 | 108 ↓ | 132 ↑ | 108 ↓ | 180 ↑ |
| Student 11 | 72 | 120 ↑ | 144 ↑ | 108 ↓ | 110 ↑ |
| Student 12 | 252 | 216 ↓ | 144 ↓ | 180 ↑ | 168 ↓ |
| Student 13 | 96 | 132 ↑ | 108 ↓ | 110 ↑ | 112 ↑ |
| Student 14 | 96 | 108 ↑ | 156 ↑ | 120 ↓ | 132 ↑ |
| Student 15 | 84 | 108 ↑ | 144 ↑ | 168 ↑ | 156 ↓ |

Based on the data collected, and then analyzed, it can be identified the effect of using free writing. The table above described as follows:

* Comparing Free Writing (FW) 1 with FW 2, in FW 2 there is 73% or 11 out of 15 participants who had increase in the number of words written. Eleven students in FW 2 wrote more, and 4 students in FW 1 wrote less.
* Comparing FW 2 with FW 3, in FW 3 there is 40% or 6 out of 15 participants who had increase in the number of words written. Six students in FW 3 wrote less, and 9 students in FW 2 wrote less.
* Comparing FW 3 with FW 4, in FW 4 there is 60% or 9 out of 15 participants who had increased in the number of words written. Nine students in FW 4 wrote more, and nine students in FW 3 wrote less.
* Comparing FW 4 with FW 5, in FW 5 there is 67% or 10 out of 15 participants who had increase in the number of words written. Ten students in FW 5 wrote more, and five students in FW 4 wrote less.

From the data analyzed above that in four series more students were able to increase the number of words in their writing with some reasons, the reasons were obtained from students’ reflection:

1. Students were ready with the topic. The topic chosen was interesting for them, so that it was easy to develop.
2. Students become more comfortable with the activity as they have known what they intended to do.

Students felt more confident after several times to do the activity. In one series, the data show that more students were not able to increase the number of words written in their writing because of some reasons:

1. Students were more focus on grammar, structure, and other linguistic elements.
2. Students were stuck by difficult words; they did not know the English of the words.
3. Students were run out of time.

Students were confused what to write as they had no much knowledge about the topic.

Table 2. Student Reflection

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Participants | Progress | Need to be Improved |
| Student 1 | I could write more sentences with better grammar and  structure. I could express my emotion. | - |
| Student 2 | The number of sentences increased. My vocabulary added. | - |
| Student 3 | I was amazed how much I improved my ability in writing. | I did mistakes in grammar. |
| Student 4 | The number of words increased. | I found some difficult words. |
| Student 5 | The number of words increased. I wrote some new vocabulary. Writing became more attractive. | - |
| Student 6 | I became more confident in writing. Writing becomes easier. The number of words  increased. | I made mistakes in grammar. |
| Student 7 | My writing ability improved. I could arrange words into coherent sentence. I could add my vocabulary. | I had difficulty in diction and grammar. |
| Student 8 | I could write more words. | I needed to correct my grammar. |
| Student 9 | I could write more words as I  chose interesting topic. | I needed to add my vocabulary. |
| Student 10 | I wrote more words with  better grammar. | - |
| Student 11 | I wrote more. I felt more  comfortable. | I had bad grammar. |
| Student 12 | I could write more. I could use complex sentences. | I made mistakes in spelling, using verbs, articles, and prepositions. |
| Student 13 | I wrote more words with good structure. | I had difficulty in finding idea. |
| Student 14 | Writing was easier. I could write more. | - |
| Student 15 | I learned a lot about writing. | - |

According to the secondary data which were collected, and then analyzed, most students realized that they had progress in their writing fluency.

* There are 80% or 12 out of 15 participants described that they had progress in number of words written. After a series of free writing activity, students realized that they could increase their writing ability.
* There are 33% or 5 out of 15 participants described that they had progress in writing with better grammar. After a series of free writing activity, students realized they were able to write with better grammar.
* There are 30% or 4 out of 15 participants described that they had changed their attitudes toward writing. After a series of free writing activity, students had new perspective toward writing, they became more confident and comfortable in writing, and they thought writing was easy.
* There are 20% or 3 out of 15 participants described that they had progress in adding vocabulary.
* There are 13% or 2 out of 15 participants mentioned that they had progress in writing ability.

Besides having progress in writing fluency, based on the reflection it could be described that students realized that they needed some improvement in finding and choosing idea or topic to write, and in some linguistic elements, especially grammar, vocabulary and spelling.

# FINDING AND DISCUSSION

**Research Question 1:**

***How could free writing activity be effective to grow students’ writing fluency?***

Based on the primary data and secondary data analyzed, it was found that 75% students had progress in their writing fluency. In five series of free writing, the students were able to write more than a hundred words in ten minutes, and they could increase the number of words written in their essay in the series. In the secondary data it was mentioned that 80% of students realized that they did progress in their writing ability, as they could write better, and became more confident and comfortable doing writing. Considering the data analysis above it identified that free writing could be implemented to grow students’ writing fluency and it was effective. The writing fluency happened in progress which grew gradually, at the first free writing, students wrote a few number of words, but then they increased the numbers of words they wrote in the next free writings. Writing as a skill required a practice to be mastered. The practice was not done once but it must be done repeatedly. Therefore, students found a lot of things from the process of writing, and they were used to it.

# Research Question 2:

***What are the beneficial effects of using free writing with the reflection toward students’ writing ability?***

Free writing was not only effective to grow students’ writing fluency, but it also had positive effects on students’ writing ability and students’ attitude toward writing. According to reflection that had been mentioned by students in evaluating their own writings. Free writing had beneficial effects on students’ writing, they were as follows:

* It helped students find the things that needed to be improved, such as grammar, structure, spelling, and mechanics. So that, students would be better in their next writing.
* It changed students’ perspective about writing. At the first they thought that writing was difficult and confusing, but then after practicing free writing in series they changed their opinion and said that writing was easy and fun to do.
* It made students be used to writing, and then they became confident and comfortable in writing.

# CONCLUSION

When the lecturer knew that students had difficulties in writing, she had responsibility to find a method that could facilitate students to overcome their difficulties. Free writing is a method designed to help students fluent in writing. After analyzing the data collected, it can be concluded that free writing was effective to grow students’ writing fluency. Since students did free writing without worrying about grammar, structure, spelling, and mechanics, they wrote comfortably and confidently. Students were pushed to write what they were thinking and wanted to express in their writing automatically and rapidly. After five series doing free writing, they felt the progress in the words written. They were able to write more in each process of free writing.

Moreover, free writing revealed other positive effects toward students’ writing ability and students’ attitude toward writing. Based on the reflection done by students on their own writing process. It could be concluded that students found their weaknesses in grammar, structure, spelling, vocabulary, and mechanics. Therefore, they learned to improve the mistakes, so they would not happen again in their next writing. Another effect of free writing was changing students’ perspective toward writing. Students became confident in writing, and they were no longer thinking that writing was hard to do, but it was interesting to do. The more you write, the easier it will be, and the better you will get.

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