For my parents:
    Geoffrey and Norma Gafner

AND

In loving memory of my grandparents:
    Otto & Marjorie Gafner
    Henry & Iva Tredrea
RESPONDING TO STUDENT WRITING: STRATEGIES FOR A DISTANCE-TEACHING CONTEXT

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Summary

*Responding to Student Writing: Strategies for a Distance-Teaching Context*

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Responding to Student Writing: Strategies for a Distance-Teaching Context identifies viable response techniques for a unique discourse community. An overview of paradigmatic shifts in writing and reading theory, 'frameworks of response' developed to classify response statements for research purposes, and an overview of research in the field provide the theoretical basis for the evaluation of the empirical study.

The research comprises a three-fold exploration of the response strategies adopted by Unisa lecturers to the writing of Practical English (PEN100-3) students. In the first phase the focus falls on the effect of intervention on the students' revised drafts of four divergent marking strategies - coded correction, minimal marking, taped response and self assessment. All the experimental strategies tested result in statistically-significant improvement levels in the revised draft. The benefits of self assessment and rewriting, even without tutorial intervention, were demonstrated. The study is unique by virtue of its distance-teaching context, its sample size of 1750 and in the high significance levels achieved.

The second phase of the research consisted of a questionnaire that determined 2640 students' expectations with respect to marking, the value of commentary, their perceptions of markers' roles and their opinions of the experimental strategies tested. Their responses were also correlated with their final Practical English examination results.
The third phase examined tutorial response. The framework of response, developed for the purpose, revealed that present response strategies represent a regression to the traditional product-orientated approach to writing that contradicts the cognitive and rhetorical axiological basis of the course. There is thus a disjunction between the teaching and theoretical practices. The final chapter bridges this gap by examining issues of audience, transparency, ownership, timing of intervention and training. The researcher believes that she has successfully identified practical and innovative strategies that assist lecturers in a distance-teaching context to break away from old response blueprints.
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Chapter One

Introduction

A response is action, motivated and consequential, with explicit and implicit purposes, on both the speaker's and the listener's parts. Responses to student texts exist not simply on the page or in the air but in the context of people, purposes and places. They are attempts to discover what will persuade, and ... what persuades are strategies for coping and equipment for living (Warnock 1989:63).

This thesis seeks to explore and demystify the specific reading / writing context in which lecturers 'mark' and respond to student scripts and intends to demonstrate that the advances in writing theory are not reflected in the response strategies markers adopt. By means of close examination of the manner in which lecturers respond to the writing of students registered for the Practical English course (PEN100-3) at University of South Africa (hereafter Unisa), a distance-teaching institution, the author intends to demonstrate that response strategies do not provide 'strategies for coping' but rather promote a view of writing that is restrictive and encourages students to continue with practices associated with poor writers. An overview of research will demonstrate that this problem is not confined to Unisa, although it is exacerbated in the distance-teaching context.

All writing is not only grounded in the contexts of situations and cultures but is defined by them. Thus responses are not so much a means of telling the truth about the text, but are a way of reacting 'to a situation, to questions posed not only by the individual student but also by the context – of the class, the situation, and the culture' (Warnock 1989:63). In encountering student texts, lecturers meet students, themselves, and contexts, their own and those of students (ibid.). 'Every response is an action, motivated and consequential – and [lecturers] are responsible for the "why's" and "wherefore's" of what [they] do with words' (ibid.). Thus when lecturers respond, they 'are being done unto [not only] by language' (ibid.) but also by their theoretical assumptions. As Van Heerden so correctly observes, all lecturers have ideological beliefs that they consciously or unconsciously transmit and these impact on student behaviour (1993:302). In this regard, it is possible for a discrepancy to exist between the lecturers' expressed rhetorical axiology\(^1\) and the paradigmatic emphasis inherent in the response style.

\(^1\) Axiology, a term introduced in 1902 by the French philosopher, Paul Lapie (in Fulkerson 1990:411), can be defined as a value theory.
Cicero claimed that 'the authority of those who teach is often an obstacle to those who want to learn' (in Winterowd 1989:32). With this warning in mind, the thesis examines the power imbalances that disadvantage students each time lecturers respond to their writing. This thesis contends that the power imbalance is further distorted in the unique context that is the focus of this study. The majority of Practical English students are studying English as an additional language. They are the products of Apartheid schooling who thus have an inadequate educational background, and can be described as silenced, 'language clams' (Van Heerden 1993:291) who are reluctant to voice opinions, under-prepared and disadvantaged. The fact that

2 The home languages of the students, as indicated in the questionnaire, are shown in the following table:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Language</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>English</td>
<td>144</td>
<td>5.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Afrikaans</td>
<td>217</td>
<td>8.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Foreign</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>1.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ndebele</td>
<td>65</td>
<td>2.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>North Sotho</td>
<td>517</td>
<td>19.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shona</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>0.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South Sotho</td>
<td>101</td>
<td>3.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Swati</td>
<td>121</td>
<td>4.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tsonga</td>
<td>176</td>
<td>6.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tswana</td>
<td>292</td>
<td>11.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Venda</td>
<td>135</td>
<td>5.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Xhosa</td>
<td>295</td>
<td>11.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Zulu</td>
<td>484</td>
<td>18.3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

These figures reveal the truly multi-cultural nature of the Practical English student body. Under Apartheid a false black / white dichotomy was promoted which fostered the illusion of the black students as a uniform group. In reality, although the largest groups are Northern Sotho- or Zulu-speaking students (each comprising just under a fifth of the student body), there are no fewer than ten distinct and diverse African languages and cultures represented in Practical English. These statistics reinforce the wisdom of Hedgcock & Lefkowitz's warning that researchers should 'avoid assumptions that the population of L2 writers is in any way homogeneous' (1994:142).

The Apartheid regime was in force in South Africa from 1948 to 1994. The hated Bantu Education Act, introduced by Verwoerd, has the unique distinction of underpinning the only education system in the world with the expressed aim of disadvantaging its citizens and 'educating' them to become submissive manual labourers. As the research conducted for this thesis was undertaken in 1995, the majority of the students tested completed their entire schooling under this jurisdiction.
these students are attempting to redress this imbalance in a distance-teaching context with minimal contact with both lecturers and other students, further handicaps them. The situation is compounded by the fact that a small minority of students (5.5% in this course) are proficient first-language (L1) English speakers. Because of the reduced contact opportunities that exist in the distance-teaching context, it is imperative that the few opportunities lecturers have to respond to student writing from both language groups are utilised as fully as possible.

1. Aims

Research studies have consistently demonstrated the limitations of response strategies that concentrate on the textual to the detriment of ideational or interpersonal interaction, and have shown that tutorial intervention is primarily evaluative in emphasis. Research indicates that this approach has minimal impact on proficiency and that emphasis on form does not deliver improved proficiency commensurate with the effort involved in providing the feedback. Yet, despite these repeated warnings from researchers, response strategies remain largely unchanged. To compound the problem, while the past four decades have seen major advances in writing theory, response strategies have remained grounded in a formalist paradigm.

The aims of this thesis are

• to provide an overview of the paradigmatic shifts in writing research;
• to evaluate research on the effect of tutorial intervention in student writing;
• to determine the relative effectiveness of four experimental marking strategies;
• to elicit student opinion by means of a questionnaire;
• to develop a taxonomy to classify tutorial commentary;

4 Throughout the thesis the abbreviations L1 and L2 will be used to illustrate the distinction between people for whom English is a home language or an additional language. The term L2 is used, although it is acknowledged that the majority of students speak many languages and thus English is an additional rather than a second language. The author is fully aware that these terms are simplifications that are ill-equipped to describe the complexity of language situations. The Indian students, for example, who often speak a distinct variety of English, also suffered under the Apartheid regime. The division into proficient L1 and less able L2 students also masks the fact that reading and writing problems are not only a L2 phenomenon. In addition, some L2 speakers are highly proficient speakers of English.

5 The research relating to response strategies is outlined in Chapter Three of this thesis.

6 The theoretical advances relating to writing are discussed in Chapter Two.
to use this taxonomy to evaluate the nature of the global commentary on a set assignment and to determine the markers' present axiological orientations;

- to develop a marking grid and guidelines for responding to student writing that overcome the limitations that research has demonstrated and that bring marking in line with recent writing theory.

The overall aim is to provide lecturers with scientifically-verifiable information about effective response strategies.

2. Statement of the Problem

Van Heerden explains that because lecturer intervention usually takes place after writers have finished writing, 'response literally is a "closed book" affair. Writers hand in closed books; their writing is commented on and assessed in their absence; teachers return ... closed books' (1992:60). This is a particularly apt description of the marking that usually takes place at Unisa. Significant sums of money are spent annually on employing both internal and external markers who respond to the students' assignments. Yet there is little research to determine the degree to which students benefit from tutorial intervention. This thesis is an attempt to redress this problem. By requiring students to resubmit a paragraph, which they have revised in accordance with a specific marking strategy, alternative marking methods can be statistically evaluated to determine their relative effectiveness. The impact on the text and both the students' and markers' opinions have to be carefully evaluated before any conclusion can be reached about the effectiveness of tutorial intervention.

3. Hypotheses

This thesis questions the effectiveness of the marking approach adopted in Practical English and in the process tests the following hypotheses:

- **Response to student writing can have a positive influence on writing.**

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7 In 1995 the external marking panel for Practical English evaluated 15,817 assignment scripts. At that stage, they were paid R4 per script which comes to a total of R63,268. In addition, 3,119 scripts were marked by full-time lecturers. The cost of their time should also be factored into this sum.
Revision, without any tutorial intervention, will have a positive influence on writing. Some response strategies are more likely to produce a positive effect than others. Some strategies are more suited to a distance-teaching context than others.

These hypotheses are expanded in Chapter 4, in the section entitled 'Hypotheses Tested'.

There is an additional hypothesis that probes the discrepancy that the author believes exists between the course material and the evaluation strategies adopted. The writing sections of the workbooks given to Practical English students are based on a process approach to writing and are rhetorical in approach, involving both writers and readers in the creation of meaning with a delayed emphasis on form. These guides are evidence of the cognitive and rhetorical axiological orientation of the course designers. The thesis aims to prove that, in contrast to the sound course material, the response strategies adopted by Practical English markers represent a regression to the traditional, product-orientated approach to writing. As a result, an additional hypothesis is formulated as follows:

- There is a marked discrepancy between the teaching and evaluative practices in the Practical English course.

4. Field

The field of study is response to second-language student writing with the emphasis falling on strategies that can be utilised in the distance-teaching context in a course which has adopted a Communicative Approach in its teaching of writing.

4.1 The Role of Writing

Writing is an invaluable tool for education, both in terms of promoting learning and in assisting students to come to grips with new material. It provides an opportunity to reinforce language learning, invites students to be adventurous with language and develops strategic competence. Writing fosters audience awareness, teaches students to evaluate material critically, promotes the integration of old and new information, is a means of power, a way to understand complex ideas and a route to self-discovery (Kilfoil & Van der Walt 1997:250). White correctly asserts
that 'if we accept the profound value of writing and its many uses, responding to writing becomes extraordinarily complex, calling for some special thoughtfulness on the instructor's part' (1995:125). It is important to remember that response to writing in the form of collaboration between the writer and someone who is more experienced is an ever-present need, regardless of the level of the student.

4.2 The Communicative Approach

Kilfoil & Van der Walt (1997) explain that although communication has been the desired product of many methods, it was only with the advent of the Communicative Approach that communication became part of the process of language teaching and learning. They explain that the 'purpose of learning English as a language of wider communication should not be to learn to communicate, but to learn while communicating' (1997:12). The aim is to promote communicative competence, a term defined by Canale & Swain as 'the underlying systems of knowledge and skill required for communication [that are] an essential part of actual communication ... reflected only indirectly, and sometimes imperfectly' (Canale 1983:5) in communication. According to Canale, there are four types of communicative competence, each of which is necessary for successful communication:

- Linguistic or grammatical competence implies mastery of the verbal and non-verbal language code. The aim is to promote accuracy. With respect to grammar, the Communicative Approach has brought about a movement away from excessive drilling, the use of transformation or substitution exercises, and of courses organised on the basis of grammar alone (Kilfoil & Van der Walt 1997:14).

- Discourse competence is defined by Canale as the ability 'to combine grammatical forms and meanings to achieve a unified spoken or written text in different genres' (1983:9). Here coherence in meaning and cohesion of form are taught. The emphasis is on what happens above the level of the sentence.

- Strategic competence involves the teaching of strategies that assist the learner to compensate for a breakdown in communication as result of momentary failure to recall a word or insufficient linguistic competence.

- Sociolinguistic competence involves the sociocultural rules of discourse. The inclusion of this aspect is based on the belief that language teaching is concerned with the
understanding and interpretation of cultural meaning. This goes beyond linguistic or grammatical competence, which demands that students be able to formulate grammatically correct sentences. Students are also required to know when, where and to whom it is fitting to address their sentences. In essence, students need to develop sociolinguistic competence, which focuses on the suitability of utterances for various contexts. Here the students’ ability to communicate appropriately in a given context is highlighted.

The emphasis on communication has brought about a shift in focus that can be traced back to Krashen’s distinction between conscious language learning and language acquisition, the unconscious absorption of a language that results from exposure to the language and using the language for real communicative purposes. The move away from formal learning has significant implications for response strategies. Kilfoil & Van der Walt explain:

activities that would hinder acquisition would be those that force learners to focus on the way in which they say things, rather than on what they are saying. In communicative terms this would be a focus on form rather than on meaning ... As soon as the learner concentrates on conveying meaning in an authentic communication situation, she will subconsciously use the rules she has internalized. It is important to realize that probably only the internalized rules will be used (1997:13).

Kilfoil & Van der Walt acknowledge that both accuracy and fluency are vital and define the terms as follows: 'Accuracy is concerned mainly with grammatical and syntactical correctness while fluency is more concerned with flowing and effective communication above sentence level' (ibid.:74). However, by focusing on accuracy, and grammatical accuracy in particular, the teacher negates the structure of a piece of writing and the fact that the student needs to learn rules of language use that govern pieces of writing above sentence level' (ibid.:253). Brumfit claims that the more advanced the level of the students, the greater the emphasis on fluency should be (in Kilfoil & Van der Walt 1997:76).

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8 Krashen’s distinction can also be expressed in other terms, namely conscious / subconscious, implicit / explicit, automatic / controlled and analysed / unanalysed. It is important to remember that this concept is not unproblematic and that the belief that a learner’s output reflects only what has been acquired subconsciously cannot be proven scientifically.

9 Internalised rules are those that can be used for effective and appropriate communication without conscious thought.
Brown (1987:213), Canale (1983:18-9) and Kilfoil & Van der Walt (1997:12-22) define the goals of Communicative Language teaching as follows:

• All components of communicative competence should be taught, the aim being integration between the types of competence.

• The Communicative Approach is based on integration of the receptive skills (reading and listening) and the productive skills (writing and speaking).

• Function is the framework through which form is taught.

• Accuracy is secondary to conveying the message. Alternatively stated, the focus should be on meaning rather than on formal accuracy and thus tasks need to be evaluated not primarily for correct language usage, but rather for their successful completion. In this regard the aims of the Communicative Approach run counter to the facts that students want explicit grammatical tuition and that adults can benefit from grammatical instruction.

• The aim is to utilise the target language in unrehearsed contexts.

• Use should be made of L1 communicative skills.

• A curriculum-wide approach should be adopted with the intention of promoting a natural integration of knowledge about the target language and culture.

• Where possible, authentic material should be used.

• This is a learner-centered approach. Although the lecturer is no longer at the centre of attention, this does not imply an abdication of authority.

• The Communicative Approach requires that students spend time working in pairs or groups.

• Writing is taught as a process starting from the known.

Both the Communicative and the Process Approach present a challenge in the distance-teaching context. The Communicative Approach is founded on faith in the value of communication and it is in this respect that the Practical English course experiences its greatest hardship as the distance-teaching context does not easily allow for student interaction. In addition, the Process Approach requires that students submit multiple drafts at the various stages of development of a document. Practical considerations, such as postal delays and the administration involved in processing vast numbers of scripts, has resulted in a 'one-off' evaluation method that undermines the Process Approach.
4.3 Response Strategies

White distinguishes two general purposes for evaluation. The first serves as an administrative sorting device, designed to make institutions more efficient, accountable and objective. The second form is a more personalised teaching mechanism, a strategy to assist students to learn more effectively (1995:vi). This thesis is concerned primarily with the latter form of evaluation, in which response is a means to promote learning. This area of responding to student writing is indeed, as White proclaims, 'a sorely neglected matter' (ibid.:viii).

Response, as defined in this thesis, is not restrictive but includes all reactions to writing, written and oral, formal and informal, to writing at the various stages from the draft to the final polishing for publication, by all sources – teacher, peer and even electronic response by means of computer. A response is a reaction evoked by the students' writing that can include codes, sentence fragments, taped responses and sustained pieces of writing. It can take the form of open or closed questions, statements and directives. It ranges from criticism to praise and encodes roles for both student and lecturer. Response can be direct, in the shape of feedback to a particular piece of writing, or indirect, in the form of group discussion of a piece of writing or generalised writing instruction. Response can be explicit or implicit. Freedman explains that whereas 'directness has to do with who the intended audience for the response is; explicitness has to do with how the response is given' (1984:7). Response evokes various roles, such as gatekeeper, diagnostician, common reader, proofreader and judge, each of which has pedagogical implications in addition to affecting the power relations.

Although lecturers are sometimes hesitant to inform students where they stand in terms of standards, as Wiggins indicates, whether they are on or off track is a matter of fact. He asks, 'without such feedback, how will the less able become more able?' (Wiggins 1993:202). Response should thus contain 'information that provides the performer with direct, usable insights into current performance, based on tangible differences between current performance and hoped-for performance' (ibid.:182). It is the lecturers' duty to provide evidence that confirms or disconfirms the accuracy of the students' actions. In addition to this objective of allowing the student to determine how well he or she is doing, response to student writing aims at
• helping the learner consciously to identify and solve writing difficulties;
• enabling the student to take any corrective action that is necessary to improve his or her writing;
• stimulating practice in the sense that students must apply the response to the revised work;
• allowing for transfer of internalised problem-solving skills to other writing;
• developing metacognitive skills;
• promoting the independence of the learner;
• increasing motivation, reducing anxiety, promoting self-esteem, encouraging risk-taking, fostering tolerance of ambiguity and showing empathy, thereby actively reinforcing the affective factors associated with language learning;
• enabling the learner to internalise the gist of the commentary thereby raising student judgement and promoting self-evaluation skills;
• modelling effective reading strategies that assist the learner to become a successful critical reader of his or her own writing;
• providing models of expert writing;
• promoting learning. Response should never be restricted to evaluation, but should strive to be part of the teaching program.

Response is feedback or reaction to writing that has been produced. Response should both model and promote internal or self-response, a vital aspect that leads to revision. Revision has a social dimension in that it is part of the teaching-learning interaction. In this regard, it involves power relations and prescribes various roles for the participants. Because learning takes place through interaction, it is vital that response is collaborative. Ideally this interaction should resemble a conversation, a teaching-learning dialogue. In the distance-teaching context the response to student writing is frequently the only form of interaction that takes place between the two parties.

Response is only as effective as the students' ability to grasp what has been conveyed, internalise the knowledge, and use it constructively in the learning process. In short, in Freedman's words, 'for response or evaluation to lead to learning, they [sic] must lead to practice and they [sic] must set up a learning interaction that leads to transfer' (1984:8). Collaboration must take place within the learner's zone of proximal development, a term that Vygotsky defines as 'the distance
between the actual developmental level as determined by independent problem solving and the level of potential development as determined through problem solving under adult guidance or in collaboration with more capable peers' (in Freedman 1987:7). Ideally the intervention must take place at a level just above the present developmental level of the student. Thus, to be effective, response needs to be both collaborative and within the writer's developmental ability, the aim being to foster independence. It needs to involve both a responder and an active recipient of that response so that he or she attends to the response, understands it, and is able to apply the learning constructively to future writing.

The field is thus response strategies to L2 student writing that are in line with a Communicative Approach to teaching and are viable in a distance-teaching context.

5. The Discourse Community: Unisa's Practical English Course

Fish explains that in the writing context the discourse community is 'the source of texts, facts, authors, and intentions ... the entities that were once seen as competing for the right to constrain interpretation (text, reader, author) are now all seen to be the products of interpretation' (in Winterowd 1989:22). The thesis examines how the academic discourse community defines the participants in this specific rhetorical situation – the lecturer / reader, herself a graduate of the academic discourse community, and the student / writer, a neophyte seeking entry into the discourse community, in this case a first-year Practical English student registered at Unisa.

In 1995, the year in which the study was conducted, the statistics for the course were as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Students enrolled</th>
<th>5,784</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Admitted to the examination</td>
<td>5,648</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wrote the examination</td>
<td>5,432</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Passed the course</td>
<td>3,776</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of assignments marked</td>
<td>18,936</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1: Statistics for Practical English in 1995
These statistics reveal that 65.3% of the students who enrolled passed. Alternatively calculated, 69.5% of the students who wrote the examination achieved success. This high promotion rate was achieved despite the fact that, on average, students received tutorial feedback on only three assignments.

The aims of the Practical English Course are to promote reading, writing and thinking skills in English, to provide redress for previously disadvantaged groups forced to use English as a medium of instruction and to facilitate access to the academic discourse community. In the process, the course designers hope to challenge restrictive attitudes towards teaching and learning, to build student confidence, to develop critical thinking skills in order to foster independent thought and to promote communicative competence. The intention is to advance both subconscious acquisition by encouraging students to use English as frequently as possible and to facilitate conscious learning of linguistic forms. Practical English is a language rather than a composition writing course. Writing is taught as a language skill and as part of a writing proficiency course.

As Forrest & Winberg (1993:350-1) indicate, university study demands that students be competent readers, critical thinkers with skills in comparing, contrasting, classifying, abstracting and applying concepts, who are able to argue rationally and deal with abstractions. Lecturers expect well-written, grammatically correct assignments and demand students who are able to read academic texts in various ways (skimming, scanning, intensive reading), are competent to follow an argument and to distinguish between fact and opinion.

In 1995 Practical English students received two Workbooks, which adopted a skills-based approach and contained practice sessions and answers to enable the student to study in isolation. The main sections were grammar, reading, writing, and business communication. Although the starting point was the most elementary level, comprising a lesson on basic sentence construction, the course covered each aspect identified by Forrest & Winberg (1993) as the basic requirements.

In 1998 the Practical English course was extensively revised. The course shifted towards an English for Specific Purposes approach. The revised course contains a compulsory language, reading and writing module, followed by a choice between modules entitled English Communication for University, English Communication for Literature, English Communication for Education, English Communication for Law and English Communication for Business.
for entry to the academic discourse community. The Practical English course was specifically
designed to bridge the gap between the level required for university study and the learners'
generally inadequate cognitive, language and study skills.

The writing section of the course promoted the view of writing as a process. The sequencing was
from content to form, with the explicit initial instruction being to 'switch off your editor ... to
give the creative part of your brain a chance to come up with original insights and ideas'
(Goedhals et al. 1993: Workbook 2:4). This was emphasised by means of the following
illustration designed to represent the conflict between the dominant editorial function and the
more submissive creative element:

![Conflict between editorial and creative functions](image)

(Goedhals et al. 1993: Workbook 2:5)

A process approach was adopted, beginning with a study unit entitled 'Getting ideas' that
included the following techniques:

- Freewriting, described as a method that helps to "unblock" your pen and to get your
  ideas flowing' (ibid.:Workbook 2:3).
- Clustering, defined as writing down 'any ideas, words, or phrases that come into your
  mind in association with the topic' (ibid.:7).
- Crazy contrasts, explained as a 'questioning technique ... [that] involves taking ordinary,
everyday objects, and comparing / contrasting them to your topic' (ibid.:8).
• Title fights, 'an invention strategy which helps you to make the best possible argument for your case' (ibid.:11).

• Audience questionnaire, designed to assist the student to 'think about your audience. Who is going to be reading your essay?' (ibid.:15).

Writing was presented as an activity that requires cognitive skill and as a rhetorical process that demands audience analysis.

The second study unit, entitled 'Organising ideas', provided the first example of the conflict between theory (the rhetorical emphasis) and practice. The negative impression was created of a reader whose primary purpose is evaluative, whose role is that of a judge and whose mood is one of exasperation. Also unfortunate was the disproportionate emphasis the mark received. In this way the theoretically-sound emphasis on the reader as representative of the academic discourse community was undermined:

If you write an essay which is just a jumbled mass of ideas, your reader becomes frustrated and irritated, and will be unable to make sense of your discussion of the topic. If your reader is your lecturer, he / she will come to the end of your essay unsure as to whether you have answered the set question, and very sure indeed that you deserve a failing mark (ibid.:20).

The third study unit, entitled 'Ordering ideas' defined paragraphing and identified the following paragraph patterns and provided lists of 'signpost words' associated with the patterns:

• General to particular (or particular to general) (ibid.:38-40)
• Chronological order (ibid.:40-43)
• Cause and effect (ibid.:43-45)
• Comparison and contrast (ibid.:46-48)

The fourth study unit on writing provided guidelines to revise content, the rationale being that: 'Before you look at how you have written, you must assess what you have written' (ibid.:54).

Practical English students generally have major problems with linguistic competence. Forrest & Winberg describe entry-level learners at the University of the Western Cape as students whose writing contains 'poor sequencing, disjointed paragraphing, chaotic sentences and other deep structural errors generally known as "language problems"' (1993:351). This description also applies to the writing of the majority of Practical English students. In an attempt to redress this problem, the final study unit gave attention to form. It provided checklists for punctuation,
spelling, verbs, and a personal questionnaire, designed to identify a student's most persistent errors. The introduction reads as follows:

A person dressed in clothes covered in food stains and dirt, with perhaps a few missing buttons and unlaced shoes, will make a very poor impression on anyone he tries to have a conversation with. Similarly, an essay that is full of spelling mistakes or other grammatical errors will make a very bad impression on your lecturers. Editing is the process whereby you look for these errors and remove them in order to make your writing as neat and polished as possible (Goedhals et al. 1993: Workbook 2:69).

Apart from the image of the student as an untidy, slovenly outsider promoted in the unfortunate extract quoted above, the workbooks are up-to-date and in line with current writing theory. Assignment 01 of 1995 (Addendum 1), used as a basis for the empirical study in this thesis, was designed to test students' ability to write and to apply the process approach outlined in the writing section of the Workbooks.

What needs to be determined is the effect of the response Practical English lecturers give their students, the degree to which it can be described as 'value-added' in enabling students to improve their writing and promoting independence and positive attitudes towards learning. The primary question is how to make response as effective as possible given the constraints of the distance-teaching context, a teaching situation that is far removed from the ideal – a natural, supportive learning environment. Here the parties are strangers. The people who respond to student writing are either full-time employees of Unisa with security of tenure or external markers. The latter, who are responsible for the bulk of the scripts, work in conditions not dissimilar to those of composition faculty in general in the United States:

Almost always, it is composition that gets taught by those faculty in the least privileged positions. ... the bulk of composition instruction is handled by part-time faculty .... At best neglected, badly paid, with no hope of security, adjunct composition faculty serve their universities with a dedication that derives from their generous concern for their students and the intellectual excitement of the discipline they profess, despite the worst possible circumstances (Schuster 1991:2-3).

The danger is that with the incredible marking load Practical English external markers have and the fact that they are paid per script, Schuster's 'generous concern' and 'intellectual excitement' can easily degenerate into a pragmatic approach to responding to student writing in which the most expedient rather than the most effective strategies are employed.
Ideally these markers should adapt their response strategies to take into account the fact that the majority of the students are learning English as an additional language. They are in the process of gaining control of the linguistic forms of this language but already have knowledge of their L1. This is a mixed blessing in the sense that skills mastered in the L1 context can be transferred to the new writing context, but there is also the possibility of negative transfer. However, the position is complicated in instances where the students can be described as 'semi-linguals' in that literacy was not fully established in their L1 before the L2 was introduced. In these cases there can be little transfer of skills from the L1. To compound the problem, the L2 was also poorly taught so that few skills were established. Many of these are students are fairly advanced in terms of Basic Interpersonal Communicative Skills (BICS) but lack the Cognitive Academic Language Proficiency (CALP) demanded at university level. Extreme care needs to be taken when responding to the writing of these students who, in terms of Schumann's Acculturation Hypothesis (outlined in Leki 1992:19-20), inhabit a very bad learning situation because of the following social variables:

- Years of Apartheid have ensured that the target culture is dominant over the native cultures of the majority of the students.
- Learners have little desire to acculturate, that is to adopt the lifestyle of the target culture while retaining their own culture.
- Members of the target and native cultures do not always intermingle socially. This is a legacy resulting from years when such interaction was legally prohibited.
- The L2 group is larger than the target language group.
- Remnants of past negative attitudes towards the target language group still fester.

To compound the problem, not all Practical English students fall into this category. Some are highly literate and select Practical English rather than a literary course out of choice or because it is a prerequisite for their degree.11

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11 For instance, a language credit is compulsory for LLB students.
Response strategies need to take into account the communicative orientation of the writing component of the course. In terms of this approach, writing is taught as a process rather than as a product. Revision takes place throughout the writing process as students generate ideas, identify their purpose, evaluate, draft and organise their ideas. Revision is viewed as more than proofreading and can be defined as 'a series of strategies designed to reexamine and reevaluate the choices that have created a piece of writing' (Trimmer & McCrimmon in Kilfoil & Van der Walt 1997:261). This reviewing should include both local (proofreading for surface-level problems) and global (above-sentence level) revision, thereby addressing the issues of accuracy and fluency. Another basic principle of the Communicative Approach is that writing is structured for a specific audience. It follows that students should be given the opportunity to write in various registers for a variety of audiences, not simply the lecturer. The challenge, particularly in the distance-teaching context, is to find ways to allow continuous feedback from as wide an audience as possible throughout the writing process.

In Practical English the present response strategy is far from optimal. According to research, the most effective response takes place during the writing process rather than after the writing is completed. Yet, at Unisa, response is primarily a written reaction to a finished piece of writing. This single-draft strategy is what White terms the McPaper approach – a 'fast-food version of writing [that] offers little nutritional value to students and is frequently indigestible for readers' (1995:2). Present tutorial response takes the form of marginal corrections to surface errors indicated by means of a correction code and an overall end comment that should be directed at higher-order problems but that frequently is limited to a vague generalisation or a justification of the grade awarded. In this respect the requirement that commentary should be both substantive and text-specific is frequently overlooked. As the end comment is not prescribed, it is value-laden and contains evidence of the tutor's primary axiological orientation. Far too often this is formalist and thus outdated in approach. The overall aim is frequently evaluative, resulting in commentary that is not as positive and encouraging as it should be. In addition, response is

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12 In contrast, grammar is taught separately. This approach is structural in that it is designed for the audio-lingual method, is grammar-based and linguistically graded. Although course designers are aware that this method contradicts the Communicative Approach adopted throughout the rest of the course, this approach to the teaching of linguistic competence is a direct response to the students' demand for explicit grammar teaching and is the result of the conviction that adults can benefit from direct tuition in this regard.
restricted to intervention from the tutors rather than using a wider audience and, in the process, lifting some of the tutors' marking load. In terms of response strategies in Practical English, little has changed since 1979 when Mitchell & Taylor wrote that research on writing was based on lecturers teaching writing as if it could be judged by universal standards and operating within a written product model in which the lecturer serves as the all-purpose surrogate audience (1979:266).

6. Scope

This thesis is restricted to Unisa's Practical English course and the way the lecturers within the department and the external marking panel respond to student writing. The research focuses on the opposition between theory and practice and assesses the response strategies adopted, bearing in mind student expectations and the teaching obligations that lecturers believe they fulfil when they respond to student writing. The three-fold emphasis on text, writer and reader resulted in three separate studies:

• First, with the emphasis on the text, an experiment to determine the effectiveness of four experimental marking strategies on students' revision of a paragraph was conducted to identify the most productive method for this specific context. Here the initial sample for both the original and the revised assignments was in excess of 5000 scripts. A random sample of 1750 scripts was selected for both the original and the revised versions. These scripts were photocopied, the copies were marked a second time and then the average of the two marks was calculated. The levels of improvement between the original and the revised paragraphs for the control group and each of the experimental groups were then statistically evaluated.

• Second, the focus shifted to the writers. In this regard, student opinion was elicited by means of a questionnaire, copies of which were sent to all Practical English students. 2640 questionnaires were returned and these were assessed. With respect to the open-ended questions, however, the sample was limited to 100 randomly selected questionnaires.

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13 The fifth group served as a control for the experiment.
• Finally, the assumptions underlying the present marking strategies and response styles of the 14 markers involved were examined by means of a taxonomy developed to determine the degree to which their responses are in line with current writing, reading and teaching theory. A sample of 50 scripts was selected for statistical analysis.

Up to this point the research was restricted to the Practical English context and the findings limited in terms of their generalisability. However, the thesis concludes with a discussion of alternative marking methods, which, the author believes could provide a more theoretically sound approach to response to student writing. The final aim is to design a response model for the distance-teaching context. This model will be generalisable and thus applicable to a wider teaching context.

7. The Gap in Response Theory

The research attempts to fill a gap that exists in response theory. First, research into the theory relating to the interpretation and evaluation of poetry, prose, fiction and drama abounds. Lawson et al. berate the stark contrast between this proliferation of knowledge and the fact that 'teachers of composition have been without such a resource in regard to that other body of texts, the student writing that consumes so much time and energy in most secondary and post-secondary English departments' (1989: vii). Not only is there minimal theoretical research relating to responding to student writing but the practical research that has been conducted is primarily American and focuses on a privileged classroom or university context, a contact-teaching situation with a manageable student / lecturer ratio. This research needs to be tested in the unique and, the author contends, impoverished language learning environment Unisa students inhabit.
8. Chapter Outline

8.1 Chapter One: Introduction

This chapter includes the statement of the aims, the problem, the hypotheses, the field, the discourse community, the scope, the gap that the thesis attempts to fill and the chapter outline.

8.2 Chapter Two: Writing, Reading and Frameworks of Response

Because responding to student writing involves a 'unique intersection' (Lawson et al. 1989:viii) between reading and composition theory, both aspects need to be reviewed. The pedagogical implications of theoretical shifts need to be examined. With this in mind, the paradigmatic movements in writing research from the current-traditional, to the expressivist, then the cognitive and finally towards the socio-constructionist model are assessed.

The 'linguistic, literary, and philosophical scrutiny, which has shaken the very foundations of our understanding of a reader's interaction with a text' (ibid:viii) are evaluated. Reading is regarded as an act of interpretation, a 'transaction' between reader and text. In contrast to readings in which the autonomy and the assumed intention of its author are uncritically accepted, postmodernist critics emphasize the role of context in interpretation. Thus, they no longer consider a ... work as static and fixed, containing a meaning and an intended interpretation that skilful readers are supposed to ferret out ...; they see it as fluid and changing, waiting for enactments of many meanings by readers who necessarily bring different experiences to the text and who will thereby and necessarily interpret it somewhat differently (Wall & Hull 1989:262-3).

Reader-response theory questions the very foundations of the lecturer's authority when she responds to student writing. The situation is compounded because of the ways in which the reading of student writing differs from that of any other text. These discrepancies have significant implications in terms of the power structures involved when lecturers respond to student writing.
Research impacts on pedagogy and in this regard the development away from the text-based, traditional linear approach to teaching writing towards a process approach, which acknowledges the richness and complexity of the writing process, will be studied. The aim of this chapter is to provide the background that will enable the researcher to 'place' lecturers' responses in terms of the theoretical assumptions on which they are based. The existing frameworks of response that have been developed to classify response statements for research purposes are outlined.

8.3 Chapter Three: Research Overview

This chapter provides an overview of research relating to response to student writing and highlights the dilemma that is at the heart of this thesis: research findings question the effectiveness of the labour that goes into marking student scripts, an activity that is perceived by both students and lecturers to be virtually synonymous with the teaching situation.

The chapter begins with an evaluation of existing reviews of research findings in the field. Research areas assessed are those relating to revision, 'appropriation' of student writing, the roles adopted by the lecturer, classification of written response styles, the effects of error correction, the attitude towards error held by English teachers, students and content-subject specialists, the content / form debate, the effect of positive comments, the impact of grades, the nature and impact of lecturers' commentary.

Research is examined critically, with particular attention being paid to research design, sample size, subject characteristics, the nature of the writing task, methodological concerns relating to the collection analysis and interpretation of data, with the aim of determining the degree to which the findings can be accepted as sound. The research in this thesis will go some way towards determining the extent to which these findings apply to the South African distance-teaching context.
In chapters Four to Six the three dimensions of the rhetorical triangle (printed below) will be highlighted:

![Rhetorical Triangle](image)

Adapted from Warnock (1989:66).

Chapter Four is based on an empirical study that examines the effect on students' revised texts of four experimental marking strategies and critically examines the concept of 'improvement'. Chapter Five turns the attention to the student writers and elicits their expectations and attitudes by means of a questionnaire. Chapter Six shifts the spotlight to the lecturer in an attempt to evaluate the assumptions that underlie his or her reading of student writing.

8.4 Chapter Four: The Text

This chapter is based on an empirical study, conducted in 1995, which was designed to determine the level of improvement of students' revised scripts resulting from the use of four experimental marking strategies. The impetus for the empirical research goes back to a Practical English assignment set in 1986 (see Addendum 2). Despite developments relating to process research, assignments for Practical English remain once-off affairs – submitted, marked, and returned to the student who moves on to the next assignment, in some instances before having the opportunity to learn from the previous work because administrative and postal problems have delayed the return of the assignment. This runs counter to the fact that ideally feedback should be concurrent, that is continuous, confirming and disconfirming information that comes to students as they write (Wiggins 1993:190). The markers comprise both members of staff and an external panel of markers, paid per script. All the markers work in a vacuum – with little knowledge of the individual student, unsure if students read the commentary, understand it, and are capable of growth as a result of it. In 1986, for the first time, Practical English lecturers
asked students to revise a marked assignment and were confronted with the reality of what students do with commentary. Although the findings that emerged were not formalised, lecturers were dismayed by the large number of students who submitted revised drafts that were notably worse than their original efforts. In addition, inconsistencies and inaccuracies in the marking were apparent despite the seminars that were held prior to the marking of assignments in an attempt to gain consensus and promote a unified approach to marking. The empirical research conducted in 1995 is a scientifically-verifiable replication of the 1986 project.\textsuperscript{14}

\section*{8.5 Chapter Five: The Students' Perspectives}

This chapter focuses on the student writer and ascertains, by means of a questionnaire, student expectations with respect to marking, the value they attach to tutor commentary and grading, the perceptions they have of the role the lecturers adopt when they respond to their writing, their concept of revision, and their attitude to alternative methods, such as peer evaluation, the portfolio approach and computer-assisted commentary. Their attitudes towards the marking strategies used in the empirical study were determined and students were asked to comment on specific difficulties with the marking method used on their particular assignment.

\textsuperscript{14} The development in the Practical English course and its move away from an extreme formalist approach can be seen by comparing the instructions for the revision assignment given in 1986 (see Addendum 2) with the 1995 version (printed as Addendum 1). First, note the incorrect sequencing in the 1986 instructions:

\begin{itemize}
  \item When you are required to revise 'something we have written we then find that our original piece of writing contains numerous grammatical and stylistic errors. We may also realise that the content and organisation of what we wrote could have been improved'.
  \item Take note of your tutor's comments on grammar, style and content.
\end{itemize}

This inverted sequencing is repeated in point 4 in the 1986 assignment (see Addendum 2) in which the initial emphasis, from (i) to (vi) is on grammatical aspects (main verbs, run-together sentences, dangling modifiers, simple sentences, avoidance of passive construction and confusing long, sentences). Only from point (vii) onwards is there a reference to structure in the form of opening and closing paragraphs and then to transition words to assist the development of ideas. Finally, point (ix) deals with the issue that should have been raised first: 'Organise the arrangement / presentation of your ideas / arguments in a logical sequence' The final injunction is to 'cut out all unnecessary words / phrases'.
8.6 Chapter Six: The Readers' Perspectives

The theoretical assumptions that underpin the way lecturers respond to Practical English scripts are highlighted because the researcher believes it is vital that lecturers become aware of their predispositions and test them against current theory. It is important to establish if the lecturers' comments are facilitative, focusing on meaning rather than form, encouraging exploration and inviting reformulation, allowing the power to pass to the student, asking real, communicative questions or if they are simply formal, testing questions to which the lecturer already has the answer. It is vital to establish if the lecturers' commentary is 'designed to foster reformulation and reconceptualization (global concerns) and not just internal consistency (local concerns)' (Onore 1989:236).

In order to analyse the lecturers' global commentary, a sample of 50 scripts was selected from those marked by means of the correction code in the experiment as these serve as samples of the status quo: the marking policy and response strategies that are adopted by Practical English Unisa markers when they respond to student writing. A taxonomy was developed in order to determine the axiological orientation, focus of the commentary, locus of control, cognitive level, the local / global, form / content, and positive / negative distinctions, modes of response, grammatical structure, length, overall purpose and reader roles. In this way the assumptions underlying the status quo in terms of commentary style could be tested against current language learning, literary, reading and pedagogic theory. The chapter ends with samples of the various approaches specifically selected to illustrate problem areas.

8.7 Chapter Seven: Conclusions and Recommendations

This chapter begins with an overview of the research findings and seeks solutions to the problems that have been identified in the thesis. Issues of audience, transparency, appropriacy, ownership and timing of intervention are raised and innovative approaches are outlined in an attempt to identify response strategies that are viable in a distance-teaching context.
9. Conclusion

Research into response strategies is vital in all teaching situations. However, in distance-teaching conditions responses stand alone. There is no mitigating and reassuring classroom context to negate any misconceptions that might arise as a result of a flawed response style. It is thus particularly vital in this situation that response modes are in keeping with the most recent theoretical advances in writing pedagogy. These will be outlined in Chapter Two.
Chapter Two

Writing, Reading and Frameworks of Response

'Tis with our judgements as our watches, none
Go just alike, yet each believes his own.

This thesis is based on the belief that each lecturer has a dominant axiology, or value theory, which guides her teaching and enables her to determine if a change introduced by a student represents progress. The theoretical assumptions that underpin this thesis are derived from sociologist Stuart Hall who argued that 'the ideological presuppositions of a writer impose a type of ideological coherence on a text' (in Bloor 1995:72) and from the linguist Fairclough, whose primary aim was to 'increase consciousness of how language contributes to the domination of some people by others, because consciousness is the first step towards emancipation' (ibid.). A Critical Language Approach (CLA) has been adopted in that the thesis aims to give lecturers the opportunity to see how their language choices when they respond to student writing 'give a picture of themselves to the reader and how they might take control of the identity they want to show through' (ibid.). The theoretical assumptions upon which this thesis is based are those that inform a CLA approach to teaching. Bloor identifies the Lancaster position as follows:

- Language and ideology are inevitably linked.
- Written texts are conscious productions that embody ideological assumptions.
- A writer has (or creates) textual identity.
- A writer is a source of power or control.
- People are empowered through knowledge (ibid.:73).

The thesis is embedded in a specific sociohistorical context and examines authentic discourse, namely the writing of Unisa's Practical English students and the way lecturers respond to this writing. It considers the content and form of their commentary in an attempt to establish the textual identity they create and considers the degree to which their commentary conforms to or challenges the dominant theoretical ideology promoted by the course. However, although the thesis employs a CLA approach, it is important to note that this pedagogic method is not adopted in the teaching of Practical English students as CLA focuses on linguistic issues of some sophistication that provide 'challenges to advanced users of the language' (ibid.: 80). In essence,
students cannot contest writing conventions until they have mastered them. In Practical English the teaching approach is a skills-based, formalist approach, combining elements of both the Communicative Approach and English for Specific Purposes (ESP).

The fact that 'neutral' teaching is a contradiction in terms has been widely acknowledged in, for example, the following quotations:

- While relativism is a position one can entertain, it is not a position one can occupy. No one can be a relativist, because no one can achieve ... distance from his own beliefs and assumptions ... (Fish 1980:319).

- Teachers who claimed to teach without any philosophy' were deluding themselves. It is possible to be unconscious about philosophy or to be inconsistent, but it isn't possible not to have one. ... too often teachers were unaware of the philosophy they more or less adhered to and sent contradictory messages in the classroom (Fulkerson 1990:410).

- No innocent reading ... is possible (Lategan 1992:117).

- An individual teacher's concepts about the activity of reading student texts tend to be correlative: that is, they cluster in ways we can call a globally coherent 'attitude' toward the task. Such conceptual clusters are value-laden: they express ideas not only about what acts and objects are, but what constitutes 'good' writing, 'good' answers to assignments, 'good' responses by teachers ... These general frameworks translate into specific conceptions of a given reading situation and the technical and ethical demands it makes of a reader. For the individual teacher, this specific conception is the way that fundamental assumptions, largely tacit, manifest themselves focally. Depending on the participants' theoretical sophistication, introspective sensitivity, and depth of commitment to the inquiry, teachers' written accounts ... will make the underlying global attitude more or less overt, but where it is less so, the interpreter can find its traces in the particular description of a given reading (Phelps 1989:48).

- All teachers and tutors, consciously or subconsciously, have a stance toward response to all writing... This stance, or, as Louise Wetherbee Phelps (1989) calls it, the 'deep structure of response to writing', is determined by a complex of many factors (Severino 1993:184).

- In every response, like it or not, my symbolic actions are motivated and consequential (Warnock 1989:71).

Given that all teaching is value-laden, the aim of this chapter is to provide the theoretical background that will enable the researcher to 'place' lecturers' responses to student writing in...
terms of the axiological assumptions on which they are based. An axiology leads to a theory,\(^1\) which, in turn, "has a procedural component describing the means by which writers can reach the ends specified by the axiology" (Fulkerson 1990:411). Each theory has implications for curricular design and teaching practice and thus has a pedagogical component.

It is important to remember, however, that axiology and pedagogy are 'essentially' independent and that no automatic one-to-one connection exists between axiological commitments and pedagogy, even though the former set up goals for the latter (ibid.:418-20). Confusion results when theorists fail to differentiate between means (pedagogy) and ends (axiology), and ignore the fact that a variety of means can be used to achieve specific axiological ends. For example, a rhetorical axiology does not necessarily require a collaborative pedagogy. Fulkerson explains that if writing is "by nature socially mediated (through shared cultural assumptions, the use of cultural allusions, intertextual citations, concern for audience understanding and acceptance ...), then whether taught by collaborative pedagogy or not, it remains social" (ibid.:419). However, in contrast, some ends rule out certain means. For example, 'a natural-process pedagogy ... does not harmonize with a formalist axiology. A cognitive view of process may not suit a mimetic or expressive axiology' (ibid.:422). It is also possible for lecturers to rise above theoretical boundaries and to choose from a wide range of approaches those they regard as suitable for their particular teaching context.

This chapter provides an overview of the axiological shifts that have occurred in writing and reading theory and demonstrates how these have progressed along comparable lines away from text-based approaches towards ones that acknowledge the socio-political context. These conflicting paradigms result in divergent ways of judging and responding to student writing and inevitably tensions between theory and practice result. The chapter ends with an outline of the various 'frameworks of response' that were designed to classify lecturers' response styles in order to facilitate research in the field.

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\(^1\) Theory can be defined as 'a set of statements intended to provide an explanation of a phenomenon; it is an attempt to answer a "why" or a "how" question' (Asher 1994:3721).

- 28 -
1. Writing Theory

In this section of the thesis, the paradigmatic movements in writing research from the current-traditional to the expressivist, then the cognitive and finally towards the socio-constructionist model are assessed with the aim of determining the impact these divergent paradigms have on student writing and lecturers' response styles. These shifts privilege divergent parts of the communicative transaction. Jakobson and Kinneavy's models are helpful in this regard. In Jakobson's (1960) well-known schema of the functions of language, he identifies the addresser, addressee, context, message, contact, and code as the factors involved in communication. Each of these, in turn, determines a different function of language:

- a 'poetic' function focuses on the self-referentiality of the message;
- an 'emotive' or 'expressive' function voices the addresser's feelings;
- a 'referential' or 'epistemic' function focuses on the context;
- a 'phatic' or 'associational' function emphasises the relationship between the addresser and the addressee;
- a 'conative' function focuses on changing the addressee's behaviour, thinking or action; and
- a 'metalingual' function focuses on the lexical or syntactic code of language (in Asher 1994:3791-2).

In contrast to Jakobson's six functions, Kinneavy's theory of discourse is founded on four components: encoder, decoder, reality and signal. Asher explains:

> Depending on the situation, language (the signal) stresses the persons (encoder or decoder), or the reality to which the reference is made, or the product (the text produced). Consequently, discourse can be 'expressive' (focused on the encoder, Jakobson's addresser), 'persuasive' (focused on the decoder, the addressee), 'informative' (focused on the reality or the context), and 'literary' (focused on the text – Jakobson's poetic function) (ibid.:3792).

The textual focus of the formalist, current-traditional approach stresses the 'literary' or 'poetic' function of language and is founded on a belief in the self-referentiality of the text.

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2 For a detailed account of the paradigmatic shifts that have taken place in writing theory, see Van Zyl 1993:1-45.
The expressivist paradigm highlights the encoder / addresser and the 'emotive' function of language. If the emphasis is on external reality, a mimetic philosophy is adopted and the 'informative' function is highlighted. In contrast, a rhetorical approach accentuates the effect of the writing on the reader, emphasising Jakobson's 'phatic' or 'associational' function.

The paradigmatic shifts in writing theory are illustrated in the table below:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>AXIOLOGY</th>
<th>THEORY / PARADIGM</th>
<th>FUNCTION (Jakobson)</th>
<th>DISCOURSE COMPONENT (Kinneavy)</th>
<th>CRITERIA FOR EVALUATION</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Formalist</td>
<td>Current-traditional</td>
<td>Poetic</td>
<td>Literary Focus: product</td>
<td>Accuracy; Correctness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emotive</td>
<td>Expressivist</td>
<td>Emotive / Expressive</td>
<td>Expressive Focus: encoder / addresser</td>
<td>Credibility; Honesty; Personal voice</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mimetic</td>
<td>Cognitive</td>
<td>Referential / Epistemic</td>
<td>Informative Focus: reality</td>
<td>Logic; Clarity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rhetorical</td>
<td>Socio-constructionist</td>
<td>Conative / Phatic / Associational</td>
<td>Persuasive Focus: effect on reader</td>
<td>Effectiveness</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2: Paradigmatic Shifts in Writing Theory

Ideally evaluation should make use of the criteria from divergent paradigms. It should consider formal accuracy, determine credibility and evaluate the logic and clarity of the writing while at the same time considering its effect on the reader. Indeed, the ESL Composition Profile used for the experiment (discussed in Chapter Four of this thesis) contains all these criteria. Despite the balance achieved in the profile, lecturers nevertheless exhibit a dominant theoretical bias. If this orientation is formalist, it is exacerbated by the fact that the marking method adopted in Practical English is the correction code.
1.1 Formalist Axiology: The Current-Traditional Paradigm

The current-traditional paradigm is based on a formalist axiology. This text-based approach focuses on the finished word, the product of the writing process. In Jakobson's terms the function of such writing is 'poetic' as the text is viewed as self-referential. As it emphasises characteristics internal to the work, it can be described as feature-orientated. It favours explicit teaching of the micro-elements of discourse and modes of discourse. Model texts are studied to help students to identify the features of effective discourse.

There are strong links between the current-traditional paradigm and New Criticism, a movement founded in the 1940s whose chief proponents were Cleanth Brooks and John Crowe Ransom. New Criticism was founded on a belief in determinate meaning. It favours close reading of a text that is viewed as a self-sufficient, organic unit with intrinsic meaning. In terms of New Criticism truth is equated to one person's reading (albeit an informed reading). New Criticism rejects the Intentional Fallacy (that claims that it is incorrect to judge the intention of an author by evidence external to the work itself) and the Affective Fallacy (an evaluation based on its effects on a reader). Aycock states that when the New Critical hermeneutic is applied to composition / rhetoric

one learns to write [and read] against a background of [literary] principles and linguistic analysis, establishing a pedagogy which emphasizes texts as organic constructs of dense, rich texture, metaphor as the constitutive principle of language, and meaning as derived from language contexts (in Winterowd 1989:23).

Van Zyl identifies the current-traditional paradigm's tendency towards prescriptiveness on issues of style – economy, clarity, emphasis (1993:6) – and traces this back to the literary academic background of many writing lecturers:

Most of us trained as English teachers by studying a product: writing. Our critical skills are honed by examining literature, which is finished writing; language as it has been used by authors. And then, fully trained in the autopsy, we go out and are assigned to teach our students to write, to make language live.

Naturally we try to use our training. It's an investment and so we teach writing as a product, focusing our critical attention on what our students have done, [as if it were literature]. ... It isn't literature, of course, and we use our skills, with
which we can dissect and sometimes almost destroy Shakespeare or Robert Lowell, to prove it.

The product doesn't improve, and so, blaming the student—who else?—we pass him along to the next teacher, who is trained, too often, the same way we were. Year after year the student shudders under a barrage of criticism, much of it brilliant, some of it stupid, and all of it irrelevant (Murray in Van Zyl 1993:5-6).

English lecturers also need to acknowledge that the temptation to adopt a formalist approach is a result of their discipline, which cares more deeply about grammatical perfection than other professions do. This can easily result in a response style that Jakobson would describe as metalingual in that it focuses on the grammatical codes of the language.

A strictly formalist approach to teaching is problematic. First, the formalist belief that good writing is synonymous with correct writing results in an excessive emphasis on the mechanical. Unfortunately, 'most of the [formalist] criteria by which ... writing is evaluated concern the accidents rather than the essences of discourse—that is spelling, punctuation, penmanship, and length' (Emig in Fulkerson 1979:344) and exclusive focus on these aspects does the student an injustice. In addition, simplistic product-based solutions 'implant upon students struggling with the deeper problems of composing a premature model of perfection' (Perl in Van Zyl 1993:12).

The formalist axiology's demand for excellence and obsession with correctness flounders on the reality of so many first-year Unisa students who, as a result of Apartheid education, seem to many literature-trained English teachers to be 'true outsiders, ... strangers in academia, unacquainted with the rules and rituals of [university life]' (Shaughnessy in Van Zyl 1993:10). The danger is that a teaching model that concentrates on features of the written product 'tempts teachers to assume that the student's mental development is somehow retarded; the written product model does not suggest that the student is merely inexperienced in controlling and displaying his or her mental development through language' (Mitchell & Taylor 1979:262). Van Zyl identifies Noam Chomsky's *Syntactic Structures* (1957), Francis Christensen's (1963) work on generative rhetoric of the sentence and the paragraph, and the humanistic approach of Carl Rogers with his criticism of behaviourism as 'the domino effects ... which reached composition theory via educational psychology' (1993:11) and served to effect a paradigm shift. The result is that, apart from proponents of rigid business writing formats, 'formalists are hard to find these...
days' (Fulkerson 1979:344). Formalism with a vengeance, in the form of the 'five error / stop marking' rule and the five-paragraph essay, is out of vogue. However, Fulkerson makes an important observation in his 1990 article: no one writing in our scholarly journals defend[s] the most basic formalist assertion that good writing is correct writing, although we [have] plenty of evidence of its classroom existence [my emphasis] (1990:412). This thesis will demonstrate that although the formalist axiology has been discredited, it thrives in lecturers' responses to student writing and in the correction codes used in evaluation. This obsessive focus on formal accuracy is then reflected in students' responses that are restricted to surface-level rewrites.

1.1.1 Formalist Axiology: Implications for Responding to Student Writing

Foucault explains that 'the word "work" and the unity that it designates are probably as problematic as the status of the author's individuality' (1979:144). However, before the weaknesses inherent in a formalist axiology are examined, it is important to acknowledge that text-based approaches and analysis of written products have specific advantages. They enable the lecturer to describe the range of written products required from a specific group of students and to identify the mode of organisation and features of coherence favoured by the discourse community for which the student is writing. One cannot disregard accuracy. It is vital to remember that in accordance with Celce-Murcia's table entitled, Variables that determine the importance of grammar (1991:465) 3, the Practical English students fall into the category for whom grammatical competence is regarded as the most important aspect because they are adults who need to write English for academic purposes.

However, one can still question the validity of a strictly formalist approach. If one accepts D'Angelo's classification of writing as containing mechanical, linguistic and rhetorical components 4 (in Van Zyl 1993:2), then commentary on student writing written within a formalist axiology focuses on the mechanical and linguistic elements to the detriment of the rhetorical

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3 See page 80 of this thesis.
4 The mechanical component includes handwriting, spelling, punctuation and capitalisation while the linguistic element encompasses syntax, morphology, phonology and semantics. Rhetoric embraces aspects like invention, arrangement and style (Van Zyl 1993:2).
component. Alternatively stated, the formalist axiology promotes commentary that focuses on closed writing capacities. Van Zyl explains:

closed capacities eventually allow of total mastery, while open capacities are never mastered to perfection. Examples of closed writing capacities are spelling, usage, and punctuation, while the more crucial fundamentals of good writing behaviour are open capacities: 'inventing and developing a discourse, arranging and structuring it, and revising and reordering it at all levels' (ibid.:2).

The novice teacher may find a formalist approach in which she concentrates her teaching on closed writing capacities a tempting option because student improvement can be monitored more easily and progress virtually assured. The problem is that for writing to be successful both closed and open capacities require attention.

Process research has shown that skilled writers have a heightened awareness of audience, treat reviewing and rewriting as part of a recursive writing process, and pay greater attention to matters relating to content, while weaker writers are preoccupied with mechanics (in Asher 1994:3775-6; 3792). This finding is supported by Raimes's (1987) discovery that L2 writers concentrate on vocabulary and sentence structure instead of focusing on the development of ideas in their essays (in Asher 1994:3793). A formalist, intrinsic-features approach by the lecturer is thus problematic because it encourages a characteristic of unskilled ESL writers, namely concern for surface-level 'perfection', and does little to convince students of the need for a more mature content-orientated emphasis. A further problem with a formalist approach is that it tempts the student to edit prematurely, a factor that has been identified as one of the causes of writer's block in inexperienced writers (Rose in Van Zyl 1993:33).

Formalism is an inappropriate response to a student's interlanguage. Kutz defines 'interlanguage' as 'the present language system of a second language learner with reference to the target language' (1986:392). Kutz's key characteristics of a student's interlanguage have been summarised below:

- Interlanguage contains features that do not occur in either the first or the target language.
- An interlanguage's unique features are developmental, representing necessary stages in the acquisition process.
- Interlanguage is systematic, rule-governed, and predictable.
Although interlanguage is not correct from the point of view of the target language, it is a valid linguistic system and allows its user to communicate competently.

While some features represent errors, they are a necessary part of constructing and testing hypotheses about the new language.

Interlanguage looks beyond error to the whole language production of the learner. It is particularly important to see the work of basic writers in the context of what they can produce.

The interlanguage of each person at any moment is unique.

Interlanguage is characterised by a return to abandoned features when the learner encounters new or stressful discourse demands (1986:392-393).

If one views a student's interlanguage as evidence of a developmental process, then it is counterproductive to focus exclusively on errors in his or her work. Tolerance is promoted if errors are viewed not only as inevitable, but as positive evidence of hypothesis testing. From this perspective, a more constructive approach to error-hunting would be to look beneath the flawed interlanguage to find evidence of competence – coherence, logical structuring and fluency.

Not only is a formalist approach problematic in L2 teaching contexts, its very foundation is flawed, as the following argument indicates. If effective writing can be identified by specific intrinsic features (such as lack of sentence fragments, mechanical accuracy, grammatically correct sentence structure), then it should be possible to gain similar judgments from a variety of readers provided the intrinsic characteristics are conscientiously identified and defined. Research contradicts this ideal. Diederich's 1961 study is a case in point: 'Out of the 300 essays graded, 101 received every grade from 1 to 9; 94 percent received either seven, eight or nine different grades; and no essay received less than five different grades from these fifty-three readers' (in Mitchell & Taylor 1979:248). The divergence in judgement can be attributed to the variety of the audience (readers included English and Social Science professors, lawyers, professional writers, editors and business executives), a finding that suggests that the text is not self-referential but is transformed as lecturers actively contribute to the meaning of what they read and respond in accordance with their expectations and preconceptions. Using virtually the same rating scale as Diederich, Purves's 1992 cross-cultural, multilingual study of assessment of student writing had equally disconcerting results. He concluded that rating teams from
different countries use scoring schemes differently and that one group of countries appeared to be guided by content while another group were influenced by style and tone (117). Mitchell & Taylor explain the implications of these research findings. The crucial flaws in the written product model is that it ignores 'the basic sociolinguistic principles which define the systematic interaction of language and audience' (1979:259) and that it is based on two false assertions, namely, that lecturers can agree on a list of intrinsic features that characterise good writing and that they will apply these criteria for evaluation consistently (ibid.). The fact that Diederich's findings were contradicted in the present study where high inter-rater reliability levels were achieved suggests that lecturers who work closely on a course gradually form a distinct discourse community. They are then able to achieve a remarkable degree of consensus in their evaluation of student writing.

A further problem, which will be discussed in Chapter Six, relates to the inconsistency that results when lecturers overtly subscribe to one axiology (usually a rhetorical one) but then evaluate in terms of another (formalist approach). Mitchell & Taylor term this the 'basic dilemma' of writing teachers: 'They evaluate writing by responding to it – as they must – but claim they are evaluating it in terms of intrinsic features. Evaluation actually takes place in one model – audience response – but is explained to students in terms of another – predominantly written response' (1979:260). In this way the arbitrary nature of response can be suppressed and the focus can fall on textual features, such as poor punctuation, spelling, and grammar.

Mitchell & Taylor visualise the response categories as follows:

\[ \text{A: aware + expressed} \rightarrow \text{"bad grammar"} \]
\[ \text{B: aware + hidden} \rightarrow \text{"dull" or "immature"} \]
\[ \text{reaction to student writing} \]
\[ \text{C: unaware} \rightarrow \text{"low SFS markers" and other sociolinguistic markers} \]

\((\text{ibid.}:260)\)

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5 The author is aware that her attempts to achieve objectivity by means of high inter-rater reliability levels and the use of the ESL Composition Profile are evidence that she also subscribes to these 'false assertions'. Nevertheless, these are inevitable in setting up an empirical study.

6 See pages 138, 140 and 141 of this thesis.
In terms of the written product model, marks are justified in accordance with Category A responses. These are acknowledged and the student is informed of them. In contrast, Category B responses are regarded as being too subjective and so they are seldom verbalised. Category C responses represent sociolinguistic markers of a complex and varied sort, including socioeconomic status markers, other (predominantly usage) features which are now viewed as "intrinsic" to good writing, and still other features, like nominalization, yet to be identified – for example, perhaps length of sentences, explicitness of opening sentences, presence or absence of explicit transitions (ibid.:261).

Lecturers are frequently unconscious of the influence of Category C responses and so their effect goes unacknowledged. Alternatively this influence is deliberately suppressed. This point is conceded by Schwegler:

Like many other composition instructors, I, too, have feared that value-laden responses will lead me to be partial or to impose some ideological 'ideal text' on student essays. Thus, in reading and evaluating student papers, I have often relied on formal criteria: coherence, evidence, thesis statements, stylistic clarity, and correctness (1991:204).

This approach can be traced back to the desire for reading and evaluation of student papers to be objective and a belief in the concept of universal, acceptable standards. It is based on the formalist assumption that 'subjectivity is an ever present danger and that any critical procedure must include a mechanism for holding it in check' (Fish in Schwegler 1991:209).

Objectivity has been sought both by linking evaluation to the features of the text and by promoting inter-rater reliability – uniformity among lecturers in terms of their perceptions and judgements (ibid.:205). Training of readers, grading scales and holistic scoring are all attempts to achieve reliability in lecturers' responses. However,

neither grading scales nor holistic scoring ... [can] make the individual reader disappear. After all, it is the reader who applies the scale or generates the holistic score. Nonetheless, the reader – the responding subject – is in both cases assumed to be of less importance than the text and to be in need of control. ... The interaction between reader and writer, the context in which the writing is produced, and the textual representation created by the reader are subsumed by pervasive attention which focuses on the written text and emphasizes reader consensus in response to this text (ibid.:206).

In addition to formalist response strategies failing to attend to students' texts as meaningful communicative events, this response style invites a perception of the lecturer as prescriptive,
distanced, and authoritarian. This, in turn, leads to a distortion in the power relationships in the writing context.

1.2 Emotive Axiology: The Expressivist Paradigm

In contrast to the feature-based formalist axiology, the expressivist axiology is sincerity-orientated. In this writer-based paradigm the focus falls on the encoder's authentic voice; writing is viewed as 'an art, a creative act in which the process – the discovery of true self – is as important as the product – the self discovered and expressed' (Berlin in Van Zyl 1993:19). The expressivist paradigm, a position that can be traced back to Coleridgean Romanticism, celebrates the concept of creative activity. Emphasis is then placed on the need to establish a conducive environment for the exploration of ideas. Writing is believed to serve a liberalising, humanising function that fosters communication. Personal subjects are prescribed and journal keeping is very highly regarded. The emphasis falls on the encoders' right to select their own subjects, to document them in their own way, to the audience of their choice in the form most conducive to expressing their ideas and in as many drafts as are necessary (ibid.:19-20). Writing that is interesting, credible, honest and contains a clear personal voice is valued.

Teachers tend to be critical of the concept of evaluating. The teacher's role is to be seen to write and to promote a 'climate of failure ... [that promotes the knowledge that] writing badly ... is a crucial part of learning to write well' (Elbow in Van Zyl 1993:20). Teachers operating within this paradigm believe they should identify one problem at a time and should not 'kidnap the first draft and correct the student's errors, thereby cheating the student of the opportunity to learn and arrive at her own meaning' (ibid.:20-1). Within this paradigm mechanics is addressed last, just prior to publication.

The belief that language creates meaning rather than merely expressing meaning, gives rise to an approach in which students 'come to an understanding of what it means to write by actually engaging in the process' (Hairston in Van Zyl 1993:18). In Elbow's words: 'think of writing as an organic, developmental process in which you start writing at the very beginning – before you know your meaning at all – and encourage your words gradually to change and evolve' (in Winterowd 1989: 26). Murray puts it another way: 'The process of making meaning with written
language can not be understood by looking backward from a finished page. Process cannot be inferred from product any more than a pig can be inferred from a sausage' (in Van Zyl 1993:13).

The Communicative Approach, upon which Practical English is founded, has an emotive axiological orientation, which is problematic in that it does not prepare students for the range of academic contexts where the bulk of the writing has 'pragmatic, instrumental value rather than humanistic or personal value' (Horowitz in Van Zyl 1993:22). In academic research tasks, students frequently know 'what they want to say; their main problem is to get their content organised and down in an acceptable form' (Hairston in Van Zyl 1993:22). Practical English course writers have to decide if their aim is humanistic. Do they want to produce students who are able to adopt a process approach to writing or is their primary objective to train students to write for the academic discourse community? Once this principal goal is formulated, the most apposite axiological orientation will become apparent.

1.2.1 Emotive Axiology: Implications for Responding to Student Writing

The expressivist paradigm and the process research upon which it is based, promote a view of writing as a self-contained process that evolves essentially out of a relationship between writers and their emerging texts. ... We conceptualize and teach [and respond to] writing on the 'model of an individual writer shaping thought through language', ... as if the process began in the writer ... and not in the writer's relationship to the world (Reither 1985:622).

How can one reconcile this view with Foucault's challenge, expressed in words taken from Beckett: "What difference does it make who is speaking?" (1979:160)? Foucault suggests that an emphasis on the encoder / addressee is deeply problematic. The expressivist paradigm's foregrounding of the writer is linked to the concept of 'authors' as genial creators of works in which they deposit an 'inexhaustible world of significations' (ibid.:159). Foucault explains that the birth of the author constitutes 'the privileged moment of individualization in the history of ideas, knowledge, literature, philosophy, and the sciences' (ibid.:141). The status accorded the author is a social construct, a characteristic of capitalist bourgeois individualism. Discourses are objects of appropriation and within a capitalist society writing has become 'goods caught up in a circuit of ownership' (ibid.:148). One needs only to think of copyright laws, author / publisher
relations and rights of production to realise how deeply writing has become commodified within our society.

The enhanced authorial stature upon which the expressivist paradigm is founded is challenged in both Barthes's *The Death of the Author* (1977) and Foucault's *What is an Author?* (1979). These texts decrease the status of the author and raise the stature of the reader, in the process placing a question mark over a writer-based approach. Asher evaluates Derrida's influence when he relates writing not to expressivist views of husbandry, authority and paternity, but to:

> the prodigal scattering of the seed on the winds: writing by its nature is wasteful spending, not economic agriculture. Hence the transgression of a basic law of authority: the 'author' of a text is merely its occasion, not its origin on the analogy of paternity. Hence the plethora of references in poststructural writing to the myth of 'filiation' (1994:5035).

The same point is made when Barthes asserts that the author does not nourish the work, like a parent does a child, but, in contrast, the writer is born simultaneously with the text (1977:145).

Post-structuralist theory has resulted in writing becoming indifferent to its origins. As a result of the severance between author and authority, writing has secured 'the right to kill, to be its author's murderer' (Foucault 1979:142). Within this paradigm the point of writing is not 'to manifest or exalt the act of writing, nor is it to pin a subject within language; it is rather a question of creating a space into which the writing subject continually disappears' (*ibid.*:142).

Mallarmé claims that it is necessary to 'substitute language itself for the person who ... [was] supposed to be its owner' (in Barthes 1977:143). The author has been replaced by author-functions. Foucault claims that 'all discourses endowed with the author-function ... possess this plurality of self' (1979:152). Thus the student is not an a unified writing subject but rather a plurality of socially-constructed selves and a text is 'not a line of words releasing a single "theological" meaning (the message of the Author-God) but a multi-dimensional space in which a variety of writings, none of them original, blend and clash. The text is a tissue of quotations drawn from the innumerable centres of culture' (Barthes 1977:146). Foucault does not see writing as expressive or representational but as a social, dynamic and historical process 'associated with the transmission of and desire for "power"' (Asher 1994:5036). His interest lies, not in what is behind the text, but in examining 'writing as an event, to reveal how it could not
be otherwise than it is, by deliberately bringing it into lateral contact, emphasising its contiguity, with other discourses' (ibid.). In summary, in its devaluing of the concept 'author', post-structuralist theory questions the very foundation upon which the expressivist paradigm is built.

The concept of 'sincerity' as a criterion for evaluation has also come under fire. It was debunked by Mitchell & Taylor as early as 1979: 'Sincerity depends on assembling those facts which will convince a reader and organizing them in a maximally persuasive order' (1979:254). The danger is that a perception of writing as sincere 'depends so heavily on knowing where the reader's values lie, [that] a false note is fatal. A writer may impress her readers, but only so long as she remains one of them' (ibid.:255). The concept of sincerity is not the exclusive property of the expressivist axiology. Mitchell & Taylor explain:

Sincerity as explained by audience-response theory entirely reverses its direction. Where before it pointed back towards the author, now it points toward the audience. Its authority formerly seemed to reside in the self. Now its authority is based on the relationship between the writing and the reader, and on the writer's ability to exploit that relationship so that he will be believed (ibid.:255).

The expressivist axiology has been widely criticised. Leki explains that a Humanistic Approach can easily result in students getting a false perception of their own linguistic ability and a misconception that grammatical competence is not important (1992:7). However, there are additional problems that arise when students are asked to write about personal experience. This type of writing is characteristic of a Communicative Approach, such as that embedded in Practical English, which is learner-centered, fosters self-expression and is integral to the Humanistic Approach to education. One difficulty is that students from certain cultural backgrounds may 'feel uncomfortable with an emphasis on self-examination and self-revelation through writing. ... They may not be accustomed to sharing their writing with classmates, may first be unwilling to accept peer corrections, or may feel intensely agitated with ... a non-technical writing approach' (ibid.:7).

Mitchell & Taylor identify a further complication with the expressivist axiology in that a writer whose only touchstone is her feelings, is not open to instruction. However, she is very vulnerable to criticism and is liable to read negative comments as personal rejection, especially if she believes she has been sincere and, in her opinion, has fulfilled the required criteria. Such a writer
can easily be paralysed by the lack of information about how to earn positive comments (1979:257-8). In addition, the lecturer might feel inhibited when responding to writing of a personal nature, particularly if the event described is traumatic. She thus focuses on more mechanical problems, in the process creating the impression that she is unsympathetic.

The problem is compounded when conflicting evaluative modes are used when lecturers respond to expressivist writing. A formalist evaluation – such as comments that focus on structure in an essay describing childhood trauma – is particularly damaging when the student perceives the task to be expressivist in nature. Bloor states that an appropriate context for personal writing is one where students are 'free from authority, prescription and overt correction' (1995:75). When a formalist approach is adopted in these writing conditions, the lecturer is guilty of giving conflicting messages. An empathetic general comment, either written or by means of a taped reaction, would be far more appropriate in instances where the topic is emotive.

1.3 Mimetic Axiology: The Cognitive Paradigm

The cognitive paradigm is based on a mimetic axiology that equates inferiority with inaccurate information and unacceptable shifts in logic. Proponents believe that there is a clear link between good writing and clarity of thought. Research is emphasised as it is believed that students do not write well if they have inadequate knowledge of the subject. The cognitive paradigm is based on schema theory, which holds that 'knowledge in the memory network is "packaged": it exists in the form of stereotypical routines, expected patterns of behaviour, or clusters of cause and effect relationships within various subjects' (Hunt in Van Zyl 1993:23).

Within the cognitive paradigm, writing is viewed as a multifarious cognitive skill involving the encoder in complex processes that require problem-solving strategies. Emig's pioneering work, The Composing Processes of Twelfth Graders (1971), was the first to shift the focus from product to process. This L1 case study, using audiotaped think-aloud protocols, led to a proliferation of research by theorists such as Sommers, Perl, Berkenkotter, and Flower & Hayes.

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Examples of composition textbooks that promote the cognitive paradigm are Beardsley's Writing With Reason and Kytle's Clear Thinking for Composition (in Fulkerson 1979:345).
The most comprehensive model in the field is the result of the work of Flower & Hayes, a team combining the insights of composition theory with those of cognitive psychology. Their 1981 model is the outcome of their study of think-aloud protocols collected from college-level writers in the act of composing. Flower & Hayes view writing as consisting of four interactive components – task, environment, the writer's long-term memory, and the composing processes themselves. Their model defines the writing process as consisting of three major processes – planning (generating ideals, goals, procedures), translating (expressing ideals and goals in verbal forms), and reviewing (evaluating and revising). Van Zyl explains that 'these composing processes are orchestrated by a "monitor" which "functions as a writing strategist which determines when the writer moves from one process to the next"' (1993:25-6).

This complex problem-solving activity is recursive rather than linear. In Van Zyl's words: 'writing is not a sequential process with rules or adages governing the major steps; writing an essay is not like following a recipe to bake a cake, or going systematically through the process of filling in one's income tax return' (ibid.:28). Within this recursive paradigm revision is not a stage in composing, but rather 'a thinking process that can occur at any time a writer chooses to evaluate or revise his text or plans' (ibid.:26). Likewise, reviewing can be conscious or spontaneous and can operate on written or unwritten text, in instances where it occurs in relation to the pre-text which exists at this stage in the mind where it is 'manipulated mentally prior to being transcribed as written text' (ibid.:27).

It is important to acknowledge the practical difficulties associated with the process methodology. Leki explains that there are two situations in which the process approach is unrealistic. It does not prepare students for a stressful world where writing has to be produced under pressure and does not equip students for examinations in which time limits allow for only a single draft (1992:7). It is also extremely difficult to adopt in a traditional distance-teaching context with its time and distance constraints and unrealistic lecturer / student ratios. However, innovative methods, such as the use of e-mail and peer review, could go some distance towards providing readers for initial drafts.
1.3.1 Mimetic Axiology: Implications for Responding to Student Writing

Bruffee (1986:776-8) and Van Zyl (1993:34-7) have identified the following problems with the cognitive paradigm:

- Cognitive processes defy direct observation. Bruffee explains that any assumptions about cognitive functions involves 'unconfirmed and unconfirmable inferences about what happens in the "black box" of the mind' (1986:777). Concepts, such as 'cognitive processes', 'higher order reasoning' and 'intellectual development' are not universal, objectifiable, or even measurable. Rather, Bruffee asserts, they are representative terms of a vernacular language agreed upon by communities of knowledgable peers (ibid.:777).

- Protocol analysis, the dominant research methodology, provides an artificial situation in which the observations can be distorted.

- Cognitive theory is based on a belief in a universal foundation, framework or structure behind knowledge which assures its certainty or truth. This basis is found either in a concept / theory or in the world / reality / facts. This solid foundation has been questioned by social constructionists who assert that 'there is no such thing as a universal foundation, ground, framework, or structure of knowledge. There is only an agreement, a consensus arrived at for the time being by communities of knowledgable peers' (ibid.:776-7).

- The cognitive paradigm is problematic as it conceives of writing as an individualistic act operating in a sociocultural void. The individual self is seen as the matrix of all thought. Founded in the belief, 'I think, therefore I am', a cognitive approach is based on the belief that an idea is the product of an individual mind. This conflicts with the social

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The term 'protocol analysis' can be defined as a 'detailed record of a subject's behaviour' (Flower & Hayes 1980:23). Protocols usually take the form of transcripts of taped recordings in which subjects verbalise their thinking processes as they write. Protocol analysis was developed to overcome the inaccuracies associated with introspective 'after-the-fact' analysis in which subjects were influenced by what they thought they should have done.
constructionist view of knowledge as 'community-generated, community-maintaining symbolic artifacts' (ibid.:777).

The paradigm's 'dichotomization of thought and language' (Van Zyl 1993:36) can be questioned. Both Derrida and Saussure hold that language is primary and that meaning does not precede language but is produced by it. Alternatively stated, 'ideas are conceived by language; language is generated by thought' (Berthoff in Van Zyl 1993:36). Language is reduced to 'a mere medium or conduit – a set of "skills" by which "ideas" are "communicated" or "transmitted" from one individual mind to another. The social constructionist alternative identifies knowledge and language and regards them as inseparable' (Bruffee 1986:778).

Cognitive theory is based on a visual metaphor of a connection between the mind's two pieces of equipment, namely the mirror that reflects outer reality and the inner eye that contemplates that reflection. Reflection and contemplation are what is thought of as knowledge from a cognitive point of view. There is 'a gap between them that cognitive theory offers no help in bridging' (ibid.:778).

Bruffee argues that lecturers operating within the cognitive paradigm must bear in mind that knowledge is a construct of a specific discourse community. Indeed, it was an acknowledgement of the social vacuum in which the cognitive paradigm operates that led to the next paradigmatic shift, namely social constructionism.

The Practical English course contains elements of formalism, expressivism and yet it is also cognitive in approach. The course is formalist in its use of the marking code and in its direct sentence-level, grammatical instruction. It is emotive in its Communicative orientation and in

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9 One needs to acknowledge that this theory applies more to monolingual speakers and that 'language' is different for the less competent L2 speaker who has little exposure to the target language, is instrumentally motivated, uses language primarily as a medium of instruction, and whose aim is simply to be able to function within the discourse community.

10 In his book, Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature, Rorty claims that Descartes 'invented' the concept of a mind which is capable of inspecting its mental states with an Inner Eye and that a belief in the mirroring abilities of the mind has persisted (in McCallum 1992:246).
its use of personal topics. Yet there is also direct teaching and assessment of cognitive skills, such as the ability to organise ideas and to construct an argument. Here the emphasis is related to an English for Academic Purposes (EAP) approach. Practical English has not taken the step towards social constructionism. In fact, the Practical English model is diametrically opposed to the social constructionist / CLA approach. In outlining the theoretical and practical implications of a CLA approach, one needs to ask if entry-level students are capable of benefiting from such a method.

1.4 Rhetorical Axiology: The Socio-Constructionist Paradigm

Bizzell divides composition theorists and researchers into two theoretical camps – those, such as Practical English, who are ‘interested in the structure of language-learning and thinking processes in their earliest state, prior to social influence [and those] more interested in the social processes whereby language-learning and thinking capabilities are shaped and used in particular communities’ (in Reither 1985:621). Fulkerson (1990) argues in favour of an emerging axiological consensus towards Bizzell’s second category, which views writing as a cognitive and communicative activity embedded in a culture. Writing teachers generally favour a rhetorical approach in which good writing is seen as ‘contextually adapted to, perhaps even controlled by, its audience (or discourse community), addressed or invoked,\(^{11}\) or both’ (Fulkerson 1990:417). This stance is an acknowledgement of the fact that literacy is a plural concept because people write for numerous different purposes and for a variety of audiences. This shift is evidenced in the proliferation of writing textbooks that promote an essentially rhetorical axiology, such as Cooper’s *St Martin’s Guide to Writing* and McCrimmon’s *Writing with a Purpose* (in Fulkerson 1990:414).

Based on the creed, ‘be effective’, the socio-constructionist paradigm claims that writers never work in a vacuum, but that successful writing is audience-related and functional. In Flower’s words, effective writing ‘goes beyond mere correctness to meet the needs of the reader’ (in

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\(^{11}\) In audience analysis the distinction can be made between what Ede & Lunsford (1984) define as the ‘audience addressed’, the real audience the writer examines and writes for, and the ‘audience evoked’, the fictional audience created by textual cues.
Fulkerson 1990:414) and 'is judged by the effect it has on a real audience' (Huff & Kline in Fulkerson 1990:415).

The socio-constructionist paradigm is founded on a belief in discourse communities that claims that all constructs are generated by 'communities of like-minded peers ... [and that] knowledge, thoughts, facts ... [are] community-generated and community-maintained linguistic entities ... that define or "constitute" the communities that generate them' (Bruffee 1986:774). Writing is viewed as 'a social act in a discourse community' (Fulkerson 1990:417). Van Zyl explains that this 'collective knowledge of discourse participants "pre-structures" the communication process, engendering reader expectations that guide text production and processing' (1993:38). The community values, shared background knowledge, and discourse conventions the community promotes go beyond personal preferences and prejudices.

The problem is that these norms 'govern and even define ... the ordinary, the everyday, the obvious, [and] what goes without saying ... They make conduct as normal and unobtrusive as breathing' (Freed & Broadhead 1987:162). Yet these unseen, and frequently unacknowledged, rules not only condition and constrain the writer, they also determine the writer.

Purves's research supports this stand. Working from empirical data obtained from a study of the written achievement of thousands of school-level students in fourteen countries, he concluded that the concept of 'national discourse communities' explains the differences in style, content, and pragmatics revealed in the essays written across cultures. Purves's research shows that 'good writing is culturally determined' (in Asher 1994:3793) and thus it is imperative that social and cultural rules are taught. In this regard, students need to

- become familiar with the cultural norms of a discourse community;
- be helped to fulfil the institutional norms\textsuperscript{12} that determine what is permissible within a company, profession or discipline;
- become aware of the various generic norms that define the boundaries of a particular genre;

\textsuperscript{12} Freed & Broadhead describe these as sacred texts containing commandments that serve the purpose of a 'guide, not just for writing proposals but for living, working, and surviving in a culture' (1987:158).
gain knowledge of the situational norms that regulate 'tone, style, content, and the level of technicality to achieve purposes and meet needs in specific rhetorical situations' (Freed & Broadhead 1987:163).

Although there is no explicit teaching of the norms of the academic discourse community in the Practical English course, students are expected to conform to Western values. This is a flaw in the course that should be addressed.

The belief that cultural models learned in the L1 context will transfer to L2 writing contexts gave rise to the study of Contrastive Rhetoric, a field in which Kaplan (1966) did pioneering work. This research is influenced by sociologists and anthropologists who believe that logic is a cultural phenomenon and who are swayed by the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis that claims that one's native culture influences one's view of the world and that 'different linguistic and cultural interpretations lead to different rhetorics, or modes of communication' (in Asher 1994:3793). In his analysis of 500 ESL compositions written by students from a variety of L1 backgrounds, Kaplan found that Arabic students' writing is characterised by repetitions and parallel expressions, that Chinese students favour an approach of indirection, writing in a circular pattern and taking time to get to the point, while Romance and Russian students frequently digress (ibid.). Hinds' research shows that Chinese, Thai and Korean discourse favours a deductive style of presentation, a 'delayed introduction of purpose' (ibid.:3794) in contrast to the English-speaking writers who favour a deductive approach that moves from the general to the particular. To compound the problem, writing does not make equal demands on readers: 'Japanese writing demands more of the reader, while the inference-based rhetorical form preferred in the West places the expository burden chiefly on the writer' (Hinds in Asher 1994:3794). In a Western model, the writer is expected to use rational argument, signposting, and structuring to make the steps of the argument clear to the reader. Despite the insights Contrastive Rhetoric has given the composition lecturer, it is limited in its focus on the finished product. There is a need for a larger instructional and sociolinguistic context, which takes into account cross-cultural differences in the process as well as in the final product.

When one considers cultural norms, Freire's distinction between Kultur and culture is of vital importance. Kultur (with a capital K) is defined as 'given, stable, immutable, and of unquestioned value. It is what institutions "pass on" from generation to generation, in the form of canons,
collections, and societal norms' (Winterowd 1989:29). In contrast, culture has positive connotations in that it is always becoming – being made. The student should not be paralysed by an awe-inspiring, debilitating Kultur, but becomes a 'creative agent, not merely a partaker, a donee' (ibid.). Culture is continually interpreted, redefined, and recreated. Warnock makes the same culture / Kultur distinction when she says, 'I want to engage in culture-swapping, literacy-lending, with students, not just in culture-transmitting' (ibid.:70), or, alternatively phrased, 'Kultur-transmitting'. Freire believes that the solution lies in a 'problem-posing' education in which people are confirmed as 'beings in the process of becoming – as unfinished, uncompleted beings in and with a likewise unfinished reality' (in Winterowd 1989:30).

1.4.1 Rhetorical Axiology: Implications for Responding to Student Writing

One strength of a rhetorical axiology is that it allows the lecturer to espouse a more balanced approach to the issue of accuracy in writing. Grammatical competence can be accorded its rightful place (in addition to sociolinguistic, discourse, and strategic competence) if this is a quality valued by the discourse community for whom the student is writing. If the addressed audience complains that the students' writing is grammatically unacceptable, then a shift occurs: 'It is not English teachers who find the writing inadequate – the addressed audiences do ... Writers must be reoriented towards the needs of the audience, not towards greater mechanical accuracy' (Mitchell & Taylor 1979:265).

A rhetorical philosophy of writing equates good writing with a desired effect on a specified audience. In this specific context, the writer's intention is to convince the reader that he or she is worthy of acceptance into the academic discourse community for whom he or she is writing. The approach is thus pragmatic – distinguishing and satisfying entrance criteria. This oversimplification disregards the fact that, in the academic writing context, students are at a decided disadvantage.

The first handicap relates to the students' status as writers. According to Foucault the 'author-function is ... a characteristic of the mode of existence, circulation, and functioning of certain discourses within a society' (1979:148). The author-construct is devalued in certain discourses: a letter has a signer, a contract a guarantor, whereas an anonymous text has a writer (ibid.). In the
case of student writing, the author is replaced by an apprentice writer, a novice learner, an outsider. This diminished stature inherent in the author-function of student writing influences how student writing is read.

The problem is compounded by the power discrepancies which characterise this specific discourse. Van Zyl explains that in

the social constructionist paradigm the reader is an initiated member of the discourse community ... [who has the power] to accept or reject writing as coherent, as consistent with the conventions of the target discourse community. In the academic context, the faculty audience is particularly omniscient, for they set the entire classroom agenda and have the final word on paper grading (1993:40).

This reader is a 'seasoned member of the hosting academic community who has well-developed schemata for academic discourse and clear and stable views of what is appropriate' (Kroll in Van Zyl 1993:40).

A further obstacle is that students are unfamiliar with academic discourse conventions and the way 'experience is constituted and interpreted in the academic discourse community' (Bizzell in Reither 1985:621). Thus it is essential that students develop 'a sensitivity to the plurality of these assumptive foundations and the conventions that arise from them ..., for they shape the complex rhetorical relationship between writer and reader in the academy' (Rose in Van Zyl 1993:40).

Texts are viewed as a 'socially mediated products and revision as a process of social accounting' (Berkenkotter et al. in Van Zyl 1993:42). Compliance with cultural norms is frequently blind to the reality that norms vary for different groups. Western values, up-front identification of the form and content of the text, generalisation, linear, causally connected narrative and cohesion (factors identified in Van Zyl (1993:42-3)), are assumed and the fact that this is not a universal approach is frequently unacknowledged. This cultural blindness is particularly problematic in contexts, such as Practical English, where the student body is multi-cultural.

Discourse practices are always embedded in the world view of a particular social group and are tied to a set of values and norms. For this reason the need to analyse and teach the conventions of academic discourse has been widely recognised (Bizzell, Maimon and Bruffee in Reither 1985:623). English for Academic Purposes (EAP) and Writing Across the Curriculum (WAC)
are approaches based on the socio-constructionist paradigm, specifically designed to empower students to write as 'knowledgable peers' (Bruffee in Reither 1985:624) for a specific discourse community. These approaches require English lecturers to compromise their autonomy and collaborate with colleagues from other disciplines in order to assist their students to become members of these discourse communities.

2. Reading Theory

2.1 Paradigmatic Shifts in Reading Theory

Whereas post-structuralism has resulted in the death of the author, the major paradigm shifts that have resulted in Reader-response criticism\(^\text{13}\) and reception theory have, figuratively speaking, given birth to the reader. Yet, in terms of Foucauldian analysis, questions of 'who writes?' and 'who responds?' are equally futile as the 'large discourses of society craft both what we think we write and how we think we read and/or respond' (Lunsford 1985:3).

The paradigmatic shifts resulting in the birth of the reader will be briefly outlined. Bloomfield's view that 'the chief source of difficulty in getting the content of reading is imperfect mastery of the mechanics of reading' (in Silberstein 1987:30) was challenged by Goodman's publication of Reading: A Psycholinguistic Guessing Game (1967), which introduced the concept of reading as an information processing skill. No longer was reading seen merely as a precise process involving the exact, detailed, sequential perception and identification of letters, words, spelling patterns and large language units. [By contrast, Goodman states that] reading is a psycholinguistic guessing game. It involves an interaction between thought and language. Efficient reading does not result from precise perception and identification of all elements, but from skill in selecting the fewest, most productive cues necessary to produce guesses which are right the first time (Silberstein 1987:30).

\(^{13}\) Although Practical English is a skills-based course that does not touch on the issue of Reader-response, this aspect needs to be considered when one evaluates the way lecturers respond to student writing.
Silberstein describes the impetus that led to the development of interactive reading, characteristic of the 1980s, as follows:

Building upon the notion that reading is only incidentally visual, interactive approaches emphasize that meaning is not fully present in a text waiting to be decoded. Rather, meaning is created through the interaction of text and reader. Background knowledge that facilitates text comprehension has been studied under the rubric of *schema theory*. ... *Schemata* are preexisting knowledge structures, stored hierarchically in the brain, the more general subsuming the more specific. Each reader's hierarchy of schemata organizes her / his knowledge of language and the world. While reading, one forms expectations based on prior knowledge of texts and the world and seeks to confirm these on the basis of input from the text (*ibid.*:31).

This theory of bi-directional processing claims that both bottom-up or text-based processing and top-down, knowledge-based, conceptually driven processing are necessary for effective reading. However, it is important to remember that this theory is built on Goodman's psychological guessing game, which is itself a top-down model. The danger thus exists that the importance of bottom-up processing can be underemphasised.

The concept of reading as a bi-directional process is central to this thesis. The researcher asserts that the lecturers' beliefs (that determine their top-down processing) influence the way they read and respond to student writing. Lecturers' schema,\(^\text{14}\) activated by the reading task, define the type of material they anticipate and the job becomes one of matching anticipated to incoming data. In this way understanding is the result of a process of prediction. The researcher also believes that the students' failure to understand tutors' comments is attributable partly to problems they experience with reading: Carrell (in Silberstein 1987:31) hypothesises the following causes for such breakdowns:

- lack of schema availability;
- schemata are not activated because the texts are opaque and so do not contain sufficient textual cues to signal the schemata to be activated;
- linguistic deficiencies;
- misconceptions about reading;
- a cognitive style that treats any stimulus as independent of prior knowledge.

\(^{14}\) Schema relate to aspects such as rhetorical structure, method and language in addition to having a content orientation.
Imagine the following hypothetical scenario: The student writes that 'she live in Mamelodi and experience difficulties with transport' but fails to understand the lecturer's marginal comment, 'agr s/v'. This inability to comprehend need not necessarily be the result of linguistic difficulties but could be because the student lacks the schema: subject / verb agreement. Alternatively, the abbreviation 'agr s/v' may be too opaque for the student to activate the schema that she does in fact possess.

This shift in emphasis towards an interactive approach has not been limited to reading research. Reception theory, defined as an 'umbrella term for the various methodological attempts to account for the role of the receiver and the situation of reception in the communication process' (Lategan 1992:4), focuses on the interaction between the receiver and the message. There are two main schools, namely Reader-response criticism and reception theory.

When they respond to student writing, lecturers sometimes ignore the fact that reading theory has moved away from a view of 'interaction' that was linked to the Cartesian dualistic paradigm that regards subject and object, knower and known, as separate entities. In terms of modern reading theory, the term 'transaction' describes a relationship in which 'each element, instead of being fixed and predefined, conditions and is conditioned by the other. ... the observer is part of the observation. The ... [text] "exists", "happens" ... in the transaction between particular readers and the text' (Rosenblatt 1993:380). Because meaning is produced by 'the interaction of textual constraints and a reader's freedom' (McCallum 1992:219), neither the reader nor the text should be emphasised at the expense of the other. Neither is the final repository of meaning. In this light the question, 'what does a text do to a reader?' is as valid as the more frequently asked query, 'what does a reader do to a text?'

15 The approach to the teaching of reading in Practical English is skills-based. Although Reader-response theory is not taught in the course, it is directly relevant to this thesis and becomes an issue whenever lecturers read and respond to student writing. It is in this situation that the Unisa student, who has no direct knowledge of the lecturers, is at a decided disadvantage.

16 Reader-response criticism is a North American movement that includes a variety of diverse approaches as opposed to the more cohesive European reception theory, a movement represented by the School of Constance with Robert Jauss and Wolfgang Iser as leaders.

17 The term 'transaction' was first introduced in 1949 in Dewey & Bentley's Knowing and the Known (in Rosenblatt 1993:380).
No definitive reading is possible. There is a marked difference between the text and the realisation of that text by the reader. The text can be seen as a complex sign that mediates between the writer and the reader. It is an ‘event, something which happens to, and with the participation of the reader’ (Fish 1980:25). In terms of this view the social dimension of reception has become prominent (Lategan 1992:6). Readers' historical relativity (their place in history and their interpretive community) affects their perception. In other words, the contemporary view of reading contradicts an approach to the teaching of writing that is exclusively text-, reader-, or logic-based.

Warnock concludes that possibly

the norm is a reader-response approach to student texts. We talk of students' ownership and authority, but we often do as reading theorists tell us we do – we construct meaning. We take student papers and mark them, sometimes even writing in our own sentences and ideas. Recently we've hesitated to respond individually and so we reach agreements with colleagues, sometimes with students, about rubrics, scale, and traits. Like it or not, we commit the pathetic fallacy despite goals of objectivity, rationality, reliability, and verifiability (1989:67).

Warnock's observation remains true regardless of the marking method that is adopted. Given that reading is subjective, Lategan's suggestion that lecturers acknowledge, from the start, what kind of reading they are engaged in and within which interpretive community it is taking place, is sound advice.

The author maintains that the lecturers' schemata influence the way they interact with student writing even in instances when the marking strategies are prescribed. Granted, formalism cannot be avoided if the prescribed marking method is either the use of a marking code or of a cross to indicate that there is an error in a line. Nevertheless, the end comment can be employed in any way the lecturer chooses and it is here that the writers embody identifiable axiologies. Likewise, the taped response is totally open although the personal nature of the communication medium invites an emotive approach.
2.2 Reading Student Texts: Rhetorical Distortions

The traditional rhetorical relationship involved in reading is disrupted when lecturers respond to student writing. The distortions that occur in the writer / reader / text relationship in this context are of vital importance if educators are to break away from traditional response styles. The causes of these distortions will be examined below.

First, there is a vast discrepancy between the respect normally accorded to writing and the way lecturers read student writing. Brannon & Knoblauch cite I.A. Richards' belief that people normally begin reading a text 'with an implicit faith in its coherence, [and] an assumption that its author intended to convey some meaning and made the choices most likely to convey the meaning effectively' (1982:157). Grice's 'Cooperative Principles', originally designed as conversational maxims, can be applied to the reading context. Grice's Principles are taken for granted in normal reading contexts as readers anticipate that a text will contain adequate information to promote clarity, that assertions will be substantiated, that the author has authority to write on the subject and that the text will be logically structured without obscurity or ambiguity (in Lawson et al. 1989:ix-x). Student writing frequently defies these principles. The effect is that in reading student papers, lecturers 'inevitably read against the grain, subverting Grice's principles by approaching student writing with a skepticism quite unlike their approach to most other texts' (ibid.:x).

The tolerance the reader normally exhibits when approaching the text is based on the 'tacit acceptance of the writer's "authority" to make the statements we are reading' (Brannon & Knoblauch 1982:157), whether they are textbooks, newspaper articles, or literary works. In fact, the claim to superiority can be so powerful that readers will tolerate writing from an author even if it appears to be 'unusually difficult, even obscure or downright confusing' (ibid.). An example would be the response of readers to Hopkins's poetry. On first reading lines such as

I caught this morning morning's minion, kingdom of daylight's dauphin, dapple-dawn-drawn Falcon ... (Watson 1987:83)

readers are likely to attribute the confusion they feel to personal inadequacy. Yet, if this had been a student's work they would probably have deemed the writing obscure and in need of clarification and would have littered the margin with what Connors & Lunsford term 'mysterious
phatic grunts' (1993:205), such as 'awk' and 'voc'. The problem is exacerbated in that many of the readers who respond to student writing are graduates from English Departments where the primary focus is English Literature and the training is in close analysis of the finished product, primarily on works selected as samples of the English Literary Canon.

Brannon & Knoblauch explain the shift that occurs when teachers approach a student text:

When we consider how writing is taught, however, this normal and dynamic connection between a writer's authority and the quality of a reader's attention is altered because of the peculiar relationship between teacher and student. The teacher-reader assumes, often correctly, that student writers have not yet earned the authority that ordinarily compels readers to listen seriously to what writers have to say. Indeed, teachers view themselves as the authorities, intellectually maturer [sic], rhetorically more experienced, technically more expert than their apprentice writers (1982:158).

This 'normal' dynamic is further distorted because student writing frequently contains language, stylistic and logical flaws that disrupt attention and demand a reaction. In this regard, one needs to bear in mind that ignoring errors is also a response that has theoretical and pedagogical implications.

Another distortion results from the abnormal presence of the reader in student writing. Lawson et al. explain that the fact that the student writer 'must be responded to in terms of his or her writing – creates a morally and politically charged reading environment. The ... [student] writer puts a weight of responsibility on the reader which does not exist in other reading contexts' (1989:ix). It is also possible that students adapt their papers in accordance with the theoretical biases they have identified in a specific teacher / reader.

3. Frameworks of Response

A number of frameworks or taxonomies of response have been developed as a result of the need to classify response statements for research purposes. These fall into three distinct categories, namely, dualistic frameworks, those that attempt to adopt a middle ground, and frameworks based on the lecturers' dominant theoretical orientation. In order to comprehend the cognitive growth these frameworks represent, it is necessary to outline Perry's taxonomy briefly.
3.1 Perry's Taxonomy

Perry's (1970) taxonomy identifies three stages of cognitive maturation along a continuum from dualistic to relativistic and then to the more mature reflective mode. Initially students view reality in a 'dualistic' light in which right and wrong, truth and falsehood, good and bad are clearly delineated. During the dualistic phase, students believe that authority figures possess all the answers and that 'learning means collecting these right answers by passively receiving them from Authority. Dualistic students believe that if they adhere to the rules and regulations of Authority, they will succeed' (Anson 1989:334) while dualistic lecturers tend to be dogmatic, egocentric and value correctness of form and content above all else. Onore makes the link between this cognitive level and the traditional classroom 'with its rigid authority structure and its ready-made forms and meanings. ... the traditional classroom ... sustains the illusion that universal definitions of improvement for writers and text can be formulated' (1989:233). A formalist axiology will result in a response style that sustains these myths.

Students' movement towards a 'relativistic' position is a result of exposure to the range of opinion, texts that differ, and individuals with conflicting frames of reference. This leads to acceptance of the fact that 'people approaching issues from different perspectives will arrive at different, but nonetheless responsible, conclusions' (Newkirk 1984b:294) but can result in counterproductive fence-sitting, in which 'all absolute certainty vanishes, except the faith that new insight, greater understanding, lies just beyond the next question. ... [Learner and lecturer alike are then sucked] into the vortex of indeterminacy, where knowledge is always constructed and "truth" ever evolves through the eternal dialogue ...' (Winterowd 1989:31). The danger that accompanies this phase is expressed by Anson: 'Since no one can be an authority about what constitutes "good" or "bad" writing, "correct" or "incorrect" decisions, then personal idiosyncrasy can prevail, immune to criticism' (1989:336). The result is frequently 'an endless weighing of alternatives, a kind of inconclusiveness born of entertaining diversity' (ibid.:337).

A more mature, reflective view comes with the realisation that not all knowledge is absolute. When writers begin to find stability and resolution, evaluate various alternatives, and take logical, well-supported stands, then they are defined as 'reflective' thinkers. Anson explains that 'here the writer's commitment to an opinion is based on a process of analysis and balanced
thought. ... In essence, the scheme charts the intellectual transition away from the accumulation of "right answers" and toward the reflective world view' (ibid.:339). Whereas dualistic writers tend to surrender their power to an all-knowing authority, relativistic writers go to the other extreme and defy authority. In contrast, the reflective writer takes the more central, stable position that he or she is entitled to any well-substantiated argument. It is this 'reflective' thought category that occupies the 'middle ground' sought by theorists who wish to move away from the more dualistic frameworks of response.

As outlined in Chapter One, Practical English students do not comprise a uniform group. They range from L1 speakers to barely literate L2 speakers, from law students for whom Practical English is a compulsory subject to students who have failed the course more than once. Although a minority exhibit mature, reflective cognitive ability, the majority belong to the dualistic category. Marking strategies, such as the correction code and the cross to indicate an error, that are strongly dualistic, need to be balanced by means of more writerly response options. Mature end comments or taped responses can go a long way to providing evidence of reflective thought that students can model and in so doing enhance their cognitive ability.

3.2 Dualistic Frameworks of Response

The fact that the majority of frameworks of response can be classified as dualistic is not surprising. Traditional binary oppositions — speech / writing, truth / fiction, male / female, conscious / unconscious, literal / metaphorical, signified / signifier, presence / absence, reality / appearance (listed in Degenaar 1992:196) — dominate Western thought. In these hierarchical oppositions the first term has priority\(^{18}\) and is at 'the heart of the logocentrism which describes the nature of Western thinking' (ibid.:196). Dualistic frameworks of response are founded in the concept of control of student writing and the binary opposition involved could be expressed as freedom / control. The fact that freedom is given priority over control illustrates the move in pedagogy towards greater student participation.

\(^{18}\) Challenges have come in the form of Feminism and Freudian Analysis.
Dualistic frameworks are grounded in the issue of control of student writing. This concept, together with the matter of 'ownership' of student writing and the need to avoid 'appropriation' of students' work, has received much critical attention, beginning in 1982 with the publication of two influential articles, Sommers's 'Responding to Student Writing' and Brannon and Knoblauch's 'On Students' Rights to their Own Texts'. Straub explains that the question of control goes to the 'heart of our teaching and our identity as teachers: How much are we to assert our vision of what makes writing good and direct students' work as writers? How much are we to allow students to find their own ways as learning writers?' (1996:223).

Dualistic frameworks are based on an either/or logic. In Greenhalgh's words: 'identifying the locus of authority is essential to probing the ethical issue of wresting or relinquishing control of texts [my emphasis]' (1992:405). Alternatively stated: 'teacher commentary is either directive or facilitative, authoritative or collaborative, teacher-based or student-based' (Straub 1996:224). Straub explains that 'with remarkable consistency, the recent scholarship on response has urged us to reject styles that take control over student texts and encouraged us instead to adopt styles that allow students to retain greater responsibility over their writing' (ibid.:223). Thus not only are the frameworks couched in dualistic terms, but they adopt a rudimentary position reminiscent of Orwell's Animal Farm: namely, 'authoritative responses bad, collaborative responses good!'

Various critics use divergent terms:

- Elbow (1981) speaks of 'criterion-based' versus 'reader-based' responses;
- Flynn (1989) uses the terms 'masculine' and 'feminine';
- Newkirk (1984b) categorises responses into 'text-based response' (justified by referring to the text) and 'subjective responses' (biased reaction).

Despite discrepancies in terminology, the underlying concepts remain the same: the former category represents the more traditional, authoritarian response style while the latter category represents freedom and is perceived positively. This is in line with pedagogy where there has been a move away from the passive authoritarian educational model, from the 'empty vessels' syndrome and the 'banking' model in which the 'lecturer makes deposits which the students

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19 Articles dealing with the issue of ownership of student texts include Bolker (1978), Burkland & Grimm (1986), Gay (1983), Reid (1994), Sommers (1992) and Straub (1996).
meekly receive, memorise, and repeat' (Winterowd 1989:29), an approach based on faith in the 'consoling certainties of accepted knowledge and tradition and the belief that behind every situation there is a meaning' (ibid.:31). In a theoretical climate where certainty disappears, lecturers need to ensure that student passivity gives way to activity and interaction. Lecturers should strive towards empowering learners to become what Winterowd defines as 'critical co-investors' (ibid.:32) in learning. This shift needs to be expressed in the response strategies adopted.

The response style influences the role or 'reader function'. Lunsford introduced the latter term to counter Foucault's 'author functions', a concept that she maintains provides lecturers with 'a strong interpretative frame for interrogating the way we function' (1995:3). These reader roles are also expressed in dualistic terms:

- Danis prefers the role of collaborator / midwife / coach rather than that of a 'ruthless judge' (1987:19);
- Fuller proposes a shift from the role of 'detached critic' to that of 'interested reader' (1987:314);

The connotative power of words such as 'detached' and 'ruthless' as opposed to terms such as 'interested' and 'midwife' clearly indicates the polemical language associated with the debate and the emotional shift away from an authoritarian approach.

While Greenhalgh's framework (1992) can also be defined as dualistic, it is unique in that he classifies responses in terms of their locus of control. He uses the terms 'interruption' and 'interpretation' to distinguish between two discursive practices, the difference being that they draw their power and force by appealing either to external realities or to the reality of the reading experience. Interpretation is based on an authority external to the reading experience, such as textbooks, style guides and language research. Lecturers' comments can be viewed as containing 'two conflicting voices, one appealing to the seemingly immutable and immaterial authority of "diction" and the other to the immediate and material experience of reading the essay' (Greenhalgh 1992:405).
The flaw in a dualistic mode of thought is clearly indicated by Straub, who believes that these frameworks 'reinforce the dichotomy between directive and facilitative response and perpetuate, however unintentionally, the notion that some comments control student writing and others do not and the notion that there is a particular level of control – and a particular style – that is optimal in teacher response' (1996:225).

### 3.3 Taxonomising a Middle Ground

There has been an attempt to broaden the view on response strategies to include a more moderate central position. The movement away from dualistic frameworks of response towards those that attempt a more reflective view represents an increased cognitive maturity in the field of response theory.

Tobin (1993) sees in the role of 'interested reader' a central position between 'two poles of response: one that "directs student revision" and another that "withholds direction, ideas, information". In this middle style, Tobin says, he finds himself "asking questions in which I was truly interested but trusting [the writer] to find her own meaning" (Straub 1996:249).

Baumlin & Baumlin's (1989) examination of lecturers' response styles resulted in the following taxonomy:

Commentaries implied specific areas of emphasis which we now wish to clarify by comparing them to three modes of classical rhetoric: forensic rhetoric, the rhetoric of accusation and defence (the rhetoric of the law courts); epideixis, the rhetoric of praise (the rhetoric of celebratory address); and deliberative rhetoric, the rhetoric of persuasion and change (the rhetoric of political assembly). These three forms of rhetoric, systematized by Aristotle and subsequent theorists, have specific aims, applications, and occasions. ... most situations indeed demand a mixture of rhetorics .... [However,] some teachers apparently become trapped within one mode of rhetoric, usually the forensic (though sometimes the epideictic). Teachers' written comments, when this happens, will seek always either to justify a grade by forensically accusing the 'guilty text', or else to praise the text by epideictically pointing out what he or she 'liked about this paper'. (1989:176)

Although it is most apparent in forensic commentary, Baumlin & Baumlin see in all three response styles elements of coercion. They perceive a need for a mediating position that goes
'beyond the three rhetorics, to discover a *quaternium quid*: a truly collaborative, *negotiative* rhetoric of response, one that presents the critical judgements of the reader without assuming an authoritative voice, without undermining the student's own authority' (*ibid.*. 179). They believe that focus on heuristic, rather than analytic or symptomatic commentary, could be a solution. Through a writerly response style, the lecturer will be perceived as a fellow writer discussing ways of achieving desired effects and offering choices to the student.

Anson asserts that teachers also conform to the 'different epistemological assumptions categorised in Perry's scheme' (1989:339). His research into the response styles of 16 teachers to the writing of high-risk, mainly minority college students, found that, although the teachers' response styles differ radically, each has a dominant response style that does not vary regardless of any cognitive-level discrepancies in the essays they evaluated. The majority of teachers – about three-fourths – could be classed as dualistic in that they 'used response styles that focused almost entirely on the surface features of the students' texts' (*ibid.*:344). They perceive their role as that of a judge and upholder of standards and regard meaning as secondary to linguistic and rhetorical correctness. This dualistic responder offers little in the way of suggestions for revision. This type of response can have a negative effect on the student: 'The next time around, if he takes the risk, he may well be penalised for making more errors' (*ibid.* 345).

In contrast, the very small group classified as relativistic responders have few marginal comments and seem content with a 'casual reaction, as if this is the only kind of response that can have any validity in a world where judgement is always in the eye of the beholder. In this style, very little is imposed on the student; the text seems "owned" by the writer and the teacher stands outside it' (*ibid.*:349). Paradoxically, this approach has benefits for the less advanced student 'whose lack of fluency may be tied to his fear of error' (*ibid.*). The lecturer concentrates on meaning, 'a tendency that, given recent theories of response ... would seem preferable to error-hunting' (*ibid.*:350).

The mature reflective responders, unfortunately also a very small group, give tentative rather than dogmatic suggestions for revision. Their preferences are made as 'representative readers – members of the classroom and the wider social community' (*ibid.*:351). Writing is viewed as an
in-process draft which serves to promote increased writing proficiency. The text assumes a central position as the means by which the reader responds to the writer's meaning.

These three types of response are 'positions along a continuum of development, from the rigidly dualistic style to the balanced, mature, reflective style' (ibid.:356). Anson speculates that development along this continuum is related to the extent of a lecturer's examination of the teaching theory and practice. Whereas dualistic responders fall on the control side of an authority / freedom continuum, relativistic responders err on the side of licence. Anson's 'reflective response', Tobin's 'interested reader', and Bauml & Baumlin's 'writerly response', are, in essence, attempts to taxonomise a middle ground and so move away from the dangers inherent in dualism.

3.4 Frameworks Linked to a Theoretical Orientation

Hilgers (1984), Phelps (1989) and Warnock (1989) have developed frameworks of response that view the ways lecturers react to student writing as the products of a lecturer's dominant theoretical bias. Phelps's four-part taxonomy shows the relationship between the lecturer's attitude, her view of the text, and her response style:

- **Evaluative attitude:** Closed Text – If teachers adopt an evaluative attitude that views the text as closed, 'self-contained, complete in itself ... independent of other writings' (Phelps 1989:49-50) then there is a danger that response will be reduced to grading, ranking and identifying errors. This implies a return to a formalist axiology.

- **Formative attitude:** Evolving Text – Here one works with drafts and samples of the composing process, encourages a view of composing as a sequence of relatively fixed stages in which 'the text becomes less important for itself than for what it may point to in the way of unrealised intentions – a fact that considerably changes the interpretative task of the reader' (ibid.:51). The reader becomes part of the composing process, the need to judge is obviated and the focus falls on 'the deficit between what the text is and what it could be' (ibid.:52). The teacher is then a reader and the possibility of peer readers becomes more feasible if this approach to reading is taken.
• Developmental attitude: Portfolio of work – There is also the possibility of adopting a developmental attitude towards a portfolio of work. Here the 'text itself blurs as an individual entity; ... it is treated simply as a sample excerpted from a stream of writing ... part of the "life text" each literate person continually produces' (ibid.:53). In responding to a portfolio the reader focuses on the writer's development. This approach implies an emotive axiology by emphasising the development of the writer.

• Contextual Attitude: Text as Context – There are problems associated with trying 'to fit the square peg of multiple – and multiplicitous – creativity into the round hole of romantic, singular "authorship"' (Lunsford 1995:2). A contextual attitude rejects the concept of a text as sole product and property of a singular, stable, autonomous creator in favour of a view that acknowledges the collaborative nature of writing. In Phelps's words: 'New, more socially orientated notions of construing text seem to raise a different kind of boundary question, not of circumscription but of semiotic autonomy. How much is a text self-authored? How much of it is coauthored?' (1989:55). This relates to Bakhtin's term "heteroglossia" – the incorporation of "another's speech in another's language" (ibid.:56).

The formalist axiology implicit in a view of writing as a closed text has evolved into the final contextual approach that clearly takes into account socio-constructionism and acknowledges the impact that post-structuralism has had on writing.

Hilgers's study of the response style of beginner writers resulted in a five-point classification system (1984:379):

• Affective response to subject matter ('I liked this one because ... I would be so happy if my mom got a splinter out of my foot' (1984:369));
• Response to surface features of a text ('No mistakes – you deserve an A');

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20 Hilgers asserts that 'all evaluation is initially a form of mimicry [in that] ... children will evaluate in the same way as the significant others in their environments evaluate' (1984:382). Thus his classification is, indirectly, one that takes into account the way that adults respond to writing and it can thus be argued that it has a place in this thesis.
• Response to text as process / understood ('Coherent', 'makes sense', 'consistent', 'complete');
• Response to craftsmanship and / or aesthetic qualities ('creative', 'moving', 'it really works!')
• Value-related response ('provocative', 'insightful', 'profound').

Although Hilgers does not take this step, his classification can be related to reading and writing theory. His category, 'affective response', acknowledges reader-response theory, surface-feature response implies a formalist axiology, the categories of response to the text as process / understood / craftsmanship relate to the cognitive paradigm, while value-related response takes place within a socio-constructionist paradigm.

Warnock's taxonomy defines responses as predominantly text-centered, author-centered, reader-centered or subject or context-based (1989:68-9).

• Text-centered response styles are founded on a formalist axiology and are thus product-based. As a result of a strong New Criticism influence this response style would highlight aspects such as autonomy, unity, organisation, coherence, intensity, vocabulary and genre conventions. This approach has obvious appeal for lecturers. Not only is it pragmatic ('the world values order, coherence, and unity, and so should we to prepare our students for future work in the world' (ibid. :67)), but it also maintains the illusion of fairness and objectivity and shields the lecturer from the uncertainty which is the legacy of post-structuralism.

• Author-centered response styles are underpinned by an emotive axiology. Based on the intentionalist fallacy these responses are 'voyeuristically seeking for what the author meant' (ibid.:67). This biographical approach focuses on the writing process and student development. Warnock explains that the danger in this response style lies in the fact that 'even process [can become] a product to package and expressive writing [can become] canned' (ibid.).
The reader-centered response style is founded in the pathetic fallacy, which can easily be reduced to a 'wallowing in our own responses' (ibid.:63). Here subjectivity and honesty are valued. This approach is characterised by comments such as 'I don't get it' (ibid.:68).

A subject-centered response style is founded in the cognitive paradigm. It will give rise to responses that question accuracy and the need for statements to be developed and supported.

A context-centered approach is based on a socio-constructionist paradigm. It questions appropriacy and delves into political and power relationships.

Warnock moves beyond classification and taxonomising to a point at which she feels confident that she can justify the way she responds to student writing: 'I know that writing and reading are flip sides of the same action and that every writer must learn to be her own critical reader and to collaborate with others. I am modelling for students how to read in order to write. I also believe that I am modelling learning, not having learned' (1989:70).

Expressed in the terms used by Phelps (1989), Warnock (1989) and Hilgers (1984), the central hypothesis tested in this thesis is that the Practical English course is written in such a way that one would anticipate that response strategies would be in line with a 'formative attitude towards a developing text', would be a 'response to the text as process' that is 'author-centered' or 'subject-centered' in style. In contrast, the evaluative strategies represent a digression to an 'evaluative attitude to a closed text', a 'response to the surface features' characteristic of a 'text-centered' approach, as will be demonstrated in Chapter Six.

4. Conclusion

The thesis asserts that in the teaching context, who writes and who responds are of vital importance (despite Foucault) because of the issue of power. In order to answer the question 'who responds?', this chapter has outlined competing theoretical stances based on views of writing that privilege text, writer, reality, and society. Reading theory has turned the tables on
the lecturer by illustrating the degree to which meaning is constructed by the reader rather than being simply encoded in the text. Frameworks of response have been designed to identify the dominant theoretical orientation of lecturers when they comment on student writing.

This thesis will use the theory outlined in this chapter to evaluate Unisa lecturers' responses to the writing of Practical English students. However, it will attempt more. According to Foucault it is vital that one ask, not only 'What are the modes of existence of this discourse? Where has it been used, how can it circulate, and who can appropriate it for himself?' (1979:160), but also 'Who owns?' and 'Who does not own?'. To what extent is Lunsford correct in her assertion that 'we commodify and trade in the commercial value of student writing' (1995:8)? This thesis will seek answers to these questions when it examines the specific discourse situation in which lecturers respond to student writing in a distance-teaching context.

The chief paradigmatic shifts with respect to writing research have been outlined in this chapter. Although one can anticipate a degree of eclecticism in lecturers' response styles, nevertheless a dominant theoretical orientation should be evident when lecturers respond to student writing. However, before a meaningful examination can take place, the research conducted in the field needs to be reviewed.

21 The term has been defined by Kilfoil & Van der Walt as 'selecting from various styles, ideas, methods' (1997:27).
Chapter Three

Research: Response to Student Writing

The current status of error correction in foreign language teaching remains ambiguous. Research on the subject is both scant and speculative. Indeed, no standards exist on whether, when, which, or how student errors should be corrected or who should correct them (Hendrickson 1980:216).

Lecturers have decided views on the issues relating to responding to student writing, such as the value of error correction, the degree to which praise affects motivation and the value of form versus content feedback. They have opinions on the issue of appropriation of student writing and on the optimal form and level of intervention for specific types of writing. They believe they know what students want and what type of feedback disciplines other than English require. These convictions find expression in the way they respond to student writing and the specific roles they adopt in the process. However, it is vital that a lecturer is aware of the findings of research projects in order to distinguish between accepted wisdom and the facts that have emerged as a result of empirical studies in the field. With this gap in mind, this chapter examines research into response strategies in both the L1 and L2 teaching contexts. The primary emphasis falls on the latter group as 94.5% of Practical English students registered for the course in 1995 were studying English as an additional language.

Extensive research into response strategies has been conducted in the L1 teaching context. Silva makes the important point that although both L1 and L2 writers employ similar recursive composing processes, the 'assumption that L1 and L2 writing are practically identical' (1993:657) is fallacious. This largely unexamined presumption has led L2 writing specialists to rely for direction almost exclusively on L1 composition theories, which are problematic in that they are 'largely monolingual, monocultural, ethnocentric and fixated on the writing of ... undergraduates in North American colleges and universities' (ibid.:669). It is clear, therefore, that the findings

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1 This research has been most ably evaluated in Hillocks (1986), despite the fact that the document privileges quantitative, experimental research (see Silva 1988:519 and Zamel 1988:522). Readers interested in L1 teaching are referred to this source.
of research into marking strategies conducted in the L1 teaching context cannot be viewed as directly transferable to the L2 teaching context. For this reason, this chapter will focus primarily on research into marking strategies in the L2 context.

1. Procedure

All academic articles and reports of empirical research into response strategies that could be located have been carefully screened, and the most directly applicable ones analysed. The research described in this chapter falls into the category which Fitzgerald terms 'intervention research' (1987:492) which primarily takes the form of feedback from the lecturer. The main focus is on the various types of written response to student writing open to the lecturer. However, brief descriptions of related study focus areas, such as the effects of revision, the levels of improvement and risk taking that were achieved through the process of revision in response to feedback, the nature of the divergent roles lecturers adopt in responding to student writing, the lecturers' attitudes to various response styles, the students' reactions to 'appropriation' of their texts, the effect of error correction, the impact of focus on content and/or form, the location of feedback and the nature and extent of teachers' comments, have also been included.

The research design, sample size, subject characteristics (age, educational level, English proficiency and writing ability), nature of the writing task, length of the study, methodological concerns (collection, analysis, and interpretation of data) and findings have been critically evaluated. Where shortcomings have been identified, these are discussed. Research was rejected if it was found to contain any flaws, such as a quantitative research design with a small subject sample, overgeneralisation of claims, inadequate or incorrect statistical procedures, meagre description in any of the areas of subject characteristics, research methodology and/or statistical procedures used in the research.

2. Reviews of Research Findings

A comprehensive review of research into marking strategies within the L1 context was conducted by Hillocks in 1986. Cohen & Cavalcanti (1990), Fathman & Whalley (1990),
Knoblauch & Brannon (1981), Leki (1990), and Sheppard (1992) have published reviews of research findings that extend the focus to include L2 teaching contexts. This chapter seeks to determine to what extent the negative conclusions that have been reached after their reviews of research findings are justified:

• Fathman & Whalley state that with respect to research on marking strategies in L2 teaching contexts, the 'story is briefer and similarly inconclusive' (1990:180).
• Hillocks's conclusion is that in the L1 context the studies he reviewed 'strongly suggest that teacher comment has little impact on student writing' (1986:165) and that 'teaching by written comment on compositions is generally ineffective' (ibid.:161).
• Knoblauch & Brannon (1981) state that there is 'scarcely a shred of empirical evidence to show that students typically even comprehend our responses to their writing, let alone use them purposefully to modify their practice' (1981:1).
• Leki states that there is 'depressingly little evidence to indicate that careful annotation of papers actually helps student writers improve' (1990:60).
• Sheppard states that 'the various types [of correction techniques] make little difference; indeed, the use of any type at all may not be worth the effort' (1992:104).

3. 'Appropriation' of Student Texts

The issues of authority and 'appropriation of student writing' are central to any study of response to student writing. This questioning is in line with the foregrounding of power relations that is found in much post-structuralist theory. Foucault explains that within the examining and responding context with 'its rituals, its methods, its characters and their roles, its play of questions and answers, its systems of marking and classification ... are to be found a whole domain of knowledge, a whole type of power' [my emphasis] (in Wiggins 1993:1). As Foucault's words imply, testing and responding to student writing still reflects 'premodern

However, Sheppard then reviews Leki's (1990) research that reveals students' desires for detailed feedback as well as Fathman & Whalley's conclusion that 'identification of the location of errors by the teacher appears to be an effective means of helping students correct their grammar errors' (1990:185), and concludes that 'error correction was okay [sic] after all' (1992:104).
views about students' (unequal) relationship to the examiner (and hence premodern views about the students' rights) (ibid: 7).

The issue of textual appropriation is complex 'because it is entwined with several dichotomies: product versus process, accuracy versus fluency, and practical considerations of audience expectations versus creativity' (Reid 1994: 274). As mentioned in the previous chapter, the concept of appropriation of student writing has been a heated topic of debate ever since the publication in 1982 of Sommers's 'Responding to Student Writing' and Brannon and Knoblauch's 'On Students' Rights to their Own Texts'. Sommers explains: 'The teacher appropriates the text from the student by confusing the student's purpose in writing the text with her own purpose in commenting' (1982: 149). Brannon & Knoblauch believe that students are faced with the dilemma of having to 'accommodate, not only the personal intentions that guide their choice-making, but also the teacher-reader's expectations about how the assignment should be completed' (ibid: 158).

The concept of 'appropriation' was widely explored over the past two decades in research such as that of Bolker (1978), Brannon & Knoblauch (1982), Burkland & Grimm (1986), Cardelle & Corno (1981), Freedman (1987), Lynch & Klemans (1978), Purves (1986; 1992), Reid (1994), Schwartz (1984), Sommers (1982, 1992), Spencer (1997) and Sperling & Freedman (1987). Reid explains how pervasive the attitude towards textual appropriation was during this era, a time during which the dominant themes of many conference papers were the 'evils of commenting (i.e., intruding on) student papers; ... the "tyranny" of teachers' responses; and ... student confusion that surrounded teacher response' (1994: 275).

To avoid unnecessary repetition, I shall discuss only the research of Lynch & Klemans (1978) and Sperling & Freedman (1987) to illustrate the basis on which researchers concluded that students frequently react to 'appropriation' of their texts with either resentment, misunderstanding or compliance. These two texts will serve to illustrate the body of research listed in the previous paragraph.

Lynch & Klemans (1978) evaluated 154 responses to questionnaires from university students in an attempt to ascertain student response to lecturers' comments on their scripts. They found that many students 'are resentful of comments on their paper's content, especially if the content can
be considered "personal opinion" (1978:179). A formalist approach troubles the students most when they have classified the writing task as expressive. One student formulates this indignation as follows: 'I feel that the content in my papers are not all that bad, but instructors tear up my ideas and illustration that I use with comments like "so what?", "Why do you feel this way?" (ibid.:170). This finding is supported by Burkland & Grimm who conclude that students view the lecturers' responses as a form of textual appropriation and that they exhibit an unwillingness to grant the teacher authority over their writing (1986:244-5).

It is necessary to counteract the negative view of student resistance to authority inherent in both Lynch & Klemans (1978) and Burkland & Grimm's (1986) research. In terms of Giroux's taxonomy there are two ways in which students can react against the dominant culture, in this instance as exhibited in the lecturers' commentary. These categories are defined as opposition and resistance. Whereas opposition 'refers to student behavior [sic] which runs against the grain and which interrupts what we usually think of as the normal progression of learning' (in Chase 1988:14-5), resistance is oppositional behaviour that is a form of 'moral and political indignation ... that actively works against the dominant ideology' (ibid.:15). The latter is positive as it is what Chase describes as a movement towards emancipation. In contrast, the former does not lead to transformation but serves merely to reinforce the dominant ideology (ibid.:15). Any blanket criticism of students' defiance of lecturers' authority is thus flawed as the type of rebellion needs to be identified. Resistance that, in Giroux's words, represents 'a critique of domination and provides theoretical opportunities for self-reflection and for struggle in the interest of self-emancipation and social emancipation' (ibid. 1988:20), is the highest ideal of teaching within the rhetorical paradigm. However, the ideal of resistance is an unrealistic expectation for the majority of Practical English students who struggle to meet the basic requirements of the academic discourse community. Speaking from experience, the author believes that it is only in rare instances that students are sufficiently advanced, both linguistically and cognitively, to engage in oppositional discourse. In Practical English students have to provide evidence that they have mastered specific skills and are communicatively competent. Critical thinking, at the level necessary for meaningful oppositional debate, is not a requirement of the course.

However, there is an alternative to both opposition and resistance, and that is what Giroux describes as accommodation, 'the process by which students learn to accept conventions
without ... questioning' (ibid.:14). This approach cannot lead to a clearer vision because the students' lack of confidence in their own ideas has reduced learning to 'reproducing acceptable truths, imitating the gestures and rituals of the academy' (Sommers 1992:28). In Bloom's words: 'If the students tailor their writing to contours of the teacher's views, how can they engage in the critical thinking and tough-minded independent learning we claim to encourage?' (1997:364). The motives for students adopting a position of accommodation need to be explored. One cause could be a ruthless pragmatism that views compliance with authority as the shortest route to an instrumental goal – the desired grade / degree. The author believes that if Practical English students exhibit evidence of mindless compliance with authority their lecturers would feel that they had failed in their duty to promote critical thinking skills. Sperling & Freedman's (1987) research illustrates that this form of deference in the face of textual appropriation is far more hazardous than the resentment described by Lynch & Klemans and Burkland & Grimm.

Sperling & Freedman (1987) used a single case-study format to probe the misunderstandings that arise from written response to student writing, even among promising students. In their study the student's text, the teacher's written response, and the student's reaction to the response make up a unit, a response round that Sperling & Freedman describe as being analogous to oral turn-taking (1987:349). In this research the subject, Lisa, proved compliant, willing to 'approve of her text's being "appropriated" by the teacher' (ibid.:357) and to maintain deference to his opinion. Her obedience to the demands of the teacher / authority are succinctly put by Sperling & Freedman: 'A good girl writes like a good girl' (ibid.). Her submissiveness is in conflict with her teacher's desire for his student to develop her own distinct voice. What Sperling and Freedman found was that the 'written response ... invokes a complex problem-solving activity requiring strategies on the part of the student that incorporate not only information and skills that ideally match the teacher's, but, potentially, a host of values as well' [my emphasis] (ibid.:362). Lisa's case exemplifies a student who surrenders her authority and is reluctant to take responsibility for her work. Unlike the rebellious response, this uncritical acceptance, characteristic of an attitude of accommodation, is always counterproductive, a negation of the goals towards which the lecturer is striving. However, a distinction needs to be made between the asinine accommodation that results when a student is paralysed by authority and the willingness to learn new skills and adopt strategies that is at the heart of successful learning.
The initial fixation with appropriation has given way to a more balanced approach exemplified in Reid's excellent article, in which she debunks 'the myths of appropriation' (1994:273). She reveals how, in the 1980s, textual appropriation had become a 'buzzword' and, at its worst extreme, teacher intervention was regarded as 'cultural imperialism' (ibid.:276). Reid's response to the 'appropriation' theory was to draw away from writing comments on her students' papers, the problem being that 'the fewer comments I made and the less I tried to "interfere", however, the more fraudulent I felt as a teacher' (ibid.:277). Her fear of appropriating student texts had begun to affect her effectiveness as an educator.

Reid believes that two reasons account for the rise of what she terms 'a flawed theory of appropriation' (ibid.:277). First, she believes the theory of appropriation of student texts runs counter to the rhetorical paradigm because it ignores the social contexts for writing in which meaning is negotiated with an audience in mind. In this situation the teacher acts, not as a gatekeeper or simply as an evaluator, but as 'the surrogate academic audience' (ibid.:279).

Second, Reid believes that textual appropriation as a pedagogic principle was first embraced and then exaggerated; in application, teachers would not utilize their expertise as cultural informants and experienced academic readers for fear of changing (i.e. educating) their students. However, the teacher exists because of her expertise, and it is therefore the responsibility of the teacher to share her cultural and rhetorical knowledge with her students, to intervene in student writing in order to educate her students (ibid.:278).

To Reid 'power does not have a finite quality. The teacher does not have to give up power in order to empower her students' (ibid.:283). Reid acknowledges that the student's relinquishing responsibility for a text is a danger inherent in the 'expert-novice relationship between teacher and student' (ibid.:287). This is particularly evident in product-based writing contexts in which the lecturer is also the evaluator. However, she still maintains that L2 classrooms need to be 'pragmatic places in which students learn the essentials of academic writing ... [which] provide students with adequate schemata (linguistic, content, contextual, and rhetorical) that will serve as scaffolding for writing' (ibid.:286). In order to meet this task the teacher needs to view appropriation as a myth and to concede that fear of appropriating student writing does not give L2 teachers 'licence to abdicate their responsibilities as cultural informants and surrogate academic audiences – as educators' (ibid.:289).
Before a lecturer can proceed to make decisions about the form his or her responses are going to take, a judgment has to be made about the issue of appropriation of student writing. One cannot deny the truth of Brannon & Knoblauch's statement that it is the opportunity to accomplish one's own purposes by controlling one's own choices that creates the incentive to write in the first place (1982:159). Writing from a position of non-ownership, feels dead, intensely boring, frustrating, dishonest, and results in despair and a sense of dissociation (Bolker 1978:182-3). However, lecturers also need to acknowledge that a negative view of 'appropriation' of student writing has a debilitating effect on them as educators. In addition, the either / or logic on which the concept of appropriation is based needs to be questioned. After all, it is in 'the pull between someone else's authority and our own, between submission and independence that we must discover how to define ourselves' (Sommers 1992:31). Reid's article goes a long way towards empowering the lecturer by promoting a more balanced view of the issue. In short, students need to recognise that the lecturer has both the experience and the duty to assist them, while educators should accept that their level of intervention will vary in accordance with their purposes in divergent writing tasks and that their goal is to foster critical thinking and independence – to teach students to write well without them.

4. Error

In keeping with the tenor of Henrickson's (1980) beliefs pertaining to error correction, cited at the opening of this chapter, Cardelle & Corno use the words 'scant and generally inconsistent' to describe the outcome of research on written feedback in L2 language learning (1981:252). Van der Walt et al. believe that much of what has been published on error correction is 'speculative, and needs to be validated by a great deal of empirical experimentation' (1994:8). Existing research must be carefully reviewed and new research conducted so that educators can move towards consensus on this vital issue.

Lecturers' commentary tends to focus on flaws in students' linguistic competence as revealed in grammatical3 'errors'. The word error is derived from the Latin 'errare', meaning 'to wander,

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3 Celce-Murcia defines grammar as a concept that includes 'morphological inflections, function words and syntactic word order' (1991:459).
roam or stray', and can be defined as 'an utterance, form, or structure that a particular language
teacher deems unacceptable because of its inappropriate use' [my emphasis] (Hendrickson
1987:366). This definition was selected because it illustrates clearly the subjective bias that is
central to any definition of the concept of error.

Silva cites thirteen studies, conducted between 1970 and 1992, which demonstrate that L2
students make more errors than L1 writers both in terms of overall number of errors as well as
in the specific areas of syntax, lexis, verbs, prepositions, articles and nouns (1993:663). Thus
educators working primarily in L2 contexts should formulate a policy on the most appropriate
means to address their students' linguistic inadequacies. However, Taylor cautions L2 teachers
that as long as their students continue to have serious written language problems, their writing
programmes will be based on a formalist axiology, concentrating 'primarily on teaching language
form and correctness, though this practice may well render the student unable to experience the
process of discovery and thorough revision' (1981:8).

4.1 Towards a More Balanced View of Error

Errors can be defined as any language, stylistic and logical flaws in writing that disrupt attention
and demand a response. As indicated earlier, ignoring errors is also a response that has
theoretical and pedagogical implications. Any educator's treatment of error will depend on his
or her theoretical assumptions about the importance of error in writing. In her article 'Grammar
Pedagogy in Second and Foreign Language Teaching', Celce-Murcia explains the shifts in
attitude towards error that have taken place: 'during the past 25 years we have seen grammar
move from a position of central importance in language teaching, to pariah status, and back to
a position of renewed importance' (1991:476). The latter attitude reflects the balance which has
resulted from rejection, not only of the Audio-Lingual Method, based on behaviouristic
psychology and structural linguistics, with its distorted view of the negative impact of any error,
but also of the more laissez-faire attitude towards error. The position of 'renewed importance'
is one which views linguistic competence as one of four components of communicative
competence alongside socio-linguistic, discourse and strategic competence. This balance should
be reflected in the attention accorded to error in the lecturers' marking policy. Students need
assistance so that they can understand the truth of Shaughnessy's statement that mechanical
errors sabotage a writer's work with 'unprofitable intrusions upon the consciousness of the reader [which] demand energy without giving any return in meaning' (in Connors 1985:71).

A balanced view of the importance of error is essential. Faneslow (1977) explains that 'errors are part of learning – mistaken hypotheses and wrong connections are normal' (in Hendrickson 1987:362). One of the basic principles of L1 acquisition is that errors are inevitable and that a child's progress can be measured in the decreasing number of 'incorrect structures' that he or she uses. An error, such as the overgeneralisation of the -ed morpheme to all past tense forms (such as 'spaked'), is indicative of a child's developing knowledge of the abstract rules underlying language and a sign that the child has begun to test structural hypotheses about the language and is no longer memorising past-tense forms as individual items. As the child is unconcerned with form, he or she is willing to make the 'mistakes that one really must make in an attempt to communicate spontaneously' (Brown 1987:50). With time all learners adopt a more target-like register in which non-standard forms are systematically identified and rectified.

A balanced approach to L2 students' errors can decrease anxiety. Errors should be regarded in a positive light – in accordance with interlanguage theory – as the 'results of the creative perception of the second language and an attempt to discover its rules apart from the rules of the first language' (ibid.:54). Cardelle & Corno stress the importance of viewing errors not in a punitive light but rather as 'information feedback to motivate the learner' (1981:251). Hendrickson (1978) sees errors as valuable as they can provide insight into the student's progress in internalising the rules of the new language. Ideally errors should be brought to the student's attention in a manner that minimises embarrassment and takes into account factors such as the student's personality, attitude, motivation, past language learning history and present proficiency level. This point is also emphasised by Van der Walt et al. who believe that more positive results will be obtained if a lecturer is aware of 'the student's writing goals, his standard of writing proficiency, the quality and quantity of errors made, and, of prime importance, the students' motivation' (1994:14). Unfortunately, in a distance-teaching context, an intimate knowledge of the student is virtually impossible.
The treatment of error is complex because it relates to the lecturer's political attitude / ideology and has sociopolitical implications. Severino identifies three 'stances' that are directly related to the degree of acculturation that lecturers believe to be desirable:

The first stance, separatism, is the belief that cultures, languages, and dialects in contact should be able to exist almost independently – unaffected, untainted by mainstream cultures, languages, and dialects. The second, more compromising position of accommodation is the belief that second language and second dialect speakers can be both a part of mainstream society and apart from it, retaining to some extent their culture and language. The third position is assimilation – the stance that everyone should blend into the mainstream or melting pot (1993:185-87).

An assimilationist stance, characteristic of English teaching in the 'Old' South Africa, is reflected in lecturers' insistence on 'linear, thesis-statement and topic-sentence-driven, error-free, and idiomatic academic English' (ibid.:187). Here linguistic differences are regarded as signs of L1 interference and viewed as errors. Severino believes that at best this stance reflects a pragmatic approach based on a desire to take into account the demands of the discourse communities for whom the students are writing. However, at worst, Severino explains, it results in a formalist approach that devalues the students' cultures.

In contrast, separatists value and desire to preserve linguistic diversity and view an assimilationist approach as unjust and colonialistic. Severino explains (ibid.:188) that ideally a separatist approach emphasises meaning, underplays formal discrepancies, stresses communication and encourages students to work on fluency, freed from nit-picking formalist constraints. Divergent rhetorical patterns are tolerated. However, this approach does little to prepare students for the demands of the workplace. To counter this problem separatists believe that society's linguistic discrimination against L2 speakers should be challenged.

The compromise position is defined as accommodationist. While students' linguistic backgrounds are valued, they are encouraged to acquire 'new discourse patterns, thus enlarging their rhetorical repertoires for different occasions' (ibid.:188). This is the multilingual stance that is at the heart of the present South African constitution. The resulting teaching is rhetorical with the focus falling on the appropriacy of a feature for a specific context. Theoretically the power shifts to students who can decide what impression they wish to create on a specific target audience.
In a distance-teaching context, a taped response would allow for the detailed discussion such complex issues require. However, Severino warns that the accommodationists’ conditions, contexts and qualifications may sound like double-talk that will probably confuse more than help the students (ibid.:189).

In her research, Severino (1993) used the response continuum outlined above to assess actual and hypothesised responses from divergent sociopolitical stances to the writing of three students from different linguistic backgrounds. She illustrates how treatments of the same errors differ in accordance with the sociopolitical stance adopted. Errors are either corrected, discussed in a rhetorical context, or ignored depending on the sociopolitical view of the marker. The fact that the correction code is the marking method used in Practical English indicates that the stance taken is primarily assimilationist and that formal correctness can easily become the overriding evaluative criterion for success.

To compound the problem relating to the degree of attention 'errors' should receive is the fact that all errors are not equal. Hendrickson emphasises the importance of distinguishing between communicative and non-communicative errors (1987:359), as the former are far more serious than the latter in that they interfere with comprehension. This distinction is at the heart of the ESL Composition Profile that was used to evaluate the scripts in the empirical study described in this thesis. Phrases, such as 'meaning not obscured' and 'meaning confused or obscured' are not only printed in bold but become the means of distinguishing between proficiency levels. Burt and Kiparsky (1972) label the former sentence-level or global errors and the latter constituent-level or local errors. Burt (1975) argues that 'the global / local distinction is the most pervasive criterion for determining the communicative importance of errors' (in Hendrickson 1987:360). For example, the local error in 'the child go home each day' is restricted to surface structure; this subject / verb agreement problem in no way hinders communication. In contrast 'the kind goes home each day' contains a communication-impairing lexical error that makes the sentence incomprehensible to anyone who is unfamiliar with Afrikaans. However, the former

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4 The ESL Composition Profile is printed on pages 168-69 of this thesis.
sentence contains a stigmatising error in the South African context and thus it should be given more attention than a local error would normally receive. It is thus vital for any educator to determine the level of stigma that native speakers in a specific discourse community attach to deviations from the standard. Stigmatising errors need attention, as do high-frequency errors and any deviations which appear to have become a permanent rather than a transient feature of students' interlanguage. The lecturer needs to weigh these factors carefully to determine what the most appropriate response should be.

Hendrickson identifies four 'critical learner factors' which determine a lecturer's response to student error, namely, purpose for writing, student proficiency level, the teacher's ability to identify high priority errors, and student attitude (1980:217). Likewise, Celce-Murcia's table indicates that the importance attached to linguistic competence varies according to the teaching context.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Learner variables</th>
<th>More Important</th>
<th>Focus on Form</th>
<th>Less Important</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td>Adults</td>
<td>Adolescents</td>
<td>Children</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Proficiency level</td>
<td>Advanced</td>
<td>Intermediate</td>
<td>Beginning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Educational background</td>
<td>Literate,</td>
<td>Semiliterate,</td>
<td>Preliterate,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>well educated</td>
<td>some formal</td>
<td>no formal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Instructional variables</td>
<td>Speaking</td>
<td>Speaking</td>
<td>Listening</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Skill</td>
<td>Consultative</td>
<td>Writing</td>
<td>reading</td>
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<tr>
<td>Register</td>
<td>Vocational</td>
<td>Formal</td>
<td>Informal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Need/use</td>
<td>Professional</td>
<td></td>
<td>Survival</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>communication</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3: Variables that Determine the Importance of Grammar (1991:465)

Unisa students fall into the category on Celce-Murcia's continuum in which accuracy is vital as they are adults studying at a university, who require writing skills for formal, professional situations. However, many of the students entering university fall into the semilingual.
proficiency bracket despite the fact that they are operating in a context where accuracy is important. The contradiction arises that a formalist approach does not help students at this proficiency level and yet the context tempts the lecturer to adopt this strategy. In addition, with the vast student numbers and the distance-teaching context, it is difficult to determine factors relating to the specific student's attitude or motivation level.

In his review of the history of mechanical correctness in composition instruction, Connors identifies what could well be regarded as the core of the problem in teaching situations where the student to teacher ratio places unrealistic demands on a teacher. In the United States 140-200 students per teacher was not uncommon in the years 1880-1910 (Connors 1985:66). He quotes a teacher who worked under these conditions: 'We hardly learn the names and faces of our hundreds of students before they break ranks ... and then we must resume our Sisyphean labours' (ibid.:67). It was in situations such as this, Connors hypothesises, that the teacher as spotter and corrector of formal errors was born, the reason being that merely scanning a paper for formal and syntactic correctness is a rather mechanical act. 'Far more students' papers can be passed through such a mechanism in a given period of time than can be passed through a full editorial reading, with its time-consuming demand for complete attention to all levels of style, form, and meaning' (ibid.:67). In these teaching contexts, concern for rhetoric can easily be replaced by an emphasis on mechanical correctness. Inadequate training can result in the new teacher clinging to his or her 'handbook as a shipwrecked sailor clings to his [or her] raft, ... soon [coming] to believe that these rules, which only yesterday were unknown to him [or her], are the sole criteria of good writing' (ibid.:69). This tendency prevails in much teacher commentary today. Despite the progress teaching methodology has made, teachers frequently adopt response strategies similar to those which probably led to Mill's words, written in 1953: 'Nothing is more blighting ... to natural and functional written communication than an excessive zeal for purity of usage in mechanics' (ibid.:70). To what extent are traditionalists at teaching institutes such as Unisa, for whom overwork is an occupational reality, able to attribute their formalist response style to the fact that responding effectively to writing as communication takes more time than does a cursory error witch-hunt?

Siegel's (1982) research indicates that expertise and experience are necessary to balance these factors in order to determine the importance of an error in a specific teaching context and to
establish if lecturer intervention is necessary. Siegel contrasts the marking of seven teachers from departments other than English with that of eight experienced composition teachers. The teachers graded a total of 35 composition papers on five proficiency levels. Siegel found that there were not significant differences between new and experienced writing teachers in the number of errors in form that they marked. 'What differed was which errors, both in form and content, that teachers chose to mark. ... the new teachers failed to mark important errors mainly because they were busy with unnecessary or even mistaken "corrections"' (1982:303). The more experienced teachers never marked a sentence too long provided grammatical control had been maintained and frequently 'ignored local infelicities or asked questions that might lead the student to come up with his or her own revision' (ibid.:304). Experienced teachers are able to distinguish between serious errors, which are relatively easy to correct, and those whose correction involves internalising new and difficult rules. The most significant difference came in the number of comments on content as opposed to form; a tendency, in the words of the Newbolt Report, to criticise 'bricks, not architecture' (in Spingies 1990:19). Although both groups marked more form than content errors, the experienced teachers marked almost three times as many content corrections as the inexperienced ones. The experienced teachers also made 4.3 times more personal comments than the teachers from the other departments. In short, 'experienced teachers acted not as impersonal correctors but as genuine readers who wrote substantive, constructive, text-specific suggestions, comments, and reactions' (Siegel 1982:306). Unfortunately the significance levels of the findings were not provided, neither were the statistical procedures available for scrutiny. The classification into experienced / inexperienced teachers is also problematic and possibly insulting to the non-English faculty teachers who have different priorities in their courses.

4.2 The Effects of Error Correction

Because Practical English is primarily a language rather than a writing course, the effect of error correction is an issue of the utmost concern. The empirical study described in this thesis tests the effect of various methods of error correction and thus research in this area is central to the treatise. Experimental investigations (Chater (1984), Fathman & Whalley (1990), Hendrickson (1976; 1978), Hyland (1990), Robb et al. (1986) and Semke (1984)) suggest that even the most meticulous attention to error has little effect on linguistic proficiency. Dulay et al. (1982)
describe the work of Hendrickson, who corrected 552 compositions written by 24 adults over a six-week period. The two independent variables tested were corrections of global errors (defined as those that affect sentence organisation and errors involving sentence connectors) and systematic corrections of all errors. His conclusion: 'neither error correction treatment, regardless of the level of communicative proficiency, made any statistically significant difference in students' written proficiency over the six-week treatment period' (Dulay et al. 1982:35). Dulay et al. also cite the research of Cohen and Robbins (1976) who found that correction of university student's work did not influence the production of errors, to support their claim that 'correction is not a very reliable tool in helping students overcome errors' (1982:36). It is important to note that this conclusion is reached after examination of four projects (only two of which deal with the written modality) and that the authors acknowledge flaws in terms of the quality and a lack of consistency in the corrections in Cohen and Robbins' study (Dulay et al. 1982:36). In contrast to these studies, Fathman & Whalley's (1990) research demonstrates that specific form-related feedback has a greater impact on grammatical accuracy than content-related feedback has on the improvement of content.

In the South African context, Van der Walt et al. (1994) used 60 Rand Afrikaans University students to test the hypothesis that 'the correction of errors in the essays of ESL students does not have a statistically as well as practically significant effect on their grammatical proficiency in writing' (1994:9). Over an eight-week period, three divergent treatments were applied to the students' essays. Group 1 had clear and systematic correction of all errors, group two had errors indicated, while group three had no visible correction. Paired t-tests were conducted to determine any significant changes that had taken place between the error analyses done on the first and the last essays. An analysis of variance indicated that the three groups differed from each other in only four of the grammatical categories. Van der Walt et al. conclude that moderate correction seems to be the most viable option for teachers ... [who] should not correct all the errors that are made by students without giving them a chance to appraise their own performance' (ibid.:14). They argue in favour of moderate, selective or minimal marking as a means to improve a limited number of grammatical categories (ibid.:14). However, it is important to note that their results 'indicate that there is not a statistically or practically significant difference between moderate correction and no correction' (ibid.:14).
4.3 Lecturers' Attitudes Towards Error

Despite evidence that error correction does little to enhance writing proficiency, research indicates that lecturers exhibit a preoccupation with error. In 1985, for example, Zamel found that most teachers respond to writing as if it were a final draft and that despite the recent influence of process-orientated research, 'teachers are still by and large concerned with accuracy and correctness of surface-level features of writing and that error identification ... is still the most widely employed procedure for responding to ESL writing' (1985:84).

Zamel cites the research of Cumming (1983), who found that error identification was the most widely employed responding technique. Zamel believes that the obsession with error is ingrained in the practices of educators who, like Practical English lecturers, view themselves as language rather than writing teachers. Zamel reveals that although the aim of marking in the L2 context seems to be to indicate all errors, some errors are overlooked, certain minor errors are corrected while major issues relating to meaning or resulting in ambiguity pass unnoticed, and that content is downplayed in favour of a formalist approach. Robb et al. quote two research studies indicating that while the majority of lecturers are able to correct errors, a third of the errors were incorrectly classified (1986:84). The problem is compounded in that the correction of errors is so often done in red ink, the 'blood' from what White describes as 'the general antagonism inherent in education, the war between student and teacher' (1995:124). Paradoxically, this red ink gives 'a visual and mental prominence to mistakes ... [which could even result] in ingraining the mistakes more deeply than before' (Spingies 1990:19). The use of pencil, while less visually obtrusive, can still produce a battle-zone effect.

Little has changed over the years in terms of teachers' obsession with error. In 1993 Connors & Lunsford's conclusion after examining comments on 3,000 scripts was that 'most teachers ... continue to feel that a major task is to "correct" and edit papers, primarily for formal errors but

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7 Of interest is the fact that in Leki's study 33% of her students elected to have their work marked in red ink while only 6% preferred a less noticeable colour. 60% felt that the matter was irrelevant (1991b:214), an opinion shared by Barry Ronge in his satirical article, 'Seeing Red', in which he denounced this 'colour stuff [as] hogwash, an irritating bee in someone's pretentious bonnet' (1997:8).

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also for deviation from algorithmic and often rigid "rhetorical" rules as well' (1993:217). In the South African context, Parkinson & Mattson (1993) found that the biggest category of commentary related to formal components such as grammar, punctuation and spelling rather than to the students' ability to structure ideas. They also observed that specific problems are indicated but that the underlying skills are not taught. Further evidence of the stress on mechanical correctness can be found in marking policies such as the instruction to markers examining matriculation papers for both the erstwhile Department of Education and Training and the Transvaal Education Department. The examiners were required to count 'major' and 'minor' errors and deduct marks for each infringement.

Divergent explanations for lecturers' persistent error-orientated response mode have been given. First, in the school context, the fact that 'the efficiency of the teacher is often judged by the quantity of the red ink disfiguring the exercise-books which he displays' (Spingies 1990:20) results in the teacher conforming to expectation. Consciousness-raising is essential to counter this myth. Second, the fact that error correction is 'a tedious task, but a plain and straightforward one' (ibid.:20) makes it an attractive option for inexperienced lecturers or ones who lack confidence. In the words of a student in Newkirk's experiment: 'It is hard to evaluate and grade papers because everyone has a different view on the interest of the topic. It is easy to find the mechanical errors' (1984b:293). Alternatively stated, judging on the number of errors, while not adequate, is at least less subjective' (ibid.) Third, Spingies's hypothesis that educators may well be perpetuating the tradition in which they were taught is echoed by White in his warning of the dangers of copying one's own teachers' formalistic response style, which lacked ... a concern for writing as learning, for the teaching of writing as supportive of learning. What it unconsciously enforced was the gatekeeper function of schooling, rewarding the privileged, and excluding almost all whose parents were of the wrong class, income, or national origin. Instructors who unrepentantly continue this patter today claim that they are upholding "standards", as if it were somehow wrong to help students learn (White 1995:125).

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8 Spingies quotes an example of this crudely mechanical approach: Deduct ½ mark for each language mistake up to a maximum of 10 marks. Deduct ½ mark for each spelling and punctuation error up to a maximum of 5 marks. To counterbalance this, students' content was marked out of 15 (1990:21).
Connors puts this point across well when he states that educators' 'single-minded enforcement of standards of mechanical and grammatical correctness in writing ... [have] transmogrified the noble discipline of Aristotle, Cicero, Campbell, into a stultifying error-hunt' (1985:61).

The lecturer's fixation on error is echoed in the composing processes of student writers. Studies such as those conducted by Bridwell (1980), Chenoweth (1987), Emig (1971), Faigley & Witte (1981), Matsuhashi & Gordon (1985), Perl (1979), Sommers (1980), and Stallard (1974) provide proof that more competent writers tend to do more revising for meaning than their less able counterparts. Sommers's (1980) finding that inexperienced writers define revision as rewording and concentrate on errors supports the belief that inexperienced writers make mainly surface and mechanical revisions and view revision as proofreading. This is the approach that Sommers so aptly describes as 'the janitorial work of polishing, cleaning, and fixing what is and always has been' (1992:28). Silva cites four other studies to support his claim that L2 revision focuses more on grammar than L1 writing does (1993:662). In addition, L2 writing involves more revision than L1 writing and the process is more complicated for L2 students in that they are less able to revise 'by ear', to make language changes on the basis of what 'sounds' right (Silva 1993:662).

Perl (1979) found that the five unskilled college writers whom she researched viewed revision as synonymous with 'error-hunting... [and became] prematurely concerned with the "look" of their writing' (1979:333). They paid more attention to form than to content in their revisions with the five students' ratios of content to form being 24:210; 7:24; 13:49; 2:167; and 21:100 (ibid.:329). These statistics support Perl's claim that students begin 'to conceive of writing as a "cosmetic" process where concern for correct form supersedes development of ideas' (ibid.:334).

The most convincing research in this field, Fitzgerald claims, is that of Faigley & Witte (1981) who could demonstrate the age / competence-related increase in focus on meaning as follows: 'Expert professional writers make one meaning-related revision for every two surface changes; advanced college student writers make one for every three; and inexperienced college students make one for every seven' (in Fitzgerald 1987:492). Faigley & Witte (1981) found that 88% of

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9 In an attempt to classify revisions and so promote research into this area, taxonomies have been developed by researchers such as Bridwell (1980), Sommers (1980), and Faigley & Witte (1980). The latter was designed to differentiate between surface-level revision, which leaves meaning untouched, and text-based revisions that challenge the meaning and content.
inexperienced writers' revisions were surface-level adjustments – editing rather than rewriting. The core of the problem lies in the fact that a response style founded in a formalist axiology, which overemphasises correctness and is restricted to word-level alterations, reinforces the inexperienced L2 writer's limited concept of revision and thus runs counter to the ideal towards which the lecturer is striving – an experienced writer who is increasingly concerned with meaning rather than form. The situation is compounded if one takes into account Zamel's (1985) finding that students tend to respond to comments on form and ignore those that focus on content.

Yet, despite the mutual preoccupation with error on the part of both pupil and teacher, Perl found that 'serious syntactic and stylistic problems remained in their finished drafts' (1979:331-2). Indeed, Fitzgerald cites the research of Bracewell, Scardamalia, and Bereiter (1978) who found that the changes made by their eighth-graders actually reduced the quality of their drafts (in Fitzgerald 1987:493). There is thus what Fitzgerald terms 'limited evidence [which] suggests that for younger or less competent college writers, revision may not have a positive effect on quality' (ibid.:493). In contrast, Fitzgerald cites five studies which support the fact that for 'older or more skilled writers, revisions appear to improve the quality of compositions' (ibid.:493). My question in this study echoes that of Fitzgerald: to what extent does form-related instructional support in the form of error correction enhance the link between revision and quality?

4.4 Students' Perspectives on Error

It takes skill for lecturers to balance the 'over politeness of the real world [where few errors are corrected] and the expectations that learners bring with them' (Brown 1987:194). Radecki & Swales (1988) observe that students' demand that the lecturer-reader provide intervention in the form of suggestions and constructive feedback is unique to the teaching context. The major discrepancy between normal reading and that of students' texts, however, lies in the students' insistence on form-related feedback. A contradiction results when the lecturer moves away from the obsession with error and, in accordance with the humanistic trends in writing research, starts to use a process approach, adopts peer review practices, and focuses on communicative competence – on fluency rather than on accuracy. The resulting mismatch between this approach and students' expectations with regard to error correction is clear: 'Despite the revolution brought
about by communicative approaches to language teaching, error correction and the ESL / EFL classroom are inseparably married' (Oladejo 1993:72).

There is a convincing body of research to support the hypothesis that learners want to be corrected more often than lecturers believe is necessary (Cathcart & Olsen (1976), Chun et al. (1982), Hendrickson (1987), Leki (1990b), Lim (1990)\(^{10}\) and Oladejo (1993)). Cathcart & Olsen found that 'students not only want to be corrected, but they also wish to be corrected more than teachers feel they ought to be' (1976:43). However, their research focuses on oral correction, a context in which it is not feasible to correct every error.

To avoid unnecessary repetition, this thesis will restrict the discussion of students' desires with respect to errors in written work to Leki and Oladejo's investigations. These two studies seek to ascertain L2 university students' preferences for error correction and their perception of the nature of errors. Leki's 1991 research surveyed the opinion of 100 American freshman composition students. Oladejo's 1993 research, which elicited the opinions of 500 undergraduate students from five faculties at the National University of Singapore, supported the majority of the findings of Lim's 1990 study that probed the opinion of 147 secondary school pupils.

Oladejo's questionnaire elicited the following information. 90% of the students selected the categories 'strongly agreed' and 'agreed' in response to the following question: 'Is it necessary to correct learners' errors in English so that they can use the language more accurately and fluently?' In the following three questions, the majority of students selected the categories 'disagreed' and 'strongly disagreed'. 85% rejected the idea that teachers should overlook errors and focus on those that inhibit communication, 82% responded negatively to the suggestion that errors should only be corrected if the majority of the students struggle with the grammatical feature. Of interest was 81% of the students' rejection of Burt & Kiparsky's (1972) belief that constant error correction can cause frustration and discourage the learner. These findings were supported by Lim's research in which 90% of her pupils wanted more than merely selective error correction.

\(^{10}\) Lim's 1990 research is discussed in Oladejo (1993).
In response to the questions to determine which errors should be corrected, Oladejo's students identified the areas of organisation, grammar, pronunciation, and vocabulary as those requiring 'high' or 'some' attention and the areas of spelling and punctuation as needing little or no attention.\textsuperscript{11} It is interesting that the former categories were identified as those requiring teacher correction, while 58\% the students believe that spelling and 50\% that punctuation could be self-corrected. Lim's study reveals the following order of preference: grammar (65\% of the students prefer to have grammar errors 'always' corrected), vocabulary, spelling, pronunciation, organisation of ideas, punctuation. Although students in the advanced level represented in Oladejo's research have a greater need for feedback relating to organisation of ideas, both groups accord grammar correction a high priority.

Responses on how errors should be corrected revealed a very negative attitude (84\% rejection) towards a 'no comments at all' approach. The most favoured method was error plus cues for self-correction (90\%), followed by error and answer (76\%), and then using errors as examples in class (74\%). Lim's research supported these findings but showed that school-level pupils are more in favour of peer correction\textsuperscript{12} than their university counterparts.

Leki's survey, reported at the 1986 TESOL conference, showed that her L2 students desire to have every error marked and also approve of written clues from the teacher that enable them to correct their own work (Leki 1990:62). Her later research (1991b) supports these findings. Here, too, 70\% of her students wanted their lecturers to mark 'all errors, major and minor' even if there are many errors in the work. In response to the question, 'what does your English teacher usually do now?', 81\% responded that they correct 'all errors, major and minor'. 57\% of the students consider grammar corrections as 'the most important to look at carefully' and yet they acknowledge that they remember comments on ideas and organisation far more than they do grammar-related correction. Students' dependence on the lecturer is clear: 58\% go to the lecturer

\textsuperscript{11} The students in Lynch & Klemans's (1976:176) study go a step further and complacently accept spelling problems as inevitable (e.g. 'I spell lousy').

\textsuperscript{12} The cultural context needs to be considered here. In the predominantly Chinese community of Singapore peer correction is frequently seen negatively, as a sign of losing face (Oladejo 1993:83).
when they have an error that they do not know how to correct and 63% find the lecturer's explanation the most helpful method of assisting them to understand an error.

In contrast to the research cited above, Walker's (1973) survey of 1,200 college students shows that they value successful communication above perfect communication which suggests that although students desire correction they reject an extreme formalist approach – a puritanical and obsessive attitude towards error. The irony is that this more progressive finding comes from an investigation conducted almost twenty years prior to Oladejo and Leki's research.

4.5 Attitudes Towards Error of Content-Subject Specialists

Santos (1988) researched the judgements and subjective reactions of 178 professors (96 from the humanities/social sciences and 82 from the physical sciences) to two L2 students' compositions. The compositions were rated on six ten-point scales, half of which focused on content and the others on language. In the latter section the categories were comprehensibility, acceptability, and irritation value. Santos discovered that the professors in the humanities/social sciences were more lenient than those representing the physical sciences, that older professors were less irritated by errors than younger ones\(^{13}\) and that content received lower ratings than the language categories. More important are the findings that professors found the errors highly comprehensible, generally not irritating, but academically unacceptable and that lexical errors were regarded as the most serious form of error. This is valid because lexical errors impinge 'directly on content; when the wrong word is used, the meaning is likely to be obscured' (Santos 1988:84) and communicative competence will probably be reduced. The content-subject professors' concern with maturity of thought and rhetorical style and their tolerance of error stand in sharp contrast to the formalist approach exhibited in studies conducted in English departments. This finding is supported by the research of Zamel (1985) in which language lecturers were found to be preoccupied with mechanics, whereas lecturers from other disciplines were more concerned with the students' presentation of concepts and facts.

\(^{13}\) Vann et al. (1984) also report that content-area lecturers' perception of error gravity varies depending on the age of the instructor and their level of exposure to L2 writers.
The findings with respect to error correction that have been discussed in this section of the thesis are best illustrated in Leki's research (1991b). A distinct trend emerges in the following three questions:

1. How important is it for you to have as few errors in English as possible in your written work?

   - Very important: 91
   - Important: 8
   - Somewhat important: 0
   - Not very important: 0
   - Not important at all: 0
   - No response: 1

2. How important is it to your English teacher for you to have as few errors in English as possible in your written work?

   - Very important: 82
   - Important: 11
   - Somewhat important: 3
   - Not very important: 1
   - Not important at all: 2
   - No response: 1

3. How important is it to your other teachers besides your English teacher for you to have as few errors in English as possible in your written work?

   - Very important: 33
   - Important: 23
   - Somewhat important: 17
   - Not very important: 9
   - Not important at all: 15
   - No response: 3

These responses reveal clearly that the students' obsession with error-free work echoes their perception of their English lecturers' desire for perfect prose. In strong contrast, only 33% of the content-subject lecturers are perceived by the students to value formal correctness as highly. The tendency is clear, not only in the trend evidenced in the 'Very important' category, but also in totals of the 'Not very important' or 'Not important at all' categories. 24% of the students believe that their subject lecturers regard errors as unimportant. In contrast, only 3% of the students see their English lecturers in this light. Significantly, none of the students regard error as unimportant in their own writing.

This finding is supported in Leki's question designed to elicit students' opinion of two content subject lecturers' treatment of error. In both cases, the highest scores received (38% and 40% respectively) were in response to the option that the content-subject lecturer 'ignores errors in
English and comments only on the ideas expressed'. In both categories the next most popular response of content-subject lecturers was (24% and 22% respectively) to 'show where the error is and give a hint about how to correct it'.

Despite repeated research findings that question the effectiveness of surface-level correction, students and, to a slightly lesser extent, English lecturers, value error-free work and thus view correction as a necessity. Yet the students entering a course such as Practical English seldom major in English. Instead, they desire the language as means to study and operate in other disciplines. If the target audience for whom they are writing does not value perfection as highly as the English department does, then, in accordance with a social constructionist view of writing, it is the English lecturers' duty to become more tolerant of error.

5. Content Versus Form

The theoretical and research reviews demonstrate that, although the focus of modern writing classes is the writing process, there remains a strong emphasis on formal correctness, with a consequent devaluing of content-related responses. Santos's research indicates that content-subject professors desire emphasis on the skill areas directly relating to content – lexis, organisation of ideas, developing and supporting arguments, an emphasis that is in line with a process approach to teaching within the cognitive paradigm (1988:85). The research also demonstrates that vocabulary building is a skill that requires closer attention than it has been accorded within a formalist approach.

This section of the thesis assesses research conducted into variations on feedback that focuses on form and/or content. The importance of both content and form is at the heart of Taylor's definition of revision as the crucial point in the writing process: 'when discovery and organization come together, when writers refine and recast what they have written and shape it into a coherent written statement' (1981:7). A similar point is made in Murray's description of two types of revision, namely, internal revision that deals with the reworking of the subject, the structure and information to ensure successful communication and external revision that concentrates on form in an attempt to get the style, tone, language and mechanics upgraded in preparation for an external audience (in Taylor 1981:7). Both Taylor (1981) and Krashen (1984)
suggest that focus on both content and form is vital, that essay writing should be regarded as a bi-directional movement between content and form. Alternatively stated, writing can be viewed as a 'dynamic, creative process of give and take between content and written form' (Taylor 1981:6).

Fathman & Whalley's (1990) research questions the effectiveness of lecturers' comment on form and content and asks when feedback should be given that focuses on form versus content. They divided 72 L2 students of similar proficiency levels into four groups: No feedback (NF), Grammar Feedback only (GF), Content Feedback only (CF), and Grammar and Content feedback (G & CF). The specific location of form errors was indicated by means of underlining while content feedback, written at the top of the page, was short, positive, and in the form of general comments that varied only slightly between compositions (Fathman & Whalley 1990:182).

The original and revised versions were rated by two independent raters, who determined a grammar score on the basis of the numbers of errors and a content score, a holistic rating based on Jacobs et al.'s (1981) ESL Composition Profile. Paired t-tests showed that students made significant improvements in grammatical accuracy only when teachers provided feedback on grammar errors, but that all groups were able to improve the content of their writing significantly, irrespective of the type of feedback given by the teacher. Contrary to the bulk of research discussed in this thesis, Fathman & Whalley found that both grammar and content feedback, given alone or simultaneously, positively affect writing and that the indication of the location of errors by underlining is an effective means of assisting students to correct grammar problems. It is important to note that Fathman & Whalley's study differs from the others cited in this chapter in that it compares an original and a revised version of a draft and does not attempt to measure the level of improvement over a period of time. Fathman & Whalley's investigation demonstrates that marking can result in improvement in the document evaluated but it does not prove that responding to student writing results in increased proficiency and thus it does not contradict the other research cited in this chapter.

In order to determine if error-related feedback inhibits writing fluency, the mean number of words written in the original and rewrites were compared. While all groups increased the number of words written in the rewrites, the least increase occurred in the G & CF group and highest in
the group with NF. Although it is vital to differentiate between quality and quantity, this finding suggests that feedback negatively influences the amount students write. If improvement results from increased practice, then the inhibiting effect of commentary is indeed a disturbing factor.

A weakness in Fathman & Whalley's research design lies in the fact that content feedback was not text-specific, a defect that detracts from their conclusion that the specific identification of grammar errors appears to have a greater effect on grammar revisions than general content comments have on revisions in content, since all students improved their grammatical accuracy when feedback on grammar was given (whereas all students did not improve the content of their writing when content feedback was given) (ibid.:185).

Of interest is the fact that students in the NF group significantly improved the content of their essays and wrote longer compositions without any feedback which suggests that 'rewriting is worthwhile and teacher intervention is not always necessary' (ibid.:186).

Fathman & Whalley's finding that students are able to improve the content of their writing without time-consuming feedback on content is supported by the work of Matsuhashi & Gordon (1985), who explored the extent to which simply cueing students to 'add' would free them from 'the strong metacognitive connotations that the word revise usually has for students. Further, use of the cue "add" responds to the single most common complaint about student revision: its failure to produce substantial, content additions to a typically spare text' (Matsuhashi & Gordon 1985:231). To this end their subjects, students enrolled in the basic composition course at the University of Illinois, were divided into three groups. Group One was instructed to 'revise your essay and improve it' (R), Group Two to 'add five things to your essay to improve it' (+5) and Group Three to 'list five things to add to your essay to improve the essay before rereading the work' (+5-R). A six item taxonomy was developed to classify alterations into surface-level changes or one of five types of text-based revisions. The researchers confirmed their hypothesis that 'beginning college writers moved beyond a concern with surface structure to increase the mean percentage of text-based revisions when cued to add. ... The mean proportion of text-based revisions for each group increased from .16 to .40 and finally to .65 across the three revising situations' (ibid.:235). This trend was thus strongest in +5-R, the group asked to add to the text prior to rereading it.
Matsuhashi & Gordon conclude that 'the opportunity to plan – free from the presence of text and the efforts of prose production – offers an incentive to work exclusively with the idea structure of the text' (ibid.:237). They go on to say that 'without any teacher intervention [my emphasis] the students in all three groups wrote more, worked on the content or idea-structure of their texts, and countered the tendency which students have to perceive a text as having surface-level problems that simply need to be "corrected and adjusted"' (ibid.:242). This approach encourages students to work in accordance with Raimes's (1983) philosophy, which is that content and errors in structure should receive attention first and that linguistic features should only be highlighted once the ideas have been fully developed. The benefit of an approach that encourages work on content needs to be viewed against Connors and Lunsford's (1993) finding that the greater the focus on clarifying meaning, the fewer the errors are.

6. The Effect of Praise

Creber (1965) defines positive marking as a response to a student's work that sets 'out primarily [to indicate] what is right, good, vivid, accurate, sincere, interesting or lively, rather than to focus attention on what is incorrect [or] slipshod' (in Spingies 1990:26-7). However, this should not be regarded as an easy option as it 'requires as much (and perhaps more) careful thought, and just as much time as the "traditional" approach' (ibid.:27). Lynch & Klemans's (1978) research indicates that students have a preference for a positive tone and an aversion to sarcasm. Van Heerden suggests that 'the absence of any distinct praise on the part of lecturers is indicative of the approach we have to student writing. We easily take for granted what is good, but frequently pinpoint the minutest writing errors' (1993:294) and suggests that one strategy to overcome negativity is to ask students to list their strengths (ibid.:293). In her research with Masters-level students at the University of the Western Cape, Van Heerden also required students to list their strengths as writers in an attempt to make them change their perceptions of themselves. She explains that this helps to counteract the lecturers' tendency to ignore the strengths of the writing while picking out its trivial flaws (ibid.:294).

Research into the effects of praise, such as that conducted by Cardelle and Corno (1981), Hausner (1975), Knoblauch and Brannon (1984) and Schroeder (1973), has resulted from a
desire to determine the link, if any, between praise and student motivation. For example, Cardelle and Corno (1981) assessed the effects on L2 learning of the way errors are brought to learners’ attention. Four independent variables were tested: criticism (C= feedback on errors without consideration of motivational effects), criticism and praise (C&P), praise (P), and no feedback (NF). The subjects were sixteen randomly selected L2 students. C and C&P were regarded as treatments that made errors salient while P and NF were methods that suppressed errors. A student questionnaire was designed to investigate the effect of the marking strategy on motivation. The study confirmed the hypotheses tested, namely that written comments would positively affect Spanish performance, that salient error conditions (C and C&P) would produce higher levels of performance than suppressed error conditions (P and NF), that the highest overall performance and most positive response on the part of the students would result from the C&P group and that the student appraisals would relate positively to student achievement. The conclusions are that response to error can be constructive provided it makes students' errors salient in a motivationally favourable manner and that written praise is more effective if it is accompanied by specific comments on errors.

A further example is given in Gee (1972), a summary of a 1970 doctoral research project into the effects of positive comment (P), negative comment (N), and no comment (NC) on the prose of eleventh grade L1 students. Gee's 139 junior students were randomly divided into three groups on the basis of their proficiency in English. Each group received one of the treatment methods. The experiment was carefully controlled over a four-week period and was followed by a questionnaire to determine attitude. The N and NC groups wrote less than the P group (significance level .05), an indication that their self-assurance and interest had been inhibited. High and low proficiency pupils were more sensitive to the treatments than average-ability pupils. The most important finding was that students in the praised group had significantly more positive attitudes (significance level =.001) than those in the C and the NC groups. This finding was further confirmed in that there was no significant difference in attitude between the C and the NC groups. The positive attitudinal results of praise, coupled with the increased writing output, is very important. These findings have been widely supported by other L1 studies.14

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14 Burkland & Grimm's (1986) L1 students, however, reported that praise neither helped them improve nor did it make them want to improve more (in Leki 1990:62).
• Seidman's (1978) L1 study showed that students receiving positive comments wrote significantly \(p<.025\) more than the N or NC groups;
• Stevens (1973) found little difference in the quality of his students' compositions but a significant difference in attitudes in the two groups (with the N group revealing far greater negativity than the P group);
• Hausner (1976) found that students in his N group showed frustration and dissatisfaction, mutilated or hid their work and actively sought praise more than students in the P group did. This contrasts with the pleasure exhibited by the P group upon return of their work and their desire to share their papers with others (all in Hillocks 1986:162-4); and
• Rinderer (1978) reports that written, supportive comments have a positive effect on student motivation while corrections stifle motivation (in Semke 1984:196).

None of the studies was able to prove that writing improved as a result of positive commentary. One needs to ask if the positive attitudinal response of students to praise is confirmed in studies involving older L2 students operating in a distance-teaching context.

The answer in terms of the age variable can be sought in Zak's (1990) research. He probed the effect of exclusively positive comments by highlighting effective sections of writing, commenting on content, on any sound structural patterns, but not form, not on 'the plethora of awful things going on – that tend to discourage, dismay, dishearten, and disappoint' \(ibid.:49-50\).

By means of random selection, five students from two of the Freshman English classes at SUNY/Stony Brook were selected for each of the two experimental groups. He explains that for the control group he would 'mark, correct, and comment – let loose the full array of written responses, both positive and negative, that I ordinarily make. In the other section, I would restrict myself to writing positive comments only, and exclude all marks, comments or corrections of mechanical errors' \(ibid.:41\).

Despite the vast number of surface level errors in the P group's work, Zak resisted the impulse to make suggestions, ask questions, give advice, sort out problems and correct \(ibid.:43\). In line with the L1 studies cited above, Zak found little difference in proficiency between the two groups. He justifies this as follows: 'At this level of development, improvement takes place constantly but sporadically as a result of increased writing experience over a period of time. Despite the differing modes of commenting, the more students write, the better they write, but
not necessarily at evenly spaced increments' (ibid.:45-46). However, in response to a question on the students' perception of their progress, the P group exhibited a far greater enthusiasm for writing. For example, one student writes that 'receiving a positive feedback make me think that my writing was very, very good and it made me try to do better and better every time. In fact, it made me have a competition towards myself. I wouldn't hand in anything that I didn't think was good enough' (ibid.:46).\textsuperscript{15}

During the experiment Zak kept a log to record his feelings. Initially, he bewailed the difficulty in resisting the ingrained 'teacherly activity' of detailed marking, found it almost impossible not to 'fixit' and 'changeit', and had to force himself to 'NOT direct, NOT point, NOT give instructions or suggestions' (ibid.:47). He touches the core of the problem: 'On the matter of spelling, grammar, mechanics I am getting the sense that my correcting students' papers is making me feel effective, that I'm doing something to help ... Whether or not it's helping the students, I don't really know. ... we need them to teach, but they do not need us to learn' (ibid.:48-9).

With the P group power was transferred: 'the ... responsibility for correctness was theirs, not ours, and they met it' (ibid.:48). With this transfer of authority, when the 'ultimate responsibility for their own writing rests with them [the students] ... we free ourselves of a huge, heavy burden ... the bonus is that the students take real pride in becoming and being authorities over their own work. It is a situation where student and instructor both win' (ibid.:49). Zak found that for the lecturer the 'positive only' approach has a regenerative effect: it 'boomeranged ... the positive responding is rewarding me' (ibid.:50). What surprised Zak was that despite all the assistance given the regular class, there was still no significant difference between the performance of the two groups. Is marking simply a way of establishing control and authority over students? Is traditional marking an easy way out as it is frequently more simple to deal with an assignment as an editing task than it is to find something to praise? Zak experienced the approach as energising and rejuvenating and believes that 'one of the important outcomes of this research project was the discovery of an antidote to teacher burnout' (ibid.:52). Although this report of

\textsuperscript{15} Throughout the thesis student quotations have been given in their own words without any grammatical alterations.
the finding of the Alchemist's stone is obviously exaggerated, any method that can assist in revitalising lecturers' enthusiasm for marking needs to be taken seriously.

7. Reader Roles

Lecturers adopt what Anson terms a 'schizophrenia of [reader] roles' (1989:2) when they respond to student writing. As early as 1977 Cowan explained that this 'schizophrenia' was the result of the lecturer having to adopt the conflicting personas of reader, coach and evaluator. Purves (in Probst 1989:72) has identified the following roles: 'common reader', 'copy editor / proof reader', 'reviewer or gatekeeper', 'critic', 'diagnostician / therapist'. If one acknowledges Transactional Theory, in which meaning resides 'not on the page, but in the transaction between reader and text' (ibid.:69), then one has to accord the lecturer the additional role of co-author of the text. In the teaching context, the role of facilitator conflicts with that of diagnostician. The former is positive, indicative of guidance and support and suggests a tentative and cautious attitude in a joint search for meaning. In contrast, the role of diagnostician implies a critical judge, an authority figure, one who imposes criteria. However, the confusion resulting from multiple roles can be reduced by a declared focus for a specific reading. This is didactically sound as certain of the roles are preferable for specific stages on the teaching / learning time line. For example, the appropriate response to an initial draft would be reading for meaning while, in subsequent drafts, evaluation becomes virtually unavoidable. The proofreading role is vital when students are polishing drafts as preparation for publication. Wherever possible, the teacher should separate roles and it should be clear to the student how a specific text is to be read.

Certain marking strategies invite specific roles. A self-test places the lecturer in the capacity of facilitator who has made the criteria transparent and trusts the learner to be able to benefit from the intervention. A taped response is ideal for the function of common reader and, correctly used, can be an exemplary facilitative medium in the distance-teaching context. However, a sympathetic tone is vital as it is necessary to avoid the impression of ruthlessness. The tape is an open medium and the lecturer's axiological disposition will be evident in her response. In contrast, formalist marking methods, such as the correction code or the use of a cross to indicate an error in a line, are more closed and virtually prescribe the role of copy editor or proofreader. Implicit in the methods are gatekeepers who cannot allow students with linguistically flawed
scripts into the establishment. The guise of diagnosticians is inherent in the identification of errors by means of a code and the role of therapist is implicit in the explanation of the codes and the exercises to which they refer the students for remediation. The impression transmitted to the student is of a critical judge whose task is primarily evaluative.

Existing literature is very severe in its criticism of the reader who reduces her response to that of proofreader. Sommers believes that if we read students' texts with an ideal text in mind, our biases will determine how we will comprehend the text. When we expect to find errors, 'the result is that we find errors and misread our students' texts' (Sommers 1982:154). Then the classroom situation is reduced to that of opponents 'sparring in a linguistic ring, the student attempting to slip confusions and inadequacies past the teacher, and the teacher attempting to catch, label, and castigate all the flaws' (Probst 1989:70). The consequences are spelled out by Probst: 'If schooling leads students to expect only the hostile reader, or only the reader who serves as proofreader, or only the reader who serves as the gatekeeper, then writing will come to seem less a pursuit of meaning than a survival exercise' (ibid.:78).

The lecturer inevitably serves as gatekeeper, a term defined by Purves as 'one charged with admitting or not admitting, approving or not approving ... [who] act[s] not as surrogates for the common reader, but as surrogates for various establishments' (ibid.:77). The contradiction is clear. Whereas gatekeeping is associated with exclusion, the role of the teacher is to provide the skills which will enable the student to be included in the establishment. Lecturers should view themselves as

manager[s] of a small interpretive community — the class — and the representative[s] of a larger one — the discipline of language and literary studies. The lecturers' role, then, is to initiate students into those communities, to engage them in the dialogue necessary to produce knowledge. ... [to help students] to re-see and re-think within the context of an interpretive community (ibid.:70).

Searle & Dillon's (1980) research explores the link between the reader role adopted and the area in which lecturers focus their comments. Twelve elementary school teachers were approached and required to submit samples of their marked work and to complete a questionnaire to ascertain their purpose in responding to student writing. In total 135 marked samples were evaluated. The main division in teacher focus was between comments on content and form. In addition to this two-dimensional framework, five types of responses were classified: those that express
evaluation (judge worth), assessment (determines students' knowledge and ability), instruction (provide correction, encouragement and comment on attitude), audience (an interested reader requiring clarification, elaboration, showing reaction) and any instruction that moves outside the text by means of extension or addition.

Of the five response strategies that reflect divergent reader roles which the lecturer can adopt Searle & Dillon found that 87% of all form responses or 59% of all responses took the form of instruction. The next biggest category was evaluation. In contrast, there was a lack of use of audience and a similar failure to move outside the writing categories. This finding supports Knoblauch & Brannon's belief that the 'given' in research studies is that commentary is essentially formalist - a 'product-centered, evaluative activity resembling literary criticism' (1981:2). In line with the other research cited, Searle and Dillon (1980) found an 'overwhelming focus on form' (1980:236) with a 356:28 form to content ratio, with the message once again being 'it doesn't matter what you say; what matters is how you say it' (ibid.:240). While mechanical errors are usually corrected, structural errors are simply noted (e.g. 'watch tenses') while stylistic concerns are given a more general comment and are rarely corrected. Of interest is their finding that comments on mechanics are frequently cognitive and negative while at 'the style end of the continuum the comments are most likely to be positive and affective' (ibid.:239).

8. Grades

In her research into the negative attitudes of three unskilled college freshmen, Gay (1983) discovered that their writing appeared to be outer- rather than inner-directed in that they wrote to please the lecturer and earn marks rather than to learn. The present educational system's obsession with marks will be the heart of the power problem for as long as marks provide extrinsic motivation and serve as external stamps of approval.

Regardless of the form (letters, numbers, percentages or aggregates) that grading takes, the system remains problematic. Bloom believes grades to be misleading in that they

• exist mainly for an institution's administrative convenience and can be manipulated to satisfy institutional purposes (e.g. to supply a required pass rate);
fit record-keeping formats and supply a convenient shorthand that allows for easy transmission of information and uncomplicated interpretation of data;

- give the impression of precision; and


In reality, grades can never be completely objective because the evaluator is a product of a specific cultural value system.

Parkerson's South African research reveals that the grade overshadows all else and creates false impressions. A low mark with no comment suggests that the lecturer is satisfied whereas a high mark without commentary is likely to result in the work being ignored (1993:255). In contrast, commentary encourages the student to re-engage with the script. Grades are also problematic in that they label students and undermine good teaching because they distort the power relations in the teaching context. Bloom (1997) believes that grades also inhibit student discussion and appear fixed. In addition, grades do not represent the entire range of possible marks because certain symbols are seldom given or are reserved for specific situations, e.g. non-submission.

There is a need to separate 'response' and 'grades'; 'sharing' and 'evaluation'. Students need to learn that a good mark is not an end in itself but a 'by-product of the care and attention [the writing process] demands' (Freedman 1987:34). Sommers (1982) explains that response is frequently linked to marks and that the emphasis then shifts from thoughtful response to a justification of the mark / symbol awarded. In Bloom's words, the lecturer is then left, not only with the 'burden of proof but the burden of articulating that proof' (1997:361). The role of evaluator can easily overshadow and even negate the other reader roles that the teacher needs to adopt to facilitate learning. Freedman explains that students have been conditioned by an educational system where evaluation with respect to one's peers, not individual learning and accomplishment, is the mark of success. Thus it is little surprise that even in classrooms where teachers focus their attention on the teaching-learning process, students still focus their attention on evaluation ... The comments and the grade provide the most official and permanent record of the teacher's response; they are the tangible bit that the student 'takes away' from the class (1987:90-91).

Grading increases as students become more senior and for many students grades become more important than learning. These students become caught in what Freedman terms an 'institutional bind' because the 'grades (the school's and society's measure of learning) and the response that
accompanies grades (and often justifies them) are confused with and become more important than the feedback that is more essential to helping them to learn. The students become more interested in the product of learning than in the learning process' (ibid.:158). Freedman explains that 'radical reorganization of classrooms will be needed to make writing and learning more important or even as important as grading from the students' point of view' (ibid.:161). It is this type of radical transformation that is at the heart of the Curriculum 2005, the new educational approach in the process of being implemented in South Africa.

Burkland & Grimm (1986) gave 197 freshman composition students a questionnaire to find out how grades affected students' attitudes towards writing, revision and the teacher's suggestions. Six independent variables included one with no grade and five different forms of grading. Final draft responses were marked. They concluded that marks do not teach students, 'only label them, but grades are so ingrained in the system that many students and teachers see them as motivators' (Burkland & Grimm 1986:239). With the grading process comes a shift in teacher role, from helper to evaluator. The mark tends to overshadow all else as the finding that one-third of the group that received a mark mentioned it first, their primary concern being "What did I get?" rather than "What can I learn from this paper?" (ibid.:240) Students who were given a mark expressed hostility more than the other groups and in some of this group's comments a negative sense of closure was evident. Brittan's claim that a marked paper shuts off communication is echoed in one child's comment: 'Teacher doesn't want to read my story, he only wanted to mark it' (ibid.:241).

Bloom (1997) experimented by withholding grades for a semester and then allowing students to grade their own portfolios. She created a culture in which grades were incidental as the emphasis was on the writing itself and only noticed for the first time after ten weeks that 'not one student had ever asked me for a grade on any paper' (Bloom 1997:367). When the students had to grade their own portfolios, the burden of proof shifted from the lecturer to them. The majority of the students provided grades that were in line with Bloom's opinion. She hypothesises that the agreement was the result of the tenor of the feedback the students had been receiving. The one exception was a gifted student writer who grossly undervalued her own work. She believes that the trust that this system places in students results in improved motivation. Bloom acknowledges, however, that this approach would be far more difficult in huge courses as opposed to her smaller
group of advanced, highly motivated students working in a merit-based elective in a community of writers who received continuous feedback on their work (ibid.:370).

However negative the research indicates grading to be, the lecturer is faced with what Bloom terms 'the abyss of the inevitable, inexorable need of my institution ... to assign grades' (ibid.:366). This should be viewed together with the students' desire to join a cultural elite, an objective that arguably can only be achieved through competition with their peers (Smith 1997).

9. Lecturers' Commentary

What is the effect of the time-consuming commentary on student writing? In a study of the commenting styles of 35 teachers and those of a computer programme entitled 'Writers' Workbench' at New York University, Sommers found that within a few minutes the computer programme had:

- delivered editorial comments;
- identified all spelling and punctuation errors;
- isolated wordy or misused phrases;
- offered a stylistic analysis of sentence types, beginnings and sentence lengths;
- provided a readability score.

All of this was conveyed in calm, reasonable language (Sommers 1982:149)!

9.1 The Nature of Lecturers' Commentary

In contrast to the efficiency exhibited by the 'Writers' Workbench', Sommers's study revealed deep-seated flaws in the human counterpart. Lecturers frequently gave contradictory messages, simultaneously instructing students to edit to avoid errors and to condense and then saying that their paragraphs needed to be developed more. In Sommers's words:

The interlinear comments and the marginal comments represent two separate tasks for this student; the interlinear comments encourage the student to see the text as a fixed piece, frozen in time, that just needs some editing. The marginal
comments, however, suggest that the meaning of the text is not fixed, but rather that the student still needs to develop the meaning by doing some more research. Students are commanded to edit and develop at the same time (1982:151).

In addition, in lecturers' commentary no indication of the level of importance of various problems is given, with the result that a comment on a spelling error seems to carry the same weight as one on organisation. The commentary encourages students to reduce the writing process to a rewording activity. Sommers also believes that lecturers' commentary often results in a reduction of risk-taking behaviour, with students making only the changes requested and not chancing any further alterations, even if they believe these would be beneficial (ibid.: 152). Another problem Sommers found was that comments were frequently 'not text-specific and could be interchanged, rubber-stamped, from text to text' (ibid.: 152). The irony lies in the fact that the teacher holds the monopoly on vagueness, even in his or her very injunction to the student to be specific.

This finding is supported by Zamel (1985), who characterises lecturers' comments as vague and even contradictory. Cohen & Robbins (1976) describe teachers' written responses as unsystematic and inconsistent. Connors & Lundsford's conclusion after reviewing 3000 essays was that a large number of comments are 'short, careless, exhausted or insensitive' (1993:215) with very little readerly response or reaction to content. Likewise, Jenkins's students complained that her responses were not only 'vague, unclear and ambiguous ... but also that they lacked any real sense of instruction' (1987:83). After reviewing research, Hillocks concluded in 1982 that 'a comparison of the studies suggests an implicit aspect of teacher comment which all have in common: the comments are diffuse, ranging from substance, organisation, and style to mechanics and punctuation' (Hillocks 1982:265) and asks whether focused comments would have had an increased impact on student writing quality.

Sommers (1982) maintains that teachers' comments are often vague and unspecific, so that revisions frequently result in a worse product than the original. Beach (1979) agrees: 'postintervention drafts are not always an improvement over preintervention drafts' (in Leki 1990:58). However, one needs to ask to what extent the nature of the teacher's comments are to blame for this scenario. This line of thinking can be taken further and the question posed: to what degree are the inconclusive results of intervention research to date the result of the
unsatisfactory nature of the comments themselves, rather than of the specific marking strategy tested?

One of the most effective means used to identify student reaction to teacher commentary takes the form of think-aloud protocols that require students to identify beneficial and ineffective commentary and substantiate their point of view. Jenkins found that asking students to evaluate teacher commentary enabled lecturers to view commentary as less prescriptive and afforded them an opportunity to answer back, to establish 'a dialogue of revision' (1987:83), in which the lecturer is regarded as a reader reacting to a specific text and supplying options for the student, not simply editing symbols. In this way the teacher is viewed as a 'real reader' and writing 'as communication' (ibid.:85). Jenkins pleads for text-bound, specific comments. Requiring students to 'explore, explain, or even justify their ideas in writing in relation to my comments helps them develop their meaning further and provide(s) more experience in expressing that meaning in writing' (ibid.:85).

Reid explains that the social context in a contact teaching situation allows progressively more individualised comments. She acknowledges that working outside this social context can easily result in teacher responses that are 'strictly mechanical, unhelpful, and confusing' (1994:280), a dire warning to lecturers who respond to student work in a distance-teaching context where knowledge of each student as an individual is impossible in a course with an approximate 4000:10 student to staff ratio and a body of external markers who are not directly involved in writing course material or in the formulation of assignments.

Reid is unique in that she offers an explanation that, if accepted, means that teachers' comments are not as ineffectual as research to date indicates. She explains that a researcher viewing her abbreviated remarks on a student's script might conclude that she is 'being obtuse, negative, and appropriative. Instead, my students view it as a game; they fully understand the shorthand of the response' (ibid.:281). Her insight suggests that lecturers' comments need to be researched with an intimate knowledge of the specific teaching context in which they occur, as comments become more communicative and valuable when taken in context, in a classroom where a 'sense of community has been established' (ibid.). How much greater, then, is the challenge of making
meaningful comments on students' work in the distance-teaching context in which intimacy is improbable?

9.2 Length of Feedback

Research has come a long way since Bata (1972) and Stiff (1967) first agonised about the placement of corrections (in the margin, at the end, and in both places) and, not surprisingly, found that the position of the correction did not result in any significant improvement in any of the treatment groups. Stiff concludes that this finding frees lecturers of some of the burdensome task of correcting and justifies the return of assignments with only partial corrections (terminal or marginal comments) rather than full correction (both terminal and marginal comments). However, this conclusion ignores the fact that students from both partial groups complained that they had not been given full correction (1967:62). In addition, research that ignores the substance of the commentary and takes into account only its location needs to be treated with caution.

Hillocks (1982) examines the effects of teaching that stresses various phases of the composing process. While the bulk of his research is not directly applicable to this study, his disproving of his fourth hypothesis, that 'the effects of extended comments will be greater than those of brief comments' (Hillocks 1982:267), is important. All teacher comments in Hillock's study were specifically designed to overcome the vagueness in teacher feedback which research, such as that by Cohen & Robbins (1976) and Sommers (1982), has identified as a major problem.

Hillocks's research design used as its independent variables three treatment conditions, with the focus falling on either pre-writing, feedback or revision. His 278 seventh and eighth grade pupils wrote two pre-tests and two post-tests that were then randomly mixed, coded, and evaluated by three raters who used Hillocks's five-point specificity scale and achieved high inter-rater reliability scores (from .95 to .98). The instructional period was four weeks. The teachers were asked to record the time required to read the papers and write brief or extended comments. An obvious, but not insignificant, finding was that it took almost twice as much time to provide detailed comments. Yet the mean gains for both students receiving long comments and short
comments were identical at 1.39 (p < .009). However, the mean gains for long and short comments by instructional condition differed sharply, with long comments benefitting the groups with pre-writing more than those who did the assignment plus the revision. The 'assignment only' group benefitted the least from the extended comments. Hillocks concludes:

Longer comments with their increased number of specific suggestions may be more meaningful when they have been preceded by instruction which is related to their content. Indeed, when unaccompanied by related instruction, long comments ... may be interpreted as primarily pejorative or punitive. ... In fact, short comments appear to be about twice as effective as long comments for students with 'assignment only'. ... if a choice must be made between providing extended comments and planning instructional activities, the decision should be for planning (Hillocks 1982:275-6).

Hillocks's conclusion is that positive and focused teacher comment over a series of compositions is effective, irrespective of the length of the comments. It must be borne in mind that this research was not conducted on adults and thus its relevance to Unisa's adult student body cannot be assumed. However, it is interesting to note that the majority of Unisa assignments take the 'assignment only' form, the type of writing that Hillocks's research indicates benefits least from lengthy teacher commentary.

10. South African Studies

With the exception of Van der Walt et al. (1994), South African research into marking strategies, such as that of Boughey & Goodman (in Dison 1996), Dison (1996), Parkerson (1993), Parkinson & Mattson (1993), Paxton (1994; 1995) and Van Heerden (1993), tends towards relatively small-scale case studies. This research is representative of a variety of South African universities and usually originates in Academic Development Programmes.

South African research has provided valuable insights not encountered in the overseas research evaluated. For example, Van Heerden believes that each lecturer is entitled to his or her

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16 This supports Graham's (1983) finding that frequency of teacher feedback is no guarantee of improvement in student writing (in Fathman & Whalley 1990:186).

17 This research will not be discussed in detail in this chapter, but will be referred to when it is applicable to the Unisa study.
ideological beliefs; but when these are so deeply rooted that the lecturer becomes intolerant of alternative views, this impacts negatively on students, who either mirror the convictions regardless of their own axiological orientation or are silenced (1993:302). Parkinson & Mattson (1993) take a positive view, stating that lecturers' divergent theoretical stances are not necessarily problematic as these controversies are the lifeblood of academic departments, that 'this debate should certainly not be shut off in an attempt to provide "the big home" for students' (1993:29) but that lecturers need to ensure that theoretical differences do not confuse the students. Parkerson adds another dimension to the debate when she states that, while lecturers acknowledge subjectivity in marking, the students find it extremely upsetting as this takes 'the stability out of learning, and passing, and makes it a hit-and-miss situation' (1993:258). She advocates open negotiation of criteria with students and acknowledges that the lecturer is responding as an audience as a means to minimise the problem.

Parkerson's research (1993), involving fifteen English 1 students at the University of the Western Cape, provides unique insight into student revision strategies by demonstrating that learners make only the changes suggested by the tutor and that those who attempt other alterations tend to make minor, almost negligible modifications. Revision is reduced to a cloze-procedure exercise, in which words are picked out one at a time and replaced, the result being patching and polishing rather than a true revision (1993:253). In addition, when a comment arouses confusion, the student frequently seeks the most expedient solution, which is to omit the offending idea or structure from subsequent drafts. She also points out that 'no scale of concerns' (ibid.:254) is offered to the students and that the sheer volume of grammatical commentary gives it a disproportionate emphasis. She explains that concepts such as 'elaborate' and 'develop' are understood but are difficult to accomplish practically (ibid.:255).

Paxton reports on a study18 at the University of Cape Town involving 70 Social Anthropology scripts, eight tutors and twelve interviews. Her findings echo those discussed thus far in the chapter – she confirms that feedback is product-orientated and is viewed as assessment, partly as a result of time pressure. She agrees with White that the English department 'discourse community' or 'English teacher reading' has become outdated (1995:190, 197). There is a need

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18 The study forms the basis of Paxton's thesis published in 1994 and entitled 'Case studies of tutors' responses to student writing and the way in which students interpret these'.
to express multiple literacies that are acquired through apprenticeship in different social situations (ibid.:190). Paxton explains that evaluative criteria are not made explicit to students and that a contradiction arises in that they are 'written in an informal sort of language but they appeal to formal criteria' (ibid.:190). Discourse should be viewed as a 'sort of identity kit' (ibid.:190) which should be explained to the students because a lack of knowledge of the canons of academic discourse results in communication breakdown. She quotes the example of students needing to understand concepts such as argument and structure if they are to be enabled to implement abstract rules and principles expressed in tutorial commentary (ibid.:193). The rules are not explained because the lecturers have internalised them and assume the students share their background knowledge. She states that the reality is that second-language students have ‘particular difficulties understanding the concept of structure and other common expressions used in responding to student essays, for example, "relevance", "colloquial", "integrate"' (ibid.: 194). She explains that statements like 'What?' 'What do you mean?' and 'This makes no sense' are not helpful to students who would benefit more if the lecturer tried to explain what the student meant and asked the learner for confirmation of the interpretation (ibid.:195-97). Paxton believes that the objective should be to use writing as a 'tool to enhance learning, rather than simply a mirror for reflecting learning' (ibid.:197).

Dison (1996) and Parkinson & Mattson (1993) are unique in the positive approach they take to tutorial intervention. Dison's work involved the first and final drafts belonging to students attending the Academic Development Programme at Rhodes University. The three students she interviewed responded positively to feedback relating to understanding of a concept, requests for development of ideas, clarification of concepts, suggestions that students rephrase a sentence or that they restructure, statements challenging the views expressed, those dealing with the issue of voice and also to the summative comment at the end of the essay (1996:280-86). However, she acknowledges that these were effective partly because of the teaching context within an Academic Development Programme. She provides the valuable insight that development 'takes place in terms of the student and where she / he is coming from, and not only in terms of the lecturers' expectations. One also has to remember that the development of academic literacy is a long process, and be able to recognise small achievements along that path' (ibid.:287). In their research involving 80 English I poetry scripts and eight markers at the University of Natal, Parkinson & Mattson (1993) are also encouraging in their finding that as students gradually
become more assimilated into a discourse community, so the commentary becomes more accessible to them (1993:21).

11. Conclusion

Fathman & Whalley (1990:180) describe the position in which lecturers find themselves when they respond to student writing as a 'Catch-22' situation. There are two areas in which research has approached consensus. First, research results question the usefulness of feedback on writing, and in particular the formalist, correction-code option, the preferred response style of the majority of lecturers and teachers. Second, studies are equally consistent in their finding that students demand feedback. The result of these conflicting findings is that lecturers feel obliged to provide feedback and do so at considerable financial and personal cost, despite research evidence that indicates that their efforts could be misguided.
Chapter Four

Empirical Study: The Effect of Marking Strategies

English teachers are assigned more than ... they can do. Some of them try to do it by working more .... This is wrong, because it disables them. Others do only what they reasonably can and let the rest go. This is wrong in another way, because it is an injustice to the pupil .... [English lecturers] must choose between overwork and bad work; between spoiling their material or killing themselves (Hopkins Committee Report (1912), quoted in Connors (1985:72)).

The heart of the problem of responding to student writing is, as previously stated, the fact that the students' need to write far exceeds the lecturers' capacity to read, correct, evaluate and comment on the work. The difficulty is compounded in the distance-teaching context as this unique interpretive community has an enormous paper load problem. Whereas Anson believes that 11 instructors to 630 freshmen is excessive (1989:4), in Practical English in 1995 the permanent staff to registered student ratio was 10 to 5784, with the number of external markers available dependent on the financial status of the university, and determined on an annual basis.

Even if one discredits the flawed dualistic paradigm inherent in the choice offered by the 1912 Hopkins Committee Report, the statement remains disconcerting. The document is optimistic: it is founded on the reassuring certainty that students will benefit from the hours of labour lecturers put into their activities, one of which is responding to student writing. However, from a late 1990s perspective, no such assurance exists. The research discussed in Chapter Three shows that it is possible for the lecturer to select the overwork option and yet still be unsure that he or she has done the student justice. In Haswell's words: 'positive results of teacher intervention through written commentary simply have not yet been found. ... The problem is analogous to that of the teaching of grammar in composition courses – hundreds of thousands of hours spent ... on a task of little proven benefit' (1983:600). Answers need to be found. In the distance-teaching context it is even more vital that the most productive means of response to student writing is identified because of the restricted student-lecturer interaction and the impoverished learning environment. This chapter describes an empirical study conducted to determine the effectiveness of five of the marking strategies open to lecturers operating in these circumstances. The emphasis in this chapter falls on the students' texts.
1. The Marking Strategies Tested

One of the central issues in response to student writing is the optimal degree of salience required to allow students to revise effectively. For this reason the Unisa experiment varies the degree of salience in the use of three marking strategies. There is a gradual decrease in salience in the indication of errors from the Correction Code to the Minimal Marking approach to no response at all. It is essential for lecturers to be able to identify and implement the most effective and practical form of feedback for a distance-teaching context, characterised by a daunting student-to-lecturer ratio and severe time constraints.

Of Wingfield's five possible written responses to errors in student writing, only the first three - giving clues for self-correction, correcting the script, and making marginal comment - are viable in a distance-teaching context. Unfortunately, the first two are formalist in orientation and thus invite text-based response styles. In 1995 Wingfield's 'class explanation' was restricted to weekly classes given at the Regional Centres and to Group Visits that are becoming increasingly infrequent as a result of financial constraints. Oral feedback is usually confined to tape recordings and in rare instances, usually with smaller groups of more advanced-level students, to teleconferencing. Wingfield's belief 'that there is no single standard method of dealing with composition errors, but that the teacher must make a choice between the most appropriate and effective of several techniques' (1975:313) is particularly true in the distance-teaching context.

This section of the chapter evaluates the viability of the five marking strategies tested in the empirical study and summarises the findings of related research.

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1 Since 1995 tutors have been appointed at regional centres in order to supply contact support to students. Initially learning centres were established at Cape Town, Durban, Johannesburg, Pietersburg and Pretoria. To date, however, the number of students who attend the regional centres has been very low. The Practical English attendance rate for 1995 was 28 students in Durban, 72 in Johannesburg, and 90 in Pretoria. An experiment to determine the effect of the centres on pass rates was conducted in 1996. The examination results of Practical English students who attended the centres were compared to a control group. The results were disappointing. While Pretoria and Johannesburg Practical English Regional Centre students performed better than the control group (+ 6% and +4% respectively), the Durban Centre's Practical English group were 13% lower and the Pietersburg centre 1% lower than their respective control groups (Boonzaaier et al. 1997:41).
1.1 Method A: Correction Code (CC) - Direct Method

Hendrickson defines direct correction methods as those which not only 'indicate the presence or location of errors ... but also provide clues or tips on how students can correct their own errors' (1980:218). Direct correction supplies the student with specific detail, such as underlining and indicating the nature of the error, bracketing a misplaced section and indicating its correct position, deleting superfluous words, or simply providing the correct form or structure. However, Hendrickson's belief that the direct method enhances students' ability to provide solutions to their errors is based on experience rather than empirical research.

Marking Method A, the Correction Code (CC), the marking method employed by Unisa's Practical English lecturers, uses symbols as a response shorthand. This is in line with Leki's (1991b) finding that the 'correction code' method is the marking technique of choice of 83% of the lecturers in her survey. It is a method she describes as showing where the error is and giving a hint about how to correct it. In the Unisa context, this 'hint' takes the form of marking codes that are explained to students in their first Tutorial Letter (See Addendum 3).

Opinion on the value of the method is divided. Spingies summarises the negative view as follows: 'Walsh (1965 p 49) finds using a marking-code labourious and of dubious value, Whitehead (1966 p 216) pillories it, and Creber (1965 p 216) considers it textbook-spawned and "irrelevant"; it is error-orientated, and in his view, "it is only to the intellectual minority that an error presents a challenge"' (1990:26). The CC is a formalistic, mechanised response style that focuses on defects. One can argue that it has been adopted because it is a hasty, convenient shorthand made necessary by the reality of vast numbers of scripts that have to be processed in haste. Anson writes: 'it is hard to overlook the [correction] card's educational durability, laminated as it is to the inside front and back covers of most typical composition textbooks. Symbolically sandwiching in everything else rhetorical, the card is still, in many contexts, the first and last word on writing' (1989:4). Lecturers who restrict commentary to surface-level alterations can fall into the trap of believing that once they have 'corrected, circled, checked, and

\[2\] Like Wingfield (1975), Hendrickson believes that 'indirect and direct correction treatments can be more effective if they are used together in a hybrid fashion' (1980:219).
assigned points to ... students' writing [they have done their job. The danger is that they can overlook the fact that they have] forgotten, in the arduous and painful process, to listen to what they [students] have been saying' (ibid.:6). This problem is magnified in the distance-teaching context.

The advantage of the method is that it serves the same function as road signs, briefly and efficiently indicating if the student is on the correct route. It is an attempt, as Wiggins explains, to provide feedback, with minimal human intervention, which informs students not only when they are diverting from their path, but also identifies the nature of their straying (1993:203). In theory the CC provides students with adequate information to facilitate self-correction. However, the method depends on students comprehending the grammatical issue identified by means of the abbreviation and being able to apply this knowledge to the particular flaw in their writing. Their frequent inability to do so is humorously alluded to in an anecdote Wiggins tells of the student who at the end of the course asked the lecturer what she had meant by the term, which the student pronounced 'Vagoo', a word he claimed the lecturer had kept writing on his scripts and that he was unable to understand (ibid.:183)!

The question is whether students are capable of using this method productively. Lalande (1982), Robb et al. (1986), Semke (1984), and Sheppard (1992) have researched the matter. Lalande's meticulously-controlled research, using 60 intermediate-level German students at Pennsylvania State University, shows that the CC is preferable to a system where the lecturer 'entered all corrections onto students' essays and then required them to incorporate the same into a rewritten version' (1982:142). The findings are flawed because the control group were 'spoon-fed' by having all their corrections done for them. One would obviously anticipate that CC students would benefit more than the control group as the former would have to interpret the codes, institute their own corrections and thus would be engaged in problem-solving and guided-learning activities. In addition, the effectiveness of an Error Awareness Sheet (See Addendum 4) was tested. As anticipated, the CC group achieved significantly higher scores than the control group and had fewer errors than their counterparts in 11 of the 12 error categories (although these were not at a statistically-significant level). In contrast, the control group had a considerable increase in errors (4 categories of grammatical deterioration were at the 0.01 level
of significance): a dire warning to those who provide all the corrections for their students and reduce revision to a handwriting or typing exercise.

The limitations of Lalande's study involve the relatively small sample group (60) and the fact that the author acknowledges that he was unable to control fully all the independent variables. Nevertheless, Lalande's work supports a policy of indicating problem areas so that students can themselves 'invoke problem-solving / active correction strategies' (ibid:147) and be made aware of recurring errors by means such as an Error Awareness Sheet.

Although the CC seems to be preferable to the lecturer writing in all the corrections, Semke's (1984) research suggests that the CC is not as effective as written comments that force the students back to the 'initial stages of composing, or what Sommers ... refers to as the "chaos"' (Robb et al. 1986:91), the stage at which they are wrestling with structuring meaning. Semke studied 141 first-year students learning German as a second language at the University of Minnesota. The response strategies examined were:

- Group 1: Writing comments and questions only
- Group 2: Corrections, including the lecturer supplying the correct form
- Group 3: Corrections with positive comments
- Group 4: Correction code – students need to make corrections themselves

All groups were given pre- and post-tests that took the form of a timed free-writing sample, a cloze test, a background questionnaire and an attitude questionnaire.

While there were no significant differences among the treatment groups in terms of writing accuracy, group 1 improved their writing fluency and scored significantly higher on the cloze test, suggesting an improved general language proficiency. In addition, group 1 spent significantly more time on their writing projects. Semke explains that one might have assumed that, because this group did not need to be concerned about errors, 'it would have spent less time rather than more on writing. ... [Yet] group 1 still took the task seriously, and were highly motivated, even though errors did not have an effect on their grades' (1984:199).

This study suggests that 'student progress is enhanced by writing practice alone. Corrections do not increase writing accuracy, writing fluency, or general language proficiency, and they may
have a negative effect on student attitudes, especially when [a correction code is used and] students must make corrections by themselves (ibid.: 195). These findings support Marzano & Arthur's (1977) conclusions that detailed marking is 'an exercise in futility' (in Semke 1984: 195) and that it is feasible to make no corrections but simply to respond to the content with written comments and questions—a form of response that keeps students 'talking on paper' (Kelly in Semke 1984: 196). The study also supports Rinderer's (1978) finding that written, supportive statements have a positive effect on students' motivation toward writing improvement, while corrections tend to stifle motivation (in Semke 1984: 196) as well as Vogler's (1971) discovery that a few positive comments cannot counteract the negative effect of numerous coded corrections. Semke quotes a bitter note written by a student expressing frustration at not being able to find the correct forms of the errors designated by the code symbols: 'your 'mechanische' ... [approach] will purge us of our desire to attempt any writing' (1984: 201).

The flaw in this research lies in the fact that Semke's statement that 'differentiation among the experimental groups was only on the basis of the method of treating the students' free-writing assignments' (ibid.: 197) is invalid. Group 1 was encouraged to write more in that a 200-word sample would merit an A grade while groups 2, 3, and 4 'worked up to 100-word minimum after the fourth week' (ibid.: 197). It is thus uncertain to what extent the positive findings associated with group 1 are the result of the marking method or of the increase in writing practice. Findings based on cloze tests need to be questioned as Hansen's research has revealed 'a cognitive style bias [relating to field dependence / independence] ... operational in cloze solutions' (1984b: 318). In addition, cloze tests favour students with high risk-taking personalities and thus they can no longer be regarded as totally 'efficient, valid, and reliable measures of global language proficiency' (Semke 1984: 197). Semke also acknowledges that 'the results of this research cannot be generalized beyond the group of students involved in the project' (ibid.: 201).

Robb et al. (1986) researched the effectiveness of the correction code method in the teaching of English as a foreign language to 134 Japanese college freshmen. The variable manipulated was the feedback students received: complete correction by the instructor, use of a correction code, uncoded feedback indicating only the location of the error, and the least salient method, only a marginal tally of the number of errors per line. The meticulous control included eighteen objective measures of writing ability and inter-rater reliability studies. Robb et al. attributed the
gradual increases in the mean scores of all four groups to the practice of writing itself rather than to the feedback method. Unlike Semke, Robb et al. conclude that any 'negative influences corrective feedback might have produced seem to have been completely offset by the practice effect arising from writing weekly assignments' (1986:89). After an examination of the mean scores for each of the feedback groups, they decided that:

the assumption underlying overt correction – that more correction results in more accuracy – was not convincingly demonstrated. ... [and that] the more direct methods of feedback do not tend to produce results commensurate with the amount of effort required of the instructor to draw the student's attention to surface errors (ibid.:88).

The less time-consuming methods suffice if improvement is independent of the type of feedback. Robb et al. believe that detailed feedback on sentence-level mechanics may not be worth the instructor's time and effort even if, as Cohen [1987] suggests students claim to need and use it' (ibid.:91). A compromise approach would be Krashen's (1984) recommendation that error-related feedback be delegated to the final editing stage of the composition process. Alternatively stated, in the words of the Bullock Report, 'only after responding to what has been said, is it reasonable to turn attention to how' (in Spingies 1990:24).

Sheppard's (1992) research into the effects of discrete-item attention to form (by means of a correction code) and holistic feedback on meaning places an additional nail into the coded-error correction coffin. Sheppard found that after ten weeks the group that had been asked to reformulate meaning, learned more about sentence length than those who were exposed to constant error-orientated feedback. ... [and that] students who negotiate meaning in conference with a teacher are unlikely to do so at the risk of diminished accuracy; indeed, they are more likely to be accurate in their use of language than students whose attention is constantly drawn to surface-level inaccuracies and repair techniques (1992:107-8).

Sheppard goes further and states that not only does the code-correction method fail to improve grammatical accuracy but he believes it might even depress the students' tendency to take risks. He bases this conclusion on the fact that at the end of the treatment period the correction-code group were using significantly fewer complex sentences: 'Having become aware of its complexity, they opted for avoidance, particularly since the course stressed corrective error feedback' (ibid.:107).
With the exception of Lalande (whose 1982 research shows that the CC is preferable to complete correction), the research surveyed indicates that response to student writing by means of a correction code does not produce an improvement in proficiency over the testing period commensurate with the lecturers' effort. Accordingly, the research described in this chapter seeks to ascertain if this formalistic method allows students to produce an improved revised draft.

1.2 Method B: Minimal Marking (MM) - Indirect Method

Hendrickson defines the indirect method as any 'correction treatments [which] may indicate either the presence or specific location of errors' (1980:218). Here the presence of an error is merely indicated by means of a symbol, be it a line under the flaw, a cross in the margin, a ring round a word / phrase, an insert sign used to indicate that something is missing, or a question mark. This is a less salient error-indication method than a direct marking method such as the Correction Code.

In the Minimal Marking technique employed in the research study for this thesis a cross in the margin serves as the only indication that there is an error in a particular line. This indirect, formalistic minimal marking strategy was used as early as the 1940s (in Haswell 1983:600-1). It is a method described by Lisman as her 'X System' in an article entitled 'The Best of All Possible Worlds: Where X Replaces AWK' (1979). The use of what Haswell terms the 'minimal functional mark' (1983:604) encourages active correction, which, he asserts, is far more productive than passive reading of corrections.

This interactive feedback style requires students to identify and correct the error in the space above the perceived flaw. In theory, because the lecturer responds to a surface correction only with a check in the margin, attention can be given to more substantial problems. The method has the advantages of reducing the lecturer's input, preventing excessive correction, and giving students the responsibility of solving the puzzle. In this way the scale is tipped towards a more authentic learning situation in which the students are doing the bulk of the work. The implication is that an oversight caused the error and that students are capable of self-correction. Lisman's students responded to the X positively in the sense that they were anxious to 'know what is
wrong' (1979:104). In theory, if they are successful in identifying the problem, it should result in increased self-motivation and reinforcement of learning. However, in entry-level courses the negative effect of students being unable to correct minimally-indicated errors needs to be considered. Haswell claims that this time-saving method can go a long way toward diminishing the halo effect of surface mistakes on evaluation as well as reducing the lecturers' irritation at having continually to correct and explain common errors (1983:601). An additional advantage is that it allows lecturers to winnow away a 'heterogeneous clutter of threshold errors to leave just a few conceptual errors ... accessible for focused treatment' (ibid.:603). However, its emphasis on surface errors need not necessarily imply that more complex issues are overlooked. In contrast, the time saved through reducing marking to simple crosses could productively be used for more detailed commentary when complex problems emerge.

In Haswell's (1983) experiment only 4 out of 69 students did not improve as a result of this marking method. He records an average reduction of 4.6 errors per 100 words to 2.2 errors / 100 words (a 52% improvement). On average his students were able to correct 61% of all errors indicated as well as to rectify divergent problems (semantic, syntactic, spelling and grammar) at approximately the same rate. This finding is supported by Lisman, who reported that her least capable students were able to 'detect about sixty percent of their errors' (1979:104). Unfortunately, Hyland's claims that his students were able to correct 'up to three quarters of their errors', that the experience 'seems to help them avoid the same problems later', that it results in a greater sensitivity to linguistic errors, as well as 'substantial' improvement in the quality of subsequent written work (1990:281) are vague and no statistical information is provided. Lisman also acknowledges that she did not evaluate the method 'formally' (1979:104).

Haswell found that the increased error correction was not achieved at the expense of fluency as the final essays were 23% longer than the original ones (1983:603). However, Haswell acknowledges that he did not have the heart to set up a control group to isolate this marking technique. It is thus uncertain whether other factors contributed to the improvement in fluency documented in his research. To the best of the researcher's knowledge there is no research that demonstrates convincingly that the formalistic MM approach results in improved proficiency over a period of time. The research project described in this chapter replicates Haswell, Hyland and Lisman's research in that it aims to establish if the MM method enables students to produce improved revised paragraphs.
1.3 Method C: Mark Only - Control Group (CG)

The approach which reduces lecturer input to the minimum is one in which no feedback is supplied apart from a mark that serves to indicate the degree of success that the student has achieved. This group served as a control group (CG) for the experiment. In addition it provided a means of testing Matsuhashi & Gordon's (1985) discovery that all three of their groups wrote more and worked on the content-structure of their writing without any teacher intervention at all. It also tests Fathman & Whalley's finding that 'students significantly improved the content and wrote longer compositions when they did revisions without any feedback, which suggests that rewriting is worthwhile and that teacher intervention is not always necessary' (1990:186). These positive findings need to be verified in a distance-teaching context and balanced against Oladejo's (1993) research, in which 84% of the students exhibit a negative attitude towards a 'no comments' approach by the lecturer.

1.4 Method D: Audiotaped Response (TR)

Since its introduction in the 1960s, the audiotape recorder has opened a new avenue of response to student writing. Equipment cost is low, the audiotape allows for erasing and reuse, and playback facilities are readily available. The fact that it is relatively low-level technology is particularly advantageous in the Unisa context, where the majority of the students come from economically disadvantaged backgrounds. A study conducted by Le Roux at Unisa in 1986 showed that 90% of the 178 students sampled own a tape recorder. From these statistics it is safe to assume that all students could gain access to tape recorders, although one should bear in mind that these are rapidly being replaced by compact disk players (CD). In Boswood & Dwyer's words the audiotape is 'familiar to all, non-threatening, relatively cheap and can be placed under the control of those who stand to benefit from it most – the students' (1995:49).

TR is particularly advantageous in the distance-teaching context as it provides a means to counteract the isolation and solitude that characterise this form of tuition. In Carney's words: 'though non-interactive, the cassette provided ... a dynamic similar to a conference with a student'

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3 Early studies of the medium include those of Coleman (1972) and Judd (1973).
Both Kirschner et al. (1991) and Moxley (1989) found that by altering intonation the method allows the lecturer to personalise evaluation and that students find this motivating. Moxley cites five studies showing that oral evaluations quickly establish a rapport with students and prompt more frequent exchanges than traditional grading procedures (1989:9). This effect could also be attributable to Clark's (1981) finding that TR is perceived by students as being more sympathetic than its written counterpart. In their guide for making tapes for the British Open University, Kelly & Ryan (1984) go as far as suggesting that in the distance-teaching context where students are isolated and insecure, the lecturers' supportive, friendly, encouraging tone is as valuable to students as the formal content (in Kirschner et al. 1991:187).

Research studies, such as Boswood & Dwyer (1995), Carney (1995), Farnsworth (1974), Kirschner et al. (1991), Le Roux (1986), both studies described in Logan et al. (1976), Moxley (1989), and Vogler (1971), show that students favour a taped response, which they perceive to be more personal, more complete, and easier to understand than a traditional, written response. Descriptions such as 'stimulating', 'refreshing', 'arousing curiosity' and 'interesting' characterise the students' perception of TR in the research studies cited. Kirschner et al. state that the enthusiasm is evident in the extensive use of qualifying adjectives ('very useful', 'more complete', 'very lucid') in the TR group's descriptions of the method (1991:192). The support is overwhelming:

- Boswell et al. (1993), a report of four studies on the effectiveness of TR, described the student support for the method as 'overwhelmingly positive' (1993:75).
- In Carney's research at Fergus Falls Community College in the United States, 96 of his 115 students found the method 'very helpful' (1995:2).
- Carsen & McTasney's 1973 research with United States Air Force students reported that 94% of the 367 students favoured TR to conventional written grading (in Moxley 1989:9).
- In Le Roux's study of Unisa students in 1986 the statistic was 75% in favour of TR.
- Logan et al. report that 93 of the 96 Iowa dental students sampled would elect to continue with TR if they were given the choice (1976:39).

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Boswood & Dwyer (1995) is a particularly comprehensive research project that explored the effect of TR on four teachers and two hundred students over a two-year period at the City University of Hong Kong.
In contrast to the students' unanimous approval, the lecturers' responses were mixed. In Boswood & Dwyer's (1995) study, the lecturers reported an overwhelmingly positive response. Whereas written response can easily be viewed as marking, TR tends towards a fuller form of feedback of the type characterised by the writing conference. In contrast, the lecturers in Le Roux's study complained about interruptions (1986:80). As Carney (1995) indicates, the need to find a quiet environment for taping is essential. The initial gathering, storage and distribution of tapes requires organisation. Unlike the minimal difference between recording time and marking time reported in Boswood & Dwyer (1995), Kirschner et al. (1991) and Hunt (1989), Le Roux's three lecturers all found the method more time-consuming than conventional written commentary, ranging from one lecturer who found the method a little longer, to one who declared the method impractical because he averaged 30 minutes per taped response compared to 10 minutes for a written response (1986:88). However, this could be attributable to a lack of familiarity with the method. Logan et al (1976) warn that TR is initially both cumbersome and time-consuming (1976:39). Boswood & Dwyer acknowledge that it is not only a procedure with a steep learning curve, but also a demanding and intense process that can be draining (1995:53). However, Boswood & Dwyer make the important point that 'the detail, variety, and sophistication of the feedback given ... confirm its more efficient use of this time' (1995:55). Farnsworth also states that the initial inertia associated with any new method has to be overcome and believes that lecturers can be intimidated both by the technology and by the trauma of listening to their own voices (1974:290).

Because speaking is faster than writing (Cryer & Kaikumba 1987, Fassler 1978, Hunt 1989, Hyland 1990, Klammer in Moxley 1989, Patrie 1989), TR tends to be more comprehensive. In Le Roux's study of Unisa students, 71% stated that they received more information than usual

5 Students in Kirschner et al's study reported that background noise was sometimes problematic (1991:193).

6 The inconvenience associated with the method can be reduced through the use of voice activating equipment (that prevents the lecturer from having to operate stop / record buttons) and a criterion sheet (to prevent the lecturer from overlooking vital aspects that require commentary). Practical suggestions include a good storage area, students being required to rewind, and the use of tapes with a very short (or no) leader (Logan et al. 1976:39).

7 The variations cited are disconcerting and range from Klammer's unrealistic assertion that speaking is approximately five hundred times faster than writing (in Moxley 1989) to Hunt who claims that he can speak five times faster than he can write (1989:271).
as a result of the taped method (1986:82). Kirschner et al.'s (1991) findings in their research project involving two instructors and twelve students at the Open University of the Netherlands is particularly revealing. Although there was an insignificant difference in the amount of time spent on the two methods (53 minutes per script for TR compared to 49 minutes for written feedback), the average length of TR was 1.7 times that of its written counterpart (502 as opposed to 280 words). The conclusion is that TR allows the instructor to tell the students a significantly larger amount in the same amount of time. It therefore results in increased effectiveness without an increase in time, and by implication, in cost. TR tends towards a richer, fuller commentary rather than its frequently more negative, abbreviated, form-fixated, written counterpart. The prime benefit lies in the degree to which it allows the lecturer to express axiological orientations other than the formalist. It promotes a readerly response style and the amount of information that can be conveyed in a relatively short space of time allows for detailed discussion of cognitive issues and complex matters relating to the discourse community for whom the student is writing. In addition, its very nature invites an emotive response style.

Boswood & Dwyer claim that TR promotes a balance between commentary on form and content (1995:50). Carney agrees. By talking to the student rather than simply grading, he claims he was able to tame 'the predatory impulse in [his] pen' (1995:5). Boswood & Dwyer (1995), McAlpine (1989) and Patrie (1989) note that the medium encourages a shift in emphasis from the syntactic features of the text to content-related problems and discourse-level discussion. McAlpine (1989) believes that TR promotes a non-judgemental, reader-based rather than a proof-reader stance. This is partly because the medium manages sentence-level comments less effectively than the written medium. Moxley states that the method invites lecturers to 'transcend [their] role as gatekeepers and police of English. We can show students where meaning breaks down and why by mentioning how we are confused or misled by vague statements and confusing passages' (1989:8-9). In this way the lecturer is able to provide what Elbow terms 'movies of the mind' by modelling questions the audience would ask when reading a text (in Moxley 1989:10). McAlpine describes the method as a form of think-aloud protocol, which has the advantage of allowing the students to hear the lecturer's mental processing as she attempts to understand the writer's meaning (1989:63). The method also preserves the visual integrity of the student's paper and obviates the need for coded comments that can be confusing, discouraging or even humiliating (Carney 1995). In addition, hearing the lecturer reacting to writing demystifies the grading.
process. A further advantage is that TR creates an authentic listening exercise, which enables students to hear what the tutor has to say about the writing. By creating a multi-sensory approach, the learning experience is enhanced through the use of a variety of methods (Moxley 1989:9). Students in Kirschner et al.'s study valued hearing the pronunciation of terminology and being able to reread the essay while listening to the tutor's comments (1991:192). Boswood & Dwyer also claim that the TR's focus on the individual will go some way towards rectifying the power differentials inherent in the teaching context (1995:50) and that this is attributable to the fact that students control when and how frequently they wish to listen to the response. However, the same option is open to students who receive written feedback.

Cryer & Kaikumba's survey of seven independent experiences of TR is unique in its use of the terms 'giver' and 'receiver' of feedback, and in its comprehensiveness that resulted in the listing of advantages and disadvantages not mentioned in the other studies cited in this section. The givers of feedback reported reduced stress levels as a result of not having to structure a written argument, a saving of time afterwards as a result of fewer follow-up meetings because of the clarity of TR, and a feeling of satisfaction associated with a perception of a job well done (Cryer & Kaikumba 1987:150). Receivers reported that the extent and detail of the commentary was so immediate that it motivated them to begin revisions quickly; that they felt secure because they were able to replay the tape when necessary; that the relationship was enhanced and that the tone of voice generated a social context that made follow-up contact more informal. However, they also reported frustration at having to find a quiet place to listen to the tape and their inability to interrupt the lecturer. They also noted that some written notes were essential to facilitate revision (ibid.:151). However, it is necessary to remember that the receivers in this study were well-motivated, advanced students, which, Cryer & Kaikumba concede, could have contributed to the positive attitudinal response (ibid.:152).

While research indicates a positive emotive response towards TR, very few studies provide comparative performance data. An exception is Logan et al.'s report that their dental students performed 'better' on subsequent practical examinations after having received TR (1976:39).

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8 This contrasts with written correction, which can be skimmed immediately.

9 Two of the participants' experience was of TR on their doctoral research.
Unfortunately, statistics are not given, neither is the testing method described. The decided attitudinal advantages of the method do not necessarily result in improved performance.

The hypothesis tested in the experiment described in this chapter, that TR results in a greater mean improvement in the revised paragraph than no response, is based on convincing research, such as that cited in this section of the thesis, which shows TR to be both technically and logically feasible and a constructive alternative to written marking. In addition, it is the method that invites the most axiologically-advanced approach in that it gives the lecturer the opportunity to discuss complex cognitive and social issues relating to the student's writing.

1.5 Method E: Self Assessment (SA)

Whereas the other experimental methods give advice tailored to a specific piece of work, a self-assessment sheet is indirect in that the students have to determine the relevance of the concepts discussed and apply them to their writing. Self assessment is evaluation viewed from the learner's perspective. It is an internal or self-directed activity. This approach fosters learner autonomy and promotes the concept of the learner as an active participant in the learning context. Assessment is then more readily viewed as a mutual, shared responsibility, thereby promoting a democratic approach to language teaching (Oscarson 1989:3). Research in the field\(^\text{10}\) suggests that self-assessment accuracy increases with time, that students can be trained to assess their own work, and that self assessment increases student motivation. Research also indicates that students' subjective evaluation of their work is not always inherently unreliable. Oscarson states that there is a growing body of research data that contradicts the notion that the learner's own assessments of acquired skills are inherently unreliable \((\text{ibid.:2})\). Blanche (1988:77-80) cites studies where students' evaluations correlate with objective measures of performance. However, SA is more valuable in the bearing that it has on the learning situation, in which assessment serves a formative function. Unfortunately, Palmer and Bachman's (1981) research involving 101 students reveals that SA accuracy is lowest for grammatical correction and pragmatic competence \((\text{in Blanche 1988:77})\).

\(^{10}\) See Blanche (1988) for a summary. The article is reproduced as Blanche & Merino (1989). The research described in these articles deals with students learning English as a foreign language.
SA has the following additional advantages:

• SA promotes learning. Oscarson claims that the training in evaluation that SA involves is, in itself, beneficial to learning (1989:3).

• SA forces lecturers to make the criteria for appraisal transparent and to ensure that students understand the terminology.11

• SA results in a raised level of awareness in the sense that training in SA 'stimulates learners to consider course content and assessment principles in a more discerning way than is usually the case' (ibid.:4).

• Oscarson claims that SA results in beneficial post-course effects because it promotes autonomous learning (ibid.:5) and promotes metacognition (Reynolds 1995:1).

1.6 The Markers' Opinions

Before the first scripts were evaluated for the Unisa experiment, markers were requested to complete a questionnaire (Addendum 5) to establish their opinions of the marking strategies. Fourteen responses were received. In questions 3 and 412 the markers were asked to 'rank strategies A, B, C, D and E from best to worst in order of their effectiveness as teaching tools' and 'in the order in which you believe the students would choose'. The results were as follows:

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11 The truth of this statement can be verified by examining the SA brochure given to students in the empirical study. See pages 173-75.

12 Questions 1 and 2 pertain to the ESL Composition Profile and will be discussed in Section 2.3.
Six of the lecturers believe that the marking code method is the most effective while four favour the taped approach. This is in essence a majority vote that endorses teacher intervention. However, four of the lecturers chose methods B and E, which suggests that they believe that the additional effort that students have to put into identifying their errors and following the self-correction brochure is beneficial. In essence these lecturers believe that part of the marking burden should be placed on the students. In contrast, all the lecturers indicated their conviction that the students would choose Methods A and D – those approaches that involve maximum tutor intervention.

The following table shows that by far the majority of lecturers identified Method C as the least beneficial method and the strategy they believed students would resent most. This indicates tutor resistance to simply returning scripts unmarked.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Marking Method</th>
<th>A</th>
<th>B</th>
<th>C</th>
<th>D</th>
<th>E</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>'Most effective'</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anticipated students' choice</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 5: The Marking Method Ranked Least Effective for Questions 3 and 4

Key
A = Marking Code
B = Minimal Marking
C = Control
D = Taped Response
E = Self Test

Questions 5 and 6 asked lecturers if they anticipated problems with any of the strategies and requested that they provide details if their answer was in the affirmative. Seven of the tutors
forecast difficulties with the marking methods. No marking method escaped unscathed, as the following table reveals:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Marking Method</th>
<th>Objection(s)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>The marking code does not cover all the errors that appear in scripts.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B</td>
<td>The objection was raised that 'you only mark the two worst mistakes in a line, and you don't tell the student what they are'. One marker felt that 'where minimal marking is done, students may find themselves unable to rectify their own mistakes'. Another marker went as far as to suggest that the majority would 'have to guess what their mistakes are and, with the level of English most of them have, their chances of guessing correctly are slim'.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C</td>
<td>One marker believed that without tutor intervention students would flounder about without any way of knowing what their mistakes are or how they can improve. Another expressed her sympathy for the students who 'won't know what they have done wrong'. In this context, two markers used the phase 'poor students'. The fear was that students would feel 'cheated' and become demoralised.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D</td>
<td>One lecturer felt that the tape would not be very clear or spontaneous and that students might not understand the lecturers' accents. Another was concerned about practicalities, such as the need for a microphone, concern that the student would not have a tape-recorder or electricity at home and the difficulty for markers of having to come to Unisa in order to use the tape there. In another lecturer's words: 'Non-technical folk will find the tape-recorder a chore'. Another objection was that 'everything depends on the tone' while the fear was expressed that in adopting this 'finicky method', the lecturer might become 'tongue tied'. Another marker opposed the time-consuming nature of the method, stating that it took 'almost double the time of A or B'. Two lecturers conceded that recorded interaction is perhaps the best marking strategy in the distance context because of the personal contact but it is costly in terms of time for the tutor.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E</td>
<td>Two markers stated that both methods C and E 'would be resented [and that] it will be perceived that lecturers are not fulfilling their part of the contract' and that students would complain as a result of the fact that 'their expectations have been confounded'. Another lecturer doubted 'whether many of our students are going to be prepared to put in the necessary amount of work this strategy requires for success'.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 6: Markers' Objections to the Various Marking Methods

Two major themes emerged from the Markers' Questionnaire. The faith lecturers have in their marking was expressed: 'Many students will find it difficult to improve their English if they don't receive feedback from teachers'. Second, although they acknowledged that each of the methods tested has limitations, the consensus of opinion is that students will feel cheated if they do not receive tutorial intervention.
2. The Empirical Study

In a carefully controlled experiment involving Unisa's Practical English students, conducted in 1995, the level of improvement in the revised paragraph resulting from the five divergent marking strategies discussed in Section 1 of this chapter was statistically examined.

The following appendices are so directly relevant to this section of the research that they have been printed after this chapter rather than in at the end of the thesis. They are:

- The ESL Composition Profile (p 168-69);
- Instructions for the Marking of Assignment 01 (p170-72);
- Self Assessment Tutorial Letter (p 173-75);
- Instructions for the Marking of Assignment 04: The Revised Paragraph (p 176);
- Instructions to Markers for the Second Examining of Research Scripts (p 177).
- A photostat copy to demonstrate the final appearance of the A3 pages is printed as Addendum 10 at the end of the thesis.

To avoid unnecessary repetition, information printed in these documents has not been repeated in the text of this chapter and readers are requested to refer to the relevant documents when they are mentioned in the text.

2.1 The Aim

The empirical study was designed to compare the effect on student revisions of five divergent marking strategies. The four experimental methods tested (Correction Code (CC), Minimal Marking (MM), Taped Response (TR) and Self Assessment (SA)) are formative̅ evaluation techniques designed to improve performance through feedback. In contrast, the control group (CG) is restricted to summative feedback in that they were only awarded a mark. The empirical study was designed to determine the relative effectiveness of the marking methods and was not a study of assessment itself as reflected in rankings, percentage grades, or test scores. Ranking was used to grade the original and the revised version of the student's writing for the sole

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13 The terms summative and formative evaluation were originally coined by Scriven in 1967 (in Yancey 1992:1). Summative feedback is defined as one that yields an external, terminal judgement (in Yancey 1992:1).
purpose of comparing the two ratings to allow statistical measurement of the 'improvement' resulting from the marking method. For the purposes of this study the effectiveness of the marking method could be determined by subtracting the score allocated to the original paragraph from the score given to the revised version. For example, if the student received 12 out of 25 for the original work and 14 for the revised paragraph, the improvement would be +2. Expressed as a percentage, the mark had improved by 8% (2 times 4). Groups receiving the divergent marking treatments could be compared as the manipulation of data remained constant across the five groups.

2.2 Hypotheses Tested

The following hypotheses were tested:

- **Hypothesis 1:** Each of the four experimental groups will have a content improvement greater than that of the control group.

- **Hypothesis 2:** Each of the four experimental groups will have a form improvement greater than that of the control group.

- **Hypothesis 3:** Each of the four experimental groups will have a mean total improvement greater than that of the control group.

- **Hypothesis 4:** Because practice, without any lecturer intervention, promotes fluency, the control group's mean improvement for the revised paragraphs will reflect a higher mark than that awarded to their original scripts.

- **Hypothesis 5:** Because of the form-related emphasis inherent in the Correction Code, the mean improvement with respect to grammar will be greater than the mean content improvement for this group.

- **Hypothesis 6:** Because of the form-related emphasis inherent in Minimal Marking, the mean improvement with respect to grammar will be greater than the mean content improvement for this group.

- **Hypothesis 7:** Because students struggle to self-correct grammatical features, the Control Group's mean improvement with respect to content will be greater than that recorded for form.

- **Hypothesis 8:** Because the Taped Response allows lecturers to place greater emphasis on the larger issues of discourse, the mean improvement
Hypothesis 9: Because students struggle to self-correct grammatical features, the Self Assessment group's mean content improvement will be greater than that recorded for form.

2.3 The ESL Composition Profile

It is vital to be able to generalise about test results so that they can have meaning beyond their immediate testing situation. To this end, the scoring procedure has to be carefully selected. The researcher was aware of the limitation that all text-based studies ignore the interactive theory of textual communication where the text is constructed by the reader. She acknowledges the truth of Ebel's statement that at all tests are flawed and that there 'is no means of test validation that is completely empirical, is completely impersonal and objective, and avoids the vagueness and uncertainty of human judgements altogether' (in Lombard 1988:19) and Nitko's comments that almost all criterion measures are incomplete and 'represent only part of the attainment of the ultimate behaviour series' a test ought to predict (ibid.). The desired end, a true score that would perfectly reflect ability and be totally consistent with future performance on the same testing instrument, is a myth. In Huot's words, 'the test or observed score ... is a function of the true score and some component of error. ... This notion of error score is what prevents any testing instrument from having a 1.0 (perfect) test / retest reliability' (1990:203). However, the fact that perfection is unattainable does not absolve the researcher from the responsibility of striving towards it.

The obvious choice would have been a holistic scoring procedure as this has become the norm, the default mode for evaluation or, in White's words, the 'standard practice' (in Huot 1990:201). One reason that holistic scoring has gained acceptance is that it fits into this era of English studies. Huot explains that 'by employing a rater's full impression of a text without trying to reduce her judgement to a set of recognizable skills, holistic scoring is linked theoretically to recent advances in linguistics, composition research, and poststructuralist literary criticism ... all

14 Hypotheses 1 - 3 are based on the assumption that 'response to student writing can have a positive influence on writing'; Hypothesis 4 is founded on a belief that 'revision, without tutorial intervention, will have a positive influence on writing'; and hypotheses 5-9 are built on the conviction that 'some response strategies are more likely to produce a positive effect than others'.

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of which favor [sic] a contextual and functional theory of written communication' (*ibid.*:201).

However, because of the numerous limitations associated with holistic scoring, an analytical scale was selected for use in the study. This has the advantage of drawing the raters' attention to specific aspects of the students' writing. A scoring guide helps readers maintain common standards and promotes reliability.

The ESL Composition Profile, described in Jacobs *et al.* (1981), was used in the study. It is an analytical scoring technique that contains the following features: Content, Organisation, Vocabulary, Language Usage and Mechanics. The main separation into content and form is an attempt to overcome the difficulty that 'ESL writing often betrays problematic mismatches between surface deficiencies and content proficiencies' (Haswell & Wyche-Smith 1994:228).

Haswell & Wyche-Smith believe that this discrepancy accounts for the fact that ESL writing has fared so poorly with holistic readings. The components in the scale are variously weighted according to their perceived level of importance, hence, the lower rating for mechanics. The total weight is then further broken down into numerical ranges that correspond to four mastery levels: 'Excellent to Very Good', 'Good to Average', 'Fair to Poor' and 'Very Poor'.

The ESL Composition Profile has proven to be a reliable testing instrument. Research in this regard was conducted by Astika (1993). The work of 210 subjects was rated by two or three markers using the ESL Composition Profile. Using a Spearman-Brown prophecy formula the

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15 Holistic scoring has major limitations in that
   • it correlates with appearance and length;
   • holistic ratings cannot be used beyond the population which generated them;
   • holistic training procedures alter the process of scoring and reading and distort the raters' ability to make sound choices concerning writing ability (Huot 1990:201-2);

It is not fair in that
   • it scores complex, multidimensional performances with single numbers along a single dimension;
   • it gives no feedback to the learner or teacher and is simply a single point on a yea / boo applause metre that provides no evidence as to why readers shouted 'yea' or 'boo';
   • it feeds the dangerous assumption that there is a 'true score' for a piece of writing;
   • it fuels the biggest enemy of thoughtful evaluation: judgement based on holistic, global feelings;
   • it feeds the cultural hunger for ranking and evaluation (Elbow 1996:84-5).

Elbow further supports his claim by citing an appendix consisting of seventeen works that question the value of holistic scoring (*ibid.* 99-100).

16 The ESL Composition Profile, as adapted for this study, is printed at the end of the chapter as document 3.1.
The correlation coefficient was established at .82, which serves as an 'indication of the interrater [sic] reliability of the test' (Astika 1993:63). This is very similar to the result of .85 reported in Jacobs et al. (1981).

The reliability index can also be improved through training. Jacobs et al. argue that instruction in the use of a scoring rubric helps to neutralise the differences between readers and 'ensure[s] more consistent interpretation and application of the criteria and standards for determining the communicative effectiveness of writers' (1981:43). In Weigle's research (1994) training proved to be effective in that it helped four inexperienced raters of ESL placement compositions to understand and apply the intended rating criteria, and to modify their expectations in terms of the characteristics of the writers and the demands of the writing tasks.

The Unisa research made use of a consensus score because two scores were generated for each paragraph. Even then, the observed consensus score 'has its own margin of error depending upon the many factors concerning the raters, their training, and their ultimate appreciation of a student's text' (Huot 1990:203). Nevertheless, the use of both a reliable testing instrument and a consensus score serves to bring the research closer to the elusive ideal of a perfect score.

2.4 Procedure

The procedure involved students writing a paragraph, which was marked using one of the five marking strategies tested, and then submitting their revised versions of the same paragraph. The markers were involved in a three-stage process that consisted of:

• the marking of the original paragraph;
• the marking of the revised paragraph;
• the re-marking of both paragraphs.

The average of the two ratings awarded for both the original and the revised paragraphs was used for statistical analysis.
2.4.1 The Original Paragraph

The original paragraph that served as a basis for the empirical study formed part of 'Assignment 01' that students were required to submit for the 1995 Practical English course (PEN100-3). The question read as follows:

Write a twenty-line paragraph about one incident from your childhood that you remember clearly. Describe it in detail. Interpret your recollections, telling why that specific memory is important or significant, how it fits into your life story. [25 marks]

IMPORTANT: Begin this question on a new page. Write no more than 20 lines. Leave the rest of the page empty.

The purposes of this writing task are:
• to introduce you to the important academic skills of careful and detailed recollection, narration, evaluation, and interpretation;
• to provide you with an opportunity for the important academic activity of self-introspection; and
• to continue your introduction of yourself to us, your lecturers, in a personally meaningful fashion. (We will share some of our memories with you in the tutorial letter containing the answers to this assignment.)

For Assignment 04 you will be required to revise the marked section of this assignment (PEN100-3 Tutorial Letter 101: 1995: 42 & 46).

Students were given only one topic so that they would be given equal opportunities. Lombard cites Lewis who claims that when testees are presented with a choice of questions they are, in fact, 'answering different papers, so the total mark may not represent comparable performances' (1988:10). There are also theoretical reasons behind the choice of personal narrative in an initial assignment for an entry-level writing course. Perl (1979) and Beach (1981) favour focusing on the personal in the early stages of writing instruction when skills are being acquired. 17 Perl (1979) claims that students write longer, more correct essays when writing on a personal topic and that narration requires less planning and is easier than either descriptive or expository (discursive / argumentative) writing. Tedick supports Perl and cites both L1 and L2 studies that demonstrate that writing performance improves when students are familiar with the subject matter and are given a topic that allows them to make use of their prior knowledge (1990:132).

17 Although the students registered for Practical English are university candidates, many are not advanced in terms of their ability in English. The language is used as medium of instruction for their other papers and this motivates many of them to take the course.
Personal narrative also creates a genuine communication context and allows students to introduce themselves to their lecturers. In addition, a personal topic allows students authority because 'they are the only ones who really know what happened, and they have the right to speculate on what it means' (White 1995:129). The benefits of narrative writing for distance students are convincingly argued in Dowling 1996. However, a personal topic is framed within an emotive axiology and this sets constraints on apposite response strategies.

2.4.2 The Marking of the Original Paragraph

The administration involved in processing assignments at a distance-teaching institution is daunting. If all the students registered for Practical English in 1995 had submitted their first assignment, 5784 assignments would have reached the English Department from the Dispatch Department, batched into groups of 18. This process is ideal for research as the assignments are processed in a random order, batched as they arrive at Unisa. 18

The scripts are then allocated to the markers from within the English Department. In 1995 the external marking panel consisted of twelve experienced teachers (one of whom had marked for Unisa for a period of thirteen years at that stage) in addition to the permanent members of staff working on the Practical English team. Each marker was allocated five batches of eighteen scripts at a time. The batches were marked A, B, C, D and E, in accordance with the marking method that was to be adopted. This was done purposefully to ensure that each marker evaluated equal numbers of scripts to be marked using the various marking methods. 19

The markers were each given a copy of the document entitled 'Instructions for the Marking of Assignment 01', which is printed at the end of this chapter. It outlined procedure, described each of the marking methods and discussed the use the ESL Composition Profile, a copy of which was attached at the end of the document.

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18 There is, however, a tendency for better students to submit their assignments earlier than weaker ones.

19 A problem that emerged was that one of the markers was so averse to Method D (the taped response) that she used Method A for this group also. For this reason she was excluded from the study.
2.4.3 Inter-Rater Reliability Study

Inter-rater reliability is designed to calculate the degree of agreement between independent raters. Huot explains that when inter-rater reliability scores are in excess of .7, then 'scoring techniques were accepted as a viable way of evaluating writing quality' (1990:204). Inter-rater reliability is frequently linked to rater training that is devised to foster agreement on independent rater scores and is based on a scoring guideline that identifies key features of writing quality. Its intention is to promote consensus on key issues relating to the evaluation. As Huot points out, the underlying assumptions in traditional assessment are that writing quality can be defined and determined; that raters should be able to agree on a set of criteria; and that it is possible to maintain consistency and standardisation (1996:551). These issues are problematic.

First, training is used to achieve high inter-rater reliability levels. For example, for the British Council's International English Language Testing Service, raters go through three training sessions (Hamp-Lyons 1986). However, Elbow contends that the high inter-rater reliability is simply 'the artificial effects of "training": getting readers to ignore their actual responses and values as professional readers' (1996:84). The fear is that attempts at gaining uniform judgements may distort the interaction between reader and text and thus the judgements resulting from the process may be questionable.

In addition, it is important to remember that inter-rater reliability does not extend to validity. 'Reliability refers to how consistency a test measures whatever it measures ... a test can be reliable but not be valid' (Huot 1996:557). In the profession's emphasis on reliability (ability of

\[20\] In this regard, Green & Hecht (1984) have identified markers failing to agree on the errors, on the gravity of the errors, not having a common basis for evaluating content or for assessing the positive aspects nor a single system for converting error scores into grades as the most common causes for low inter-rater reliability (1984:13-4).
raters to agree) of holistic scoring techniques, validity\textsuperscript{21} (the value of the judgement given) has tended to be neglected.

Huot advocates contextualisation of assessment, depending on a stable pool of raters that teach specific courses on a consistent basis (\textit{ibid.}:553). It is probably this common context that is responsible for the high inter-rater reliability statistics obtained in the Unisa study, which instructed raters to award marks to five paragraphs the researcher selected from the first assignments received. Reliability Study 1\textsuperscript{22} is printed as Addendum 6. The paragraphs were specifically chosen to represent the range of proficiency levels that could be expected from the students. The 18 markers' results were then evaluated statistically and the precision values were calculated for each of the paragraphs. The formula was as follows:

- The standard mean for each paragraph was multiplied by 2.1. The resulting number is a figure that shows that 95% of the time all the markers lie within this range of the mean.\textsuperscript{23}

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Precision Values: 'Reliability Study 1: Marking of the Original Paragraph'</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Paragraph 1: 1,02 = 4,08%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Paragraph 2: 1,12 = 4,48%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Paragraph 3: 1,02 = 4,08%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Paragraph 4: 0,92 = 3,68%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Paragraph 5: 1,44 = 5,76%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\textbf{Table 7: Reliability Study 1: Precision Values}

\textsuperscript{21} There are various forms of validity. Face validity, requiring that 'a test should look like what it claims to accomplish - is the least important type of validity' (Huot 1990:204) in that it is simply the appearance of validity. Predictive validity has value for placement purposes. Concurrent validity is the ability to correlate one type of testing with another. Content validity assumes the assessment instrument contains the necessary procedures to measure truly for its intended purposes. Construct validity ensures the theoretical soundness of the assessment procedure and is the degree to which it tests a theoretical construct or trait (\textit{ibid.}:206).

\textsuperscript{22} Markers were also required to answer the 'Questionnaire for Markers', which was discussed in Section 6.1 of this chapter.

\textsuperscript{23} For example, a precision value of 1,02 indicates that 95% of the time the markers were within 4,08\% of the mean. The percentage is calculated by multiplying the precision value by 4 because the original mark was calculated out of 25. The range is then determined by multiplying this number by 2 because the marks could fall on either side of the mean. Thus, in this instance, with the exception of the occasional outliers, the marks do not range more than 8,16\%. The term 'outliers' refers to marks that fall outside this range.
With the exception of paragraph 5, the markers were considered to be evaluating with an acceptable level of precision. The discrepancy with respect to Paragraph 5 was the result of divergence in the markers' reading of the particular paragraph. Those operating from within a formalist paradigm deemed certain structures incorrect while those with a more literary bent regarded them as deliberate distortions for poetic effect.

The markers were contacted by the researcher and their marks were compared with means achieved by all the markers for each of the questions. Problems that emerged in their marking were discussed and, where necessary, markers were requested to either raise or drop their standard. The five divergent marking strategies were evaluated in detail. The scripts were then marked, quality controlled and returned to the students.

2.4.4 Marking of the Revised Paragraphs

Assignment 04 required students to revise their original, marked paragraph from Assignment 01. The time lapse between assignments was almost three months. This was necessary because of postal delays and the time required to process almost 6000 scripts. The instruction reads:

Resubmit the marked section of Assignment 01. You must include both your marked paragraph and your revised version of the paragraph. Follow the 'Instructions for the Submission of the Revised Paragraph' given in the tutorial letter entitled 'Comment on Assignment 01' (PEN100-3 Tutorial Letter 101: 1995: 86).

Before scripts were allocated to markers, the original mark was covered with a yellow 'Stick-it' label. As these were not totally opaque, a black line was drawn on the label making it impossible for the marker to see the original mark allocated without lifting the label. The researcher impressed on markers that the investigation would be invalidated if they cheated and lifted the

---

24 This is in accordance with Huot's demand for an inter-rater reliability index of .7 or above (1990:204).

25 Marked discrepancies in paradigmatic emphasis were apparent in this paragraph. Whereas the more literary lecturers commented on the atmosphere evoked and regarded phrases such as 'paved through the tall grasses' as poetic, others saw only the linguistic flaws.
labels. The researcher relied on their integrity and is certain that markers did not disregard the request. This time-consuming process was vital to ensure that the mark for the revised version was not influenced by the original mark allocated. The document, 'Instructions for the Marking of Assignment 04: The Revised Paragraph', which was given to markers, is printed at the end of this chapter.

A further reliability study (See Addendum 7) required the markers, once again, to evaluate five selected paragraphs to determine the inter-rater reliability index. The precision values gave the researcher the confidence to allow markers to begin evaluating the revised paragraphs using the ESL Composition Profile. The scripts were then marked.

### Precision Values:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>'Reliability Study 2: Preparation for Marking the Revised Paragraph'</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Paragraph 1: 0,68 = 2,72%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Paragraph 2: 1,04 = 4,16%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Paragraph 3: 1,17 = 4,68%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Paragraph 4: 0,90 = 3,6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Paragraph 5: 0,93 = 3,72%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 8: Reliability Study 2: Precision Values

2.4.5 The Second Marking of Both the Original and Revised Paragraphs

When the marked scripts were returned, the yellow stickers were removed and the scripts were divided into five groups according to the marking method used in the original assignment. A random selection of 350 scripts was made from each of the five marking strategies. These 1750 (5 groups of 350) scripts form the data base for the research project. The scripts that were not selected were returned to the students at this stage. The scripts that were included in the study were photocopied before they could be returned to the students. The original and the revised versions of each of these assignments were then photocopied on an A3 sheet with the original marked paragraph on the left of the page and the revised marked version on the right. The original scripts were then returned to the students. The photostats (with all the marks concealed) were then given to markers for a second marking of both the original and the revised paragraphs.
A document entitled 'Instructions to Markers for the Second Examining of Research Scripts' (printed at the end of this chapter) outlined their instructions.

Once again the marks awarded by the markers to the original and the revised paragraphs first had to be covered with yellow stickers and another inter-rater reliability test (See Addendum 8) was conducted. The results revealed a very high inter-rater reliability index. The markers were able to compare their marks for each question with the mean. Discrepancies were discussed and two of the markers were requested to adjust their standard slightly.

| Precision Values: |
| 'Reliability Study 3': Preparation for the Second Marking |
| Paragraph 1: | 1.03 = 4.12% |
| Paragraph 2: | 0.80 = 3.3% |
| Paragraph 3: | 0.72 = 2.88% |
| Paragraph 4: | 0.79 = 3.16% |
| Paragraph 5: | 0.77 = 3.08% |

Table 9: Reliability Study 3: Precision Values

Markers were then given permission to proceed with the second evaluation of the paragraphs. In this instance they had to award marks to both the original and the revised paragraphs. Because they were in a position to compare paragraphs the markers were requested to indicate any strong opinions by means of codes. The markers were instructed to use green pen to differentiate their marks from the ones given by the first markers, which were in black after being photocopied.

The paragraphs were then marked. When they were returned, the stickers were removed and the marks were averaged. This average appeared in blue pen to distinguish it from the other marks. This mark was used for the statistical analysis. In instances where there was a discrepancy of 3 or more between the two markers this was recorded as Variable 7. These scripts were removed from the full sample. The results of the reduced sample (excluding Variable 7 scripts) were very similar to those of the full sample. In the few instances where discrepancies between the full and the reduced sample exist, these will be discussed.

26 See page 154 of this thesis.
The scripts were classified from A to E according to the marking method used. In addition, four proficiency levels were allocated. The students were placed in proficiency levels in accordance with the mark out of 25 that they had been awarded for the original script. The categories were as follows:

Proficiency Level 1: < 9.0
Proficiency Level 2: 10.0 - 12.0
Proficiency Level 3: 12.5 - 15.0
Proficiency Level 4: > 16.0

For example, a script classified B1 would thus belong to the weakest group of students marked according to Method B. This classification has been introduced to facilitate discussion of results. A photocopy to show the final appearance of the A3 pages is included at the end of the chapter.

2.5 Findings

Two statistical procedures were carried out.
- A one-way Anova analysis of Variance, and
- t-tests to compare each of the experimental methods individually with the Control Group (Method C).

2.5.1 Levels of Improvement in the Revised Paragraph

Students were divided into four classes in accordance with the level of improvement (expressed as a percentage) exhibited in their revised paragraph. This figure, termed 'Total Improvement', was obtained by subtracting the mark awarded for the original assignment from that of the revised paragraph. There were instances where students had faired worse in the revised paragraph than they had done in the original. In these cases the 'Total Improvement' is expressed negatively. The four improvement levels were as follows:

- Improvement Level 1 = <-2%
- Improvement Level 2 = 0% - 8%
- Improvement Level 3 = 10% - 18%
- Improvement Level 4 = > 20%

The table below demonstrates how the levels of improvement varied in accordance with the marking strategy used.
The table, entitled 'The Total Improvement Levels for Each Marking Strategy', indicates that in total 1559 scripts were included in the study and that these were spread fairly evenly across the five correction methods (A - 315, B - 325, C - 321, D - 283, E - 315). 57.7% of all students had an improvement of 0 - 8% while 24.6% of all students improved by 10 - 18%. Thus 82.3% of all students had an improvement of between 0 - 18%. In addition, 3.8% managed to achieve an improvement in excess of 20%. This suggests that, with or without lecturer intervention, revision is worthwhile. However, gains tend to be small in relation to the effort involved in tutor-marked assignments.

\[ \text{Table 10: The Total Improvement Levels for Each Marking Strategy} \]

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Total Improvement Level</th>
<th>A (Raw score)</th>
<th>B (Percentage)</th>
<th>C (Raw score)</th>
<th>D (Percentage)</th>
<th>E (Raw score)</th>
<th>E (Percentage)</th>
<th>Row Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1: Raw score</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>216</td>
<td>13.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percentage</td>
<td>13.0</td>
<td>25.5</td>
<td>25.9</td>
<td>16.7</td>
<td>19.0</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2: Raw score</td>
<td>157</td>
<td>193</td>
<td>216</td>
<td>142</td>
<td>191</td>
<td>899</td>
<td>57.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percentage</td>
<td>17.5</td>
<td>21.5</td>
<td>24.0</td>
<td>15.8</td>
<td>21.2</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3: Raw score</td>
<td>107</td>
<td>68</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>95</td>
<td>70</td>
<td>384</td>
<td>24.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percentage</td>
<td>27.9</td>
<td>17.7</td>
<td>11.5</td>
<td>24.7</td>
<td>18.2</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4: Raw score</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>3.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percentage</td>
<td>38.3</td>
<td>15.0</td>
<td>8.3</td>
<td>16.7</td>
<td>21.7</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5: Column Total</td>
<td>315</td>
<td>325</td>
<td>321</td>
<td>283</td>
<td>315</td>
<td>1559</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Raw score</td>
<td>20.2</td>
<td>20.8</td>
<td>20.6</td>
<td>18.2</td>
<td>20.2</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percentage</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Key: A = Marking Code, B = Minimal Marking, C = Control, D = Taped Response, E = Self Test

It would have been preferable to have had identical numbers. However, when the researcher identified problems with a script, it was removed from the study, hence the slight discrepancies in numbers of students allocated to each marking method. The most common reasons for eliminating scripts were poor photostats and instances where the marker had ignored specific instructions (e.g. providing full corrections for Method A or B, and written commentary in Methods C, D, and E). This could be an indication that, in certain cases, the lecturers' desire to assist students was greater than their loyalty to the experiment.
Improvement Level 1 consists of students whose revisions were more than 2% worse than their original paragraphs. In this instance the title is a contradiction in terms as the students did not improve at all. Fortunately only 13.9% of the students fall into this category. The largest groups were those marked by means of Methods B (25.5%) and C (25.9%). The size of these groups is the first indication that both methods are problematic.

The majority of the students (57.7%) performed at Improvement Level 2 (0 - +8%). These were spread as follows across the 5 marking methods: 17.5%, 21.5%, 24.0%, 15.8%, and 21.2%. Method C has the highest number (24.0%) of students falling into this marginal improvement category. The next highest categories were students who had been marked by means of Methods B and E.

In contrast, there were proportionately fewer students from Method C in Improvement Level 3 (10 - 18%) and Improvement Level 4 (above 20%). Only 11.5% of the students in Improvement Level 3 had been marked with Method C and in the highest category, Improvement Level 4, a mere 8.3% of the students belonged to the control group. In contrast, proportionately more Method A students fell into both these Improvement Levels (with 27.9% and 38.3% of the students respectively). In both instances students marked according to Method D and E formed the next largest groups.

These figures indicate that students from the control group were still able to improve their work but that the improvements were not as great as those of students whose work was marked by means of methods A, D and E. Students whose work deteriorated or who fell into the marginal improvement category were more likely to have been marked by means of Methods C or B as opposed to the higher improvement level categories where the trend favoured students marked by means of Method A, followed by Methods D and E.
The trends discussed are more easily discernible if the information given in the table is presented in graph form:

![Graph showing improvements for students marked by different methods]

**Table 11: Percentage of Students in Each Improvement Level**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Marking Method</th>
<th>Improvement Level 1 (≤-2%)</th>
<th>Improvement Level 2 (0% - 8%)</th>
<th>Improvement Level 3 (10% - 18%)</th>
<th>Improvement Level 4 (&gt;20%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The rising trend in terms of level of improvement for students marked by means of Method A is clearly visible in the graph from 13% in Improvement Level 1, the weakest improvement category, through to 38% in Improvement Level 4, the highest improvement category. The reverse trend is obvious in the case of students marked by means of Methods B and C. In the case of Method B, the decreased improvement levels are as follows: 25%, 21%, 18%, 15% while with respect to Method C the decrease is more pronounced: 26%, 24%, 11%, 8%. In contrast, there is a much more even spread of students through the four improvement levels in Methods D and E. These statistics indicate that students whose work is marked using Method A are likely to improve most. It also demonstrates that students who are marked by means of Methods B and C are likely to improve less than if they had been marked using methods A, D or E.
2.5.2 Content Improvement in the Revised Paragraphs

![Diagram showing average percentage content improvement for different marking methods]

**MARKING METHOD**

Table 12: Average Percentage Content Improvement

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Method</th>
<th>Percentage Improvement</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>6,6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B</td>
<td>4,0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C</td>
<td>3,6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D</td>
<td>5,1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E</td>
<td>5,5%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Key: A = Marking Code, B = Minimal Marking, C = Control, D = Taped Response, E = Self Assessment

On average all the students, regardless of the marking method applied, were able to improve the content of their revised paragraphs. The value of revision is endorsed as even Method C students, those who had no lecturer intervention apart from a mark, were able to improve the content of their paragraphs by an average of 3,6%. This graph supports Hypothesis 1: *Each of the four experimental groups will have a content improvement greater than that of the control group.*

Students marked by means of Method A showed the greatest content improvement (6,6%), followed closely by those in Methods D (5,5%) and E (5,1%). Once again, Method C students performed worst (3,6%), followed by those marked by means of Method B (4,0%).

At a significance level of 0,05, the One-Way Anova Analysis of Variance revealed that in terms of average percentage content improvement Method A differed significantly from both Methods B and C, indicating that it is a more effective means of promoting content improvement than
either of the other methods. In terms of content improvement there was no statistically-
significant difference between Methods A and Methods D and E. However, in terms of the
labour intensity the methods are poles apart. While Methods A and D are virtually on a par in
this regard,\textsuperscript{28} there is an enormous contrast in terms of time required for these methods compared
to Method E, which simply requires a lecturer to award a mark and staple in a self-assessment
brochure.

The t-test, an independent sample of methods to determine equality of means, revealed the
following impressive results in terms of content improvement:

- Method A differed from Method C – significance level 0.001
- Method D differed from Method C – significance level 0.007
- Method E differed from Method C – significance level 0.016

In each of these cases the significance levels was considerably less than 0.05 and thus
statistically significant differences were recorded. However, in terms of content improvement,
the t-test showed that Method B was not statistically different from Method C. The form-related
emphasis of this minimal marking method is the probable cause of its being so similar to Method
C in its effect on content.

These findings support the research of Fathman & Whalley (1990), who also found that all their
groups were able to improve the content of their writing significantly, irrespective of the type
of feedback. This also applied to the control group who had no feedback. It appears that, in terms
of content, re-writing is worthwhile. This finding endorses Matsushashi & Gordon's (1985)
conclusion that even without any teacher intervention students are able to improve the content
of their papers.

\textsuperscript{28} It is important that the markers were specifically instructed to spend no longer on the taped
response than they would spend on Method A.
2.5.3 Form Improvement in the Revised Paragraphs

As the graph indicates, Hypothesis 2: *Each of the four experimental groups will have a form improvement greater than that of the control group*, is also supported. Re-writing alone, with no lecturer intervention (apart from the mark) results in an average improvement of 4.2% in terms of form. Although students are able to improve the formal aspect of their writing without tutor intervention, the improvement is not as great as it is when support is given.

At a significance level of 0.05, Method A differed significantly in terms of form improvement from Methods B, C, and E. In the reduced sample, which excluded any scripts where there was a difference of more than 10% between the two markers, there was also an additional statistically significant difference recorded between Methods A and D. Thus, of the methods tested, Method A is most likely to produce the best revisions in the formal component of writing. At a significance level of 0.05, both Methods B and D differed significantly from Method C,
indicating that the work inherent in both these methods reaps benefits in terms of improved form in the revised versions.

Method A involves direct correction while Method B tests a form of indirect correction. In contrast there is no error correction at all in Method C. The clearly visible decline in percentage form improvement recorded with respect to Methods A (9.4%), B (6.4%) and C (4.2%) suggests that the higher the salience accorded the error correction, the more likely the student is to be able to improve in terms of form. This finding confirms the finding of Cardello & Corno (1981) who demonstrated that salient error conditions would produce higher levels of performance than suppressed error conditions. Ideally, the high error salience should be given in a motivationally favourable context, an aspect examined in Chapter Six.

The t-tests all revealed statistically significant differences between the experimental groups and the control in terms of form improvement.

• Method A differed from Method C – significance level 0.000
• Method B differed from Method C – significance level 0.000
• Method D differed from Method C – significance level 0.000
• Method E differed from Method C – significance level 0.012

In each of these cases the significance levels were all far less than 0.05 and thus statistically significant differences were recorded. All the experimental methods, including the self-correction method, are preferable to Method C. However, Method A was the only one that was proved (at a statistically significant level) to be better in terms of formal improvement than the other experimental methods. With the support provided by Cardello & Corno, one can conclude that it is the high salience of error that makes Method A the most effective means of improving form. The more direct the method, the greater the formal improvement will be when students revise the document.
2.5.4 Total Improvement in the Revised Paragraphs

![Bar chart showing total improvement by marking method]

Table 14: Average Percentage Total Improvement

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>MARKING METHOD</th>
<th>A</th>
<th>B</th>
<th>C</th>
<th>D</th>
<th>E</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>80</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>66</td>
<td>54</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Key**
- A = Marking Code
- B = Minimal Marking
- C = Control
- D = Taped Response
- E = Self Assessment

The graph supports both Hypothesis 3: *Each of the four experimental groups will have a mean total improvement greater than that of the control group*, and Hypothesis 4: *Because practice, without any lecturer intervention, promotes fluency, the control group's mean improvement for the revised paragraphs will reflect a higher mark than that awarded to their original scripts*.

In terms of total improvement, at a significance level of 0.05, Method A differed significantly from Methods B, C, and E. These findings were confirmed in the reduced sample. However, here Method A also differed significantly from Method D. Thus, overall Method A is the approach most likely to allow students to perform best.

The small total improvement recorded for Method B over Method C (5.2% versus 3.9%) runs counter to the glowing reports by Haswell (1983), Hyland (1990) and Lisman (1983). This is possibly because less than 20% of the students marked by means of Method B followed the
instruction to 'identify the error yourself and write the correction in pencil above the mistake'. Of those students who attempted self correction, a random sample of 50 scripts was selected. These confirm reports by Haswell (1983), Hyland (1990) and Lisman (1983) that students are able to identify and correct in excess of 60% of the errors indicated by means of a cross.

Method D differed significantly from Method C. The fact that it scored well was to be anticipated judging from reports such as Boswood & Dwyer (1995), Carney (1995), Farnsworth (1974), Kirschner et al. (1991), Le Roux (1986), Logan et al. (1976), Moxley (1989) and Vogler (1971). However, the Unisa markers' use of the tapes was not optimal and thus the method is probably more effective than the Unisa experiment reveals. In a randomly-selected sample of taped responses, 30% had unacceptably high noise levels, one marker's accent was distracting, 70% adopted a strongly formalistic approach and 20% exhibited a reductive editorial attitude. A mere 20% of the markers included a personal note, only 30% of the responses could be described as encouraging, 10% commented on content, and only 20% took advantage of the fact that the medium allows lecturers to demonstrate comprehension difficulties they experience while reading the text.

In the reduced sample, Method E also differed significantly from Method C, a reassuring finding given the fact that the method is not labour-intensive. The t-tests revealed statistically significant differences between the experimental groups and the control in terms of total improvement.

- Method A differed from Method C – significance level 0.000
- Method B differed from Method C – significance level 0.015
- Method D differed from Method C – significance level 0.000
- Method E differed from Method C – significance level 0.004

The t-test thus confirms that all the experimental methods are preferable to a 'mark-only' approach. On first glance these findings seem to discredit both Robb et al.'s belief that 'the more direct methods of feedback do not tend to produce results commensurate with the amount of effort required of the instructor to draw the student's attention to surface errors' (1986:88) and Marzano & Arthur's (1977) conclusion that detailed marking is 'an exercise in futility' (in Semke 1984:195). However, compared to Method C, the overall percentage improvement levels are indeed minimal. Method A results in an average improvement over Method C of 4.1%;
Method B a mere 1.3%; Method D a better 2.7% and Method E a 1.5% improvement. Overall, the order in terms of effectiveness was A, D, E, B, C – a sequence predicted by the markers.

2.5.5 Content / Form Improvement

![Graph showing content vs. form improvement for methods A to E.]

**MARKING METHOD**

Table 15: Average Percentage Content and Form Improvement

| Key: | Percentage Form Improvement | Percentage Content Improvement |

As the graph indicates, in each of the marking strategies tested, the improvement in form was greater than the improvement in content. Thus both Hypothesis 5 (Because of the form-related emphasis inherent in the Correction Code, the mean improvement with respect to form will be greater than the mean content improvement for this group) and Hypothesis 6 (Because of the form-related emphasis inherent in Minimal Marking, the mean improvement with respect to grammar will be greater than the mean content improvement for this group) were confirmed.

In contrast, there was no support for Hypothesis 7 (Because students struggle to self-correct grammatical features, the Control Group’s mean improvement with respect to content will be greater than that recorded for form), for Hypothesis 8 (Because the taped response allows lecturers to place greater emphasis on the larger issues of discourse), the mean improvement

29 The sample examined revealed that the problem was more how the tapes were used rather than a weakness inherent in the method itself.
with respect to content will be greater than the mean form improvement for this group) or for Hypothesis 9 (Because students struggle to self-correct grammatical features, the Self Assessment group's mean content improvement will be greater than that recorded for form).

In Methods A, B, and D there is a greater difference between the content and form average improvements than there is in Methods C and E. This suggests that the lecturer's effort in the former marking strategies results in improved grammatical performance. It could, however, also be viewed negatively as an indication that markers are operating from a formalist paradigm.

2.5.6 Proficiency Group Variations

There were originally four proficiency levels determined by the mark that the students received for their initial paragraphs. However, because the differences between groups were so slight, the following table has been reduced to two levels. The first group consists of students who failed the original paragraph while the second group comprises those who were awarded above 12.5 (50%) for their first effort. The table below differentiates between pass / fail proficiency-level students and shows the various levels of improvement achieved by means of the five marking methods. The percentages are given in brackets. In each instance, the improvement level that contains the majority of the students has been indicated in bold for ease of interpretation.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Students Who Failed</th>
<th>Students Who Passed</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Improvement Level 1</td>
<td>Improvement Level 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Improvement Level 2</td>
<td>Improvement Level 2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Improvement Level 3</td>
<td>Improvement Level 3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Improvement Level 4</td>
<td>Improvement Level 4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Improvement Level 1</th>
<th>Improvement Level 2</th>
<th>Improvement Level 3</th>
<th>Improvement Level 4</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>4 (4%)</td>
<td>41 (38%)</td>
<td>50 (47%)</td>
<td>12 (11%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B</td>
<td>13 (11%)</td>
<td>67 (58%)</td>
<td>31 (27%)</td>
<td>5 (4%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C</td>
<td>16 (13%)</td>
<td>83 (67%)</td>
<td>22 (18%)</td>
<td>3 (2%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D</td>
<td>6 (6%)</td>
<td>41 (38%)</td>
<td>52 (48%)</td>
<td>9 (8%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E</td>
<td>10 (8%)</td>
<td>62 (47%)</td>
<td>51 (38%)</td>
<td>9 (7%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 16: Improvement Levels achieved for Two Proficiency Groups

Key:  
- Improvement Level 1 = < 2%
- Improvement Level 2 = 0% - 8%
- Improvement Level 3 = 10% - 18%
- Improvement Level 4 = > 20%
The majority of the students who passed their original assignments fell into improvement level 2 (0-9% improvement). In each case, regardless of the marking method adopted, this was by far the largest improvement category. The same trend was revealed for the students who failed their original assignments and who were marked by means of Marking Methods B, C and E. In contrast, the weaker students who were marked by means of Methods A and D showed an increased benefit in that the majority in these students fell into Improvement Category 3 (10-18% improvement). These figures suggest that it is the weaker students who benefit most from the intensive tutorial intervention contained in Methods A and D. However, amongst the weaker students marked by means of Method E, there is a greater spread of marks across Levels 2 and 3 than there is in the other groups. This indicates that the self-assessment method is also effective for the weaker students.

2.5.7 Codes Allocated by Markers

In the second marking, when markers were in an ideal position to compare the original and revised paragraphs, they were asked to indicate their impressions by means of codes.30

The following graph indicates the numbers of scripts in each marking category where the lecturers felt that there had been a marked improvement in content, form or overall.

30

\[\begin{array}{ll}
\text{U} & \text{a marked improvement in the revised version} \\
\text{U} & \text{a marked improvement in terms of the content of the revised version} \\
\text{F} & \text{a marked improvement in form in the revised version} \\
\text{R} & \text{a marked deterioration in the revised version} \\
\text{R} & \text{a marked deterioration in terms of content in the revised version} \\
\text{F} & \text{a marked deterioration in form in the revised version} \\
\text{F} & \text{almost unchanged or completely unchanged} \\
\text{L} & \text{a marked increase in length (more than 10 additional lines)} \\
\text{L} & \text{a marked decrease in length (a decrease of more than 10 lines)} \\
\text{R} & \text{a pleasing response to teacher commentary} \\
\text{R} & \text{a negative response to teacher commentary or repetition of error despite specific teacher commentary}
\end{array}\]

- 154 -
Table 17: Scripts Classified as Having a 'Marked Improvement'

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Key</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>a marked improvement in the revised version</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>a marked improvement in form in the revised version</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>a marked improvement in terms of the content of the revised version</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The total number of scripts that the markers indicated had improved are A (139), D (127), B (84), C (62) and E (58). The numbers of students identified as showing a 'marked improvement' was thus smallest for Methods C and E. This demonstrates the value of tutor intervention and confirms the statistical results. However, the fact that Method E students form the smallest group in total contradicts the more positive indications that emerged from the statistical analysis. The very high numbers of students from Methods A and D were to be anticipated and this is a further endorsement of these methods. This trend is particularly evident with respect to the 'marked improvement in form' category where the Methods A and D scored 76 and 80 respectively. Once again, the decline from the more salient method A through to the least salient method is clear: A (72), B (45) and C (23).

The figures indicating 'a marked improvement in terms of the content' are C (27), E (21) A (15), B (11) and D (9). In terms of content, the trends described in the previous paragraph are reversed. Here the highest frequency of improvement appear in the groups that have no lecturer intervention, namely C and E. These figures suggest that lecturer commentary inhibits students from working on the content of their paragraphs. Possibly the form-related emphasis of
Methods A and B discourage students from revising content because they are involved with correcting the existing paragraph as it stands.

The following graph reveals the numbers of students coded

\[ R^+ = \text{a pleasing response to teacher commentary} \]

Although the numbers of students coded in this instance is very small, it is still important to note that twice as many students from group B were judged to have had a notably negative response to commentary than were students from group A.
The following graph indicates the numbers of student who were coded with:

\[ \text{almost unchanged or completely unchanged} \]

```
MARKING METHOD
```

It is possible that the 149 Method C students who basically rewrote their original paragraphs were expressing a negative response to the 'mark only' method. This could be a form of resistance, such as that described by Burkland & Grimm (1986) and Lynch & Klemans (1978). The attitude could be that the lecturer has put in no effort and thus the student is entitled to mirror this indifference by simply rewriting the original. Many of the students did not believe they were capable of correcting their own work or regarded their work as nearly perfect and thus thought it could not be improved. The students' words shed light on the matter:

- I don't know what to write because I don't see my fault. (9/25)
- I think there is no need to rewrite this paragraph again because this was the best I could do and I shall still write it exactly the same word for word. (14/25)
- I have failed to write my revised draft, because it sounds correct if I revised it. The other reason is that my paragraph do not have lecturer's comments to give me a clear illustration of mistakes. (10/25)
- Excuse me please. I do not see the need to revise and rewrite anything about this paragraph as no explicit comment was made by the lecturer. (16/25)
- Above did not need editing. Signed by the student. (25/25)

The high number of students who fell into this category is problematic especially if one considers that there were only 321 students in the control group. Thus 46% of these students simply rewrote their original paragraphs with little or no change at all. The results are almost as unsatisfactory for Method B where 35% of the students (115 out of 325) virtually resubmitted their original paragraphs and for Method E where the percentage was 32% (101 out of 315

---

31 The mark for the original passage is given in brackets.
students). The latter statistic suggests that almost a third of the students did not use the self-correction brochure or were incapable of using it.

Of the Method D students, 30% (86 out of 283) hardly benefitted from the taped response, since they resubmitted virtually identical paragraphs. The findings with respect to Method A are more positive. Here only 14% (43 out of 315 students) were unresponsive to the feedback they received in the form of the correction code. This is a further indication of the positive attitudes students have towards the correction code method. Overall, however, the numbers of students who did not revise their work is disturbing and disheartening for lecturers who have so little opportunity to assist their students.

The following graph represents the numbers of scripts marked by means of a 'C' to indicate a complete change in terms of subject matter. This is the antithesis of the students who resubmitted virtually identical drafts and yet it is also evidence of counterproductive resistance. Here the paragraphs were not much revised, but new ones were written.

\[
\begin{array}{c|cc|cc}
\text{MARKING METHOD} & A & B & C & D & E \\
\hline
0 & 1 & 2 & 3 & 4 & 5 \\
1 & 2 & 6 & 8 & 10 & 12 \\
2 & 3 & 8 & 9 & 2 & 10 \\
3 & 5 & 8 & 9 & 2 & 10 \\
\end{array}
\]

In contrast to the previous graph, the numbers of students in this instance is very small. However, the trend across the methods (3, 3, 9, 2, 10) is clear. Where there is no lecturer intervention (Methods C and E), the students are three times as likely to submit totally new paragraphs. This serves as further evidence that tutor intervention, particularly if it is formalistic in orientation, inhibits content revision.
2.5.8 Statistics Omitting Students who Submitted Virtually Identical Revised Paragraphs

The high percentage of students who resubmitted virtually identical 'revised' paragraphs caused concern. The researcher feared that the statistically significant findings discussed thus far in the chapter may be simply a reflection of the numbers of students who had not attempted a revised version and thus had been awarded a mark that was either almost identical to that of their original draft or slightly lower than the original. The decline in percentages of students who resubmitted their original drafts almost untouched (C (46%), B (35%), E (32%), D (30%), A (14%)) can be interpreted as a measure of student resistance to the various methods. However, this opposition impacts on the statistics used to demonstrate the 'effectiveness' of the method. For this reason the statistics were recalculated omitting the students who had resubmitted virtually identical drafts. The discrepancies between the full and the reduced groups in terms of average percentage content improvement are shown in the following table:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Marking Method</th>
<th>A</th>
<th>B</th>
<th>C</th>
<th>D</th>
<th>E</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Full Sample</td>
<td>6.6</td>
<td>4.0</td>
<td>3.6</td>
<td>5.5</td>
<td>5.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reduced Sample</td>
<td>7.6</td>
<td>5.9</td>
<td>4.7</td>
<td>7.4</td>
<td>8.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Difference</td>
<td>1.0</td>
<td>1.9</td>
<td>1.1</td>
<td>1.9</td>
<td>3.7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 18: Average Percentage Content Improvement: Comparison Between Full and Reduced Samples

When the students who virtually resubmitted their original paragraphs are removed from the study, the average percentage content improvement rises for each marking method. However, the statistics still support Hypothesis 1, as each experimental group still has a mean content improvement greater than that of the control group. The difference in terms of Method E is marked, indicating that students can be given the confidence to revise their own work using a self-correction brochure. Their content improves more than it does for those who have direct tutorial intervention, even in instances where the correction code has been used. In this reduced sample a statistically significant difference was recorded between Methods E and C. The following graph indicates the vast improvement in terms of content achieved by means of Method E in the reduced sample:
The differences between the full and the reduced groups in terms of average percentage form improvement are shown in the following table:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Marking Method</th>
<th>A</th>
<th>B</th>
<th>C</th>
<th>D</th>
<th>E</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Full Sample</td>
<td>9.4</td>
<td>6.4</td>
<td>4.2</td>
<td>7.8</td>
<td>5.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reduced Sample</td>
<td>9.6</td>
<td>7.5</td>
<td>5.4</td>
<td>10.5</td>
<td>8.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Difference</td>
<td>0.2</td>
<td>1.1</td>
<td>1.2</td>
<td>2.7</td>
<td>2.8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 20: Average Percentage Form Improvement: Comparison Between Full and Reduced Samples

Hypothesis 2 is still supported, as each experimental group still has a mean form improvement greater than that of the control group. However, the difference between the full and the reduced samples in terms of both methods D and E is almost equally great. The graph below indicates clearly that when students revise the formal aspect of their writing in accordance with tutorial
intervention, this is most effective if the instruction comes in the form of a taped response\textsuperscript{32} and is followed closely by the marking code and by the self-test.

\begin{table}[h]
\centering
\begin{tabular}{|c|c|}
\hline
MARKING METHOD & \begin{tabular}{c}
A = Marking Code \\
B = Minimal Marking \\
C = Control \\
D = Taped Response \\
E = Self Assessment
\end{tabular} \\
\hline
Table 20: Average Percentage Form Improvement – Limited to Students Who Revised Their Work \\
Key A = Marking Code \\
B = Minimal Marking \\
C = Control \\
D = Taped Response \\
E = Self Assessment
\end{tabular}
\end{table}

The differences between the full and the reduced groups in terms of percentage 'total improvement' is shown in the table printed below. Here the value of encouraging students to respond to taped and self-correction feedback is clear.

\textsuperscript{32} Statistically significant differences were recorded between Method D and Methods C, B and D in the reduced sample. There was also a statistically significant difference between Method A and Method C in terms of form improvement in the reduced sample.
### Table 22: Average Percentage Total Improvement: Comparison Between Full and Reduced Samples

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Marking Method</th>
<th>A</th>
<th>B</th>
<th>C</th>
<th>D</th>
<th>E</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Full Sample</td>
<td>8.0</td>
<td>5.2</td>
<td>3.9</td>
<td>6.6</td>
<td>5.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reduced Sample</td>
<td>8.6</td>
<td>6.7</td>
<td>5.1</td>
<td>9.0</td>
<td>8.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Difference</td>
<td>0.6</td>
<td>1.5</td>
<td>1.2</td>
<td>2.4</td>
<td>3.3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The following graph indicates clearly that if students can be encouraged to use taped or self-assessment feedback, it is as effective as the correction code method in bringing about a 'total improvement'. Rounded off to the nearest full point, there is no difference between the three methods in instances where students implemented changes to their writing.

**MARKING METHOD**

Graph 23: Average Percentage Total Improvement – Limited to Students Who Revised Their Work

- **A** = Marking Code
- **B** = Minimal Marking
- **C** = Control
- **D** = Taped Response
- **E** = Self Assessment

At a significance level of 0.05, the t-tests recorded significant differences when the individual methods were compared to Control Group C. The sole exception was Method B, which did not result in a statistically significant difference in either content improvement or overall improvement.

Statistically significant differences were recorded between Methods A, D and E and Method C.
improvement when compared to Method C. Thus, even in making allowance for students who ignored feedback, Method B is not effective in improving content.

The challenge to lecturers implicit in this section of the thesis is to convince students of the effectiveness of alternative response methods, such as a taped reaction and the self-assessment brochure, thereby giving them the confidence they need to utilise this information in their revision.

2.6 Limitations of the Study

The experiment was difficult to control because of the number of distance-education students involved in the study. The large external marking team was also a challenge. In order to determine if control had been maintained and if markers had followed instructions, the raters awarding the second mark were requested to code any script which they believed had been poorly marked with the code: M! It was reassuring to note that only 4 Method A scripts, 3 Method B scripts, and 2 Method D scripts were coded in this manner. However, on close analysis, the researcher discovered instances where, with Marking Method A, some markers inserted the corrections while others overlooked errors. This inconsistency was repeated with the Minimal Marking where some markers overlooked errors and used the X far too sparingly, while students often failed to identify the actual errors and corrected aspects that were accurate. There were examples where markers crossed out correct usage and inserted incorrect phrases and other instances where they 'over-marked'.

Other problems related to the students. One student thought that revision meant giving the theme of the paragraph and his rewrite read as follows:

- Although they were poor, they knew what to do to make their grandchildren feel special.

Another felt that she had been instructed to criticise the original passage:

- My paragraph is not based to one incident that occurs during my early life. It ignores the personal incident I experienced. Instead, I generalize about the causes of premature sexual relationships resulting from incident occurred during a child's early years. I missed the target. There are incidents I can extract from my childhood which have impact on me till today.

Because students work in isolation, there is no proof that they did not get assistance outside the response provided in the experiment. The second reaction cited above is a case in point, as this
does not sound like the reasoning of a student who was awarded 8/25 for her original effort. One lecturer also admitted to aiding a Control Group student who had come into her office for assistance. Unfortunately she kept no record of the student's number so there is no way of knowing if this student was included in the sample.

The most fundamental criticism of this research lies in Knoblauch & Brannon's remark that 'researchers expect too much from isolated marginal remarks on essays and reflect too little on the larger conversation between teacher and student to which they only contribute' (1981:1). However, one needs to bear in mind that in the distance-teaching context, in the majority of cases there is no larger conversation\(^{34}\) and thus the marginal remarks take on a disproportionate significance. There is also truth in Moxley's observation that 'the message is more important than the medium. Poor advice on our part is still poor advice, whether it is conveyed in written or oral form' (1989:9).

The concept of 'improvement' also needs to be examined critically because there are explanations for a lack of improvement that are independent of the marking method adopted. Discontinuities in L2 learners' development can be attributed to the causes discussed below.

In terms of the concept of Universal Grammar, defined as 'a set of universal principles which drastically constrain the set of possible hypotheses that can be entertained by the (L1) language acquirer' (Asher 1994:3723), the learner's interlanguage is not random, but is rule-governed. However, despite the fact that there are acquisition stages, language learning is not linear and cumulative, but is characterised by 'backsliding' and loss of forms and patterns that seemed to be mastered. This can be explained in terms of the concept of restructuring, which occurs because language is a complex hierarchical system whose components interact in non-linear ways. Seen in these terms, an increase in error rate in one area may reflect an increase in complexity or accuracy in another, followed by overgeneralization of a newly acquired structure, or simply by a[n] ... overload of complexity which forces a restructuring, or at least a simplification, in another part of the system (Lightbrown 1985:177 in Asher 1994:3747).

\(^{34}\) This is true in terms of individualised interaction. There is obviously a more general conversation in the form of the course material included in the study package.
'U-shaped developmental functions' is a term used to illustrate how performance can decline, as more complex internal representations replace less sophisticated ones. Fortunately, this is followed by an increase in performance as the skill becomes expertise. However, in terms of this theory a script can be given detailed attention and yet the student might produce a revised version that is worse than the original as a result of factors totally unrelated to the lecturer's commentary.

Second, a deterioration can be the result of divergent definitions of what constitutes an improvement, the view being dependent on the lecturer's axiological predisposition. For example, Mitchell & Taylor state that 'the "better writing" is sometimes perceived as a decrease in mechanical errors, sometimes as work that pleased the teacher more, and sometimes as high scores on statewide tests' (1979:266) while Macrorie, working from an emotive axiological orientation, believes that 'writing well means the ability to "say something exciting and say it compellingly"' (ibid.:266). In addition, a basic tenet of Reader-response criticism is that the observer is part of the observed and that this is a characteristic of ethnographic or participant-observer research. However, in composition research Purves claims that this principle is forgotten and that writing quality is ascribed to the writer of the text.

Third, Bloom's telling criticism of the grading process is that 'if the teacher has provided numerous corrections at each stage, at some point she'll be grading her own writing rather than the student's anyway' (1997:365). If the student acts like Sperling & Freedman's (1987) 'good girl' and unquestioningly incorporates the lecturer's corrections in accordance with Giroux's accommodation theory, the revised draft will be judged as 'improved'. The following is a sample of the compliance that will result in uncritical acceptance of commentary:

- I really agree with your comments because really I was not clear understand tenses but I will try my best.

In such instances, the question then reverts to the issue of ownership or appropriation of student writing.

In addition, 'to expect that risk-taking and improvement can occur simultaneously is unrealistic and inappropriate' (Onore in Horvath 1984:139). Sommers explains that the process of revision always involves risks. However, she claims that 'too often revision becomes a balancing act for students in which they make the changes that are requested but do not take the risk of changing
anything that was not commented on, even if the students sense that other changes are needed (1982:152). The truth of this statement is reflected in the high numbers of students who resubmitted virtually the same paragraph.

2.7 Conclusion

Despite the limitations cited in the previous section, the researcher believes that the experiment demonstrates that the Marking Code is the most effective means to achieve an overall improvement in the revised script. This method brings about the greatest improvement in terms of form. Ironically, this is probably a result of the fact that the Marking Code is a formalist method that invites an assimilationist stance in that it strives towards error-free, idiomatically-correct prose. Yet the error-fixation demonstrated in the marking approach is understandable because, even in Santos's (1988) study, where the subject professors stressed the value of content-related correction, they indicated that they found language errors unacceptable. In addition, research such as Cathcart & Olsen (1976), Chun et al. (1982), Hendrickson (1987), Leki (1990b), Lim (1990) and Oladejo (1993) shows that students demand error correction. English teachers also value it and could argue that providing error correction is a response to the market serviced. The Unisa project demonstrates that students are able to respond to this time-consuming response method by improving the grammar in their revised paragraphs. The finding shows the wisdom of Van der Walt et al.'s (1994) suggestion that moderate correction is probably the most viable compromise in this teaching context.

It is vital to note that in the Unisa study the positive improvement levels are limited to the revised version. Thus, the findings of this study do not refute the research cited in Chapter Three, such as Hendrickson (1976), Semke (1984), Robb et al. (1986) and Fathman & Whalley (1990), that were unable to demonstrate that error correction resulted in increased proficiency over a period of time. For the same reason the Unisa study does not disprove the negative reports on the effect of error correction cited by Knoblauch & Brannon (1981), Hillocks (1986), Leki (1996) and Sheppard (1992), cited on page 70 in Chapter Three. However, the Unisa study shows that rewriting alone allows for an improvement, particularly in the area of content. It also demonstrates the value of the inclusion of a self-assessment brochure and reveals that this results in improvements that are far greater than when the script is sent back without tutorial comment.
It also demonstrates the need for students to be informed of the effectiveness of this method in order to encourage them to take advantage of this form of teaching. For large groups the use of a self-assessment sheet is particularly cost-effective. The research also demonstrates that it is the weaker students who benefit most from the intensive tutorial intervention involved in Methods A and D. However, the findings of the empirical study have to be reassessed in accordance with the students' views. This is the objective of Chapter Five.
3. Appendix to Chapter Four

3.1 Adaptation of the ESL Composition Profile

Please use the following criteria as a guideline to assist you in the allocation of marks. It has been adapted from Jacobson et al.'s 'ESL Composition Profile', which was described by Liz Hamp-Lyons (a leading figure in the field of ESL Testing) as the best known scoring procedure for ESL writing at the present time.

**MARK OUT OF 12.5 FOR CONTENT / ORGANISATION**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SCORE</th>
<th>LEVEL</th>
<th>CRITERIA</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>12.5 - 10</td>
<td>EXCELLENT</td>
<td>• <strong>Content</strong>: knowledgeable, thorough development, relevant to assigned topic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(100% - 80%)</td>
<td>TO</td>
<td>• <strong>Organisation</strong>: ideas clearly stated, succinct, well-organised, logically sequenced, cohesive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9 - 7</td>
<td>GOOD TO</td>
<td>• <strong>Content</strong>: fairly knowledgeable, mostly relevant to topic, lacks detail</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(72% - 56%)</td>
<td>AVERAGE</td>
<td>• <strong>Organisation</strong>: somewhat choppy, loosely organised, logical but incomplete sequencing and signposting</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6 - 4</td>
<td>FAIR TO POOR</td>
<td>• <strong>Content</strong>: little substance, inadequate detail</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(48% - 32%)</td>
<td></td>
<td>• <strong>Organisation</strong>: ideas confused or disconnected, lacks logical sequencing or development, little signposting</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 - 2</td>
<td>VERY POOR</td>
<td>• <strong>Content</strong>: not pertinent or not enough to evaluate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(24% - 16%)</td>
<td></td>
<td>• <strong>Organisation</strong>: does not communicate, no organisation or not enough to evaluate</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The weighting should favour content over structure (ratio for content: structure is 3:2)
## MARK OUT OF 12.5 FOR FORM (VOCABULARY, LANGUAGE USE, MECHANICS)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SCORE</th>
<th>LEVEL</th>
<th>CRITERIA</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>12.5 - 10</td>
<td>EXCELLENT TO</td>
<td>• <strong>Vocabulary:</strong> sophisticated range, effective word / idiom choice, word form mastery, appropriate register</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(100% -</td>
<td>VERY GOOD</td>
<td>• <strong>Language usage:</strong> effective complex constructions, few language errors (agreement, tense, number, word order, articles, pronouns, prepositions)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>80%)</td>
<td></td>
<td>• <strong>Mechanics:</strong> Mechanics (spelling, punctuation, capitalisation, paragraphing), demonstrates mastery of conventions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9 - 7</td>
<td>GOOD TO</td>
<td>• <strong>Vocabulary:</strong> adequate range, occasional errors of word, idiom, form, choice, usage but meaning not obscured</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(72% -</td>
<td>AVERAGE</td>
<td>• <strong>Language usage:</strong> effective but simple constructions, minor problems in complex constructions, several language errors but meaning seldom obscured</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>56%)</td>
<td></td>
<td>• <strong>Mechanics:</strong> occasional errors in mechanics but meaning seldom obscured</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6 - 4</td>
<td>FAIR TO POOR</td>
<td>• <strong>Vocabulary:</strong> limited range, frequent errors of word / idiom, form, choice, usage, meaning confused or obscured</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(48% -</td>
<td></td>
<td>• <strong>Language usage:</strong> major problems in simple/ complex constructions, frequent language errors including sentence construction problems, meaning confused or obscured</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>32%)</td>
<td></td>
<td>• <strong>Mechanics:</strong> Frequent errors in mechanics, poor handwriting, meaning confused or obscured</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 - 2</td>
<td>VERY POOR</td>
<td>• <strong>Vocabulary:</strong> essentially translation, little knowledge of English vocabulary, idioms, word forms, or not enough to evaluate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(24% -</td>
<td></td>
<td>• <strong>Language usage:</strong> virtually no mastery of sentence construction, dominated by errors, does not communicate, not enough to evaluate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16%)</td>
<td></td>
<td>• <strong>Mechanics:</strong> no mastery of conventions, dominated by errors in mechanics, handwriting illegible, or not enough to evaluate</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Vocabulary and Language use should be accorded equal weight. Because the aspect of mechanics is less important than the former criteria, the ratio of vocabulary: language: mechanics is 2:2:1.
3.2 Instructions for the Marking of Assignment 01: The Original Paragraph

The question which is to be marked in detail is Question 4, the 20-line paragraph. Students will be required to resubmit this as part of Assignment 04. Simply tick through the rest of the assignment to indicate that it has all been completed.

The marking of this paragraph is part of a study which I am conducting into various marking strategies and their relative effectiveness in the distance teaching context. In order for the study to be scientific, it is vital that you follow instructions very carefully.

The allocation of marks is to be identical for all scripts. Please make use of the ESL Composition Profile to allocate three marks. The first is a mark out of 12.5 for content and organisation, the second is also out of 12.5 and is awarded for vocabulary, language usage and mechanics. The total is out of 25. Please indicate the marks as follows at the bottom of the paragraph: X + X = X. You can then make use of the conversion table and indicate the percentage on the front cover.

In order to ensure that our marking is as consistent as possible, please mark the five scripts enclosed. Award the three marks as indicated above and give correction code symbols and a brief comment for each. This is vital as I have to determine the inter-rater reliability index before everyone starts marking. Without this the entire project is meaningless.

You will be issued scripts in batches of five. Each batch will have a letter (A, B, C, D, or E) on the front cover. This means that the entire batch is to be marked according to the strategy indicated on the cover.

Please write the letter which indicates the strategy used on the page on which the student has written the paragraph. Please write this letter in ink and circle it. This is very important as it is necessary to determine which strategy was used when the students resubmit for Assignment 04.

The strategies are:

STRATEGY A: MARKING CODE

Please use the Marking Code from Tutorial Letter 101. Indicate errors by means of marking code symbols in the margin. Make a general comment, which is phrased as positively as possible. This is to be made below the paragraph and not on the front cover. The comments should deal with the more complex issues of logic, register and rhetorical structure while the marking codes should reflect surface-level problems. This is the marking strategy we use at present.
STRATEGY B: MINIMAL MARKING:

This policy, designed by Haswell in 1983, contrasts with the correction code strategy in that specific errors are not indicated either by means of marginal symbols or by underlining of text. A cross in the margin is indicative of a problem area in that line. Please do not indicate more than two crosses per line even if there are more than two problems in the line. This system has the advantage that it is simple and allows for more detailed comment on the more complex issues which cannot be indicated by mere marginal crosses. Thus the comment (also written below the paragraph) should be slightly more comprehensive than that given for Strategy A. Please place a sticker (see below) explaining how the strategy works below the comment.

We have tried a new marking method. A cross in the margin shows that there is an error in that line. Identify the errors yourself and write the correction in pencil above the mistake. You will still need to revise your paragraph completely for Assignment 04.

STRATEGY C: NO FEEDBACK

Here I want to test Fathman and Whalley's finding that 'students significantly improved the content and wrote longer compositions when they did revisions without any feedback, which suggests that rewriting is worthwhile and teacher intervention is not always necessary' (1990:186). If this hypothesis can be supported then the implications are enormous, particularly for the distance teaching context. It suggests that requiring frequent writing, much of it with minimal teacher intervention, can be as effective as painstaking and costly evaluation. Thus for all Strategy C scripts you simply indicate that C has been used by writing a C in ink at the top of the page and awarding the three marks and pasting in the sticker indicated below. Make no comments or corrections at all.

Please revise this paragraph carefully for Assignment 04. Your revised paragraph will be marked in detail.
STRATEGY D: RECORDED INTERACTION

A recorded comment allows for a more natural response on the part of the teacher and is valuable, particularly in the distance context, in that the taped contact feels more intimate than marginal symbols and comments. In addition, greater detail can be given than is feasible in written commentary. The prime advantage is that an authentic reader's response is created in that the marker simply reads the text and if a comment is necessary, places a number in the margin35, switches on the tape and comments: 'At point 4 ...'. An authentic listening exercise is also generated.

Please spend no longer on this strategy than you would on Strategy A. Please let me know if you have any difficulty in obtaining a tape recorder. The tapes are available from Joanne along with the plastic packets each with a sticker (see below) on it giving instructions to the students. When you have finished recording put the tape in the plastic and staple it into the front cover. Please do not forget to indicate the strategy and award the three marks on the student's script.

Your lecturer's comments have been taped. Keep this tape as you will need it for Assignment 04. Please return the tape with your Assignment 04.

STRATEGY E: SELF ASSESSMENT

Here students are given a checklist of criteria and asked to evaluate their own work and to then draft a revised version themselves. All you are required to do is to staple the Self Assessment Tutorial Letter in these assignments. Please allocate the marks and indicate that strategy E has been used.

35 This system was introduced to overcome the potential difficulty for the listener of linking the taped repose to the written text. Boswood et al. state that it is vital to adopt 'a clear system for linking the written text with the spoken commentary by means of reference markings in the text' (1993:75).
3.3 Self Assessment Tutorial Letter

Your lecturers awarded three marks for your paragraph. The first two are both out of 12.5 and the third is the total, a mark out of 25. The first mark is for content and structure and the second mark for form (vocabulary, language use and mechanics). Although you were awarded marks for this paragraph, your lecturers have not made any further comments. This is because we believe that you will learn more by evaluating your own writing and making changes which you feel are necessary.

IMPORTANT: FOLLOW STEPS 1 TO 3 WHEN YOU PREPARE TO RESUBMIT YOUR PARAGRAPH FOR ASSIGNMENT 04. KEEP THIS PAPER SAFE TILL THEN.

PREPARATION FOR ASSIGNMENT 04

By following Steps 1 to 3 you will be able to examine your original paragraph critically and revise it on your own.

STEP 1: UNDERSTANDING THE WAY YOUR LECTURERS MARKED YOUR WORK

To help you to evaluate your own work we have included a list of the factors which your markers use to identify effective writing. Read through the lists carefully.

YOUR FIRST MARK REPRESENTS YOUR LECTURER’S RATING OF THE CONTENT AND ORGANISATION OF YOUR PARAGRAPH.

**CONTENT: Ideas, information or message**

The reader can see and feel what the writer sees and feels; ideas and details create an impression on the reader; all ideas are clear and fully developed; all ideas are related to each other and to the title; details fill out the ideas and make the people, places and / or events come alive; all questions are answered and the reader is left with a feeling of completeness.

**ORGANISATION: The arrangement of ideas in order**

The introductory sentence is interesting; it makes the reader want to carry on reading; the concluding sentence makes the reader understand the writer’s point of view and / or feelings; the main idea ties all parts of the story together in an obvious logical order; your paragraph has only one main idea or purpose and all details support that idea.
YOUR SECOND MARK REPRESENTS YOUR LECTURER'S RATING OF YOUR VOCABULARY, LANGUAGE USAGE AND MECHANICS.

**VOCABULARY: The words you use**

Words are used effectively, there is a range of vocabulary and the register (level of formality) is appropriate.

**LANGUAGE USAGE: Grammatical control**

Clauses are joined effectively by means of connectors (if, although, because etc.); each sentence is complete; there are few errors of agreement, tense, articles, word order, word form, prepositions.

**MECHANICS: The way the writing looks**

There are few errors of spelling, punctuation, capitalisation, paragraphing. Handwriting is readable.

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**STEP 2: REVISING THE CONTENT OF YOUR PARAGRAPH**

EFFECTIVE REVISION IS MORE THAN SIMPLY PLAYING WITH SURFACE GRAMMATICAL STRUCTURE. YOU NEED TO EXAMINE YOUR CONTENT (WHAT YOU SAY) CAREFULLY FIRST.

- You will be able to examine the content of your writing by answering the following questions:

**WHAT HAVE YOU WRITTEN?**

HAVE YOU FOLLOWED INSTRUCTIONS BY:

- writing ONE paragraph of 20 lines?
- describing ONE incident from your childhood?
- giving your reader clear information about what happened, when, where and why it happened and who was involved?
- explaining why this memory is important to you?

**CAN YOU IMPROVE YOUR STRUCTURE?**

- Does your opening sentence arouse your reader's interest?
- Do your ideas follow a logical order?
- Does your final sentence conclude or sum up the central idea which you have tried to convey to your reader?
- Does your paragraph have a topic sentence and do all your other sentences support it? If you are unsure what the term 'topic sentence' means please revise pp. 54 - 61 of *Workbook 2* and do *Practice Session 2* (pp. 60 - 61).
HAVE YOU SIGNPOSTED YOUR WRITING?

- Revise the section on Chronological Order (pp. 40 - 43 of Workbook 2).
- Do all the exercises in Practice Session 4. You will need to use this pattern as your paragraph describes an event and thus you require a step-by-step sequence to explain clearly what happened.
- Read the list of Chronological Signpost words given in the block on page 43.
- Would the inclusion of any of these signpost words help to make your paragraph more clear for your reader?

These questions should have helped you to identify weaknesses in your original paragraph. Now draft a NEW PARAGRAPH ON ROUGH PAPER. When you are happy with the content of your paragraph, you can begin to examine your language and vocabulary.

STEP 3 : HOW HAVE YOU WRITTEN?

- First look at your vocabulary very carefully. Have you used the most effective words you know?
- Now revise Study Units 26 and 27 very carefully.
- Re-read the paragraph you have written.
- Now work through the following Checklists in Workbook 2:
  - Editing Checklist 1: Punctuation (p. 69)
  - Editing Checklist 2: Spelling (p. 70)
  - Editing Checklist 3: Verbs (p. 72)
- Make any language corrections that you feel are necessary.

Once you are satisfied that this is the very best you can do in terms of what you say and how you say it, then you are ready to submit your revision as part of your Assignment 04.

1. Tear out your original paragraph, which was part of Assignment 01.
2. Now write your revised draft below your original paragraph on the same piece of paper. You might need to go onto a second page. Make sure that your handwriting is as neat as possible.
3. Make sure that you have completed your questionnaire.
4. Now staple your original paragraph, your revised paragraphs and your questionnaire into your assignment cover for Assignment 04.
5. You are now ready to complete the rest of Assignment 04.
3.4 Instructions for the Marking of Assignment 04: The Revised Paragraph.

1. Please read through the original paragraph. The mark will have been covered with a yellow sticker so that the mark which you give for the revised paragraph is not influenced by the original mark. Please resist the temptation to look at the original mark!

2. Read through the revised paragraph and award a mark out of 25. Use the 'ESL Composition Profile' as a guideline to assist you in the allocation of marks. Award three marks, the first out of 12,5 for Content/ Organisation, the second out of 12,5 for Form and the total out of 25. Write this as follows: X + X = X. Please consider the mark very carefully.

3. Allocate the marks and give a brief comment which indicates the degree to which the student was successful in revising his or her paragraph. (e.g.: Excellent: Substantial content revisions or Remember revision is more than fixing minor spelling errors.) However, in cases where Strategy C (no marking of the original) was used, please mark the revised paragraph in detail.

4. Please do not remove the tapes or the questionnaires from the assignments.
4.5 Instructions to Markers for the Second Examining of Research Scripts

1. On each A3 page you will have two passages, both of which need to be marked. The paragraph on your left is the original paragraph submitted by the student in response to the following question:

   Write a twenty-line paragraph about one incident from your childhood that you remember clearly. Describe it in detail. Interpret your recollections, telling why that specific memory is important or significant, and how it fits into your life story. [25 marks]

   The paragraph on your right is in response to an instruction to revise the original paragraph taking into account any comments which the tutor may have made.

2. Please make use of the ESL Composition Profile to evaluate each of the paragraphs. The marks are to be expressed as follows: X (a mark out of 12.5 for content and organisation) + X (a mark out of 12.5 for form) = X (a total out of 25). A copy of the ESL Composition Profile is attached.

3. Before you begin, please mark the five sample paragraphs. This is necessary in order to ensure as high a level of inter-rater reliability as possible. Please return these scripts to me before you begin marking.

4. PROCEDURE WHEN MARKING: Read the original paragraph and award the three marks. Write your marks IN GREEN PEN as close to the original mark as possible. You will see that the original has been covered by a sticker. Now repeat the procedure for the revised paragraph.

5. In addition to awarding the marks, I would appreciate it if you could make use of the following codes:

   \[ U \] = a marked improvement in the revised version
   \[ G \] = a marked improvement in terms of the content of the revised version
   \[ v \] = a marked improvement in form in the revised version
   \[ m \] = a marked deterioration in the revised version
   \[ c \] = a marked deterioration in terms of content in the revised version
   \[ t \] = a marked deterioration in form in the revised version
   \[ = \] = almost unchanged or completely unchanged
   \[ L+ \] = a marked increase in length (more than 10 additional lines)
   \[ L- \] = a marked decrease in length (a decrease of more than 10 lines)
   \[ R+ \] = a pleasing response to teacher commentary
   \[ R- \] = a negative response to teacher commentary or repetition of error despite specific teacher commentary

   These symbols are to be indicated IN GREEN PEN at the top of the page.

   Thank you for assisting me with my research.

   Brenda

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36 An additional code was included later. This was M!. It was introduced at the request of the markers to allow them to indicate displeasure with some aspect of the original marker's work.
Chapter Five:
The Students' Perspectives

'(X- this means what?) Spelling, or grammar, tense, structure? I don't know'
(Practical English student)

Research on the effects of various marking strategies and on the characteristics of lecturers' feedback abounds. In stark contrast, Radecki & Swales bewail the 'apparent paucity of work' (1988:355) in the area of students' reaction to feedback. In Hedgcock & Lefkowitz's words: 'Very few studies to date have accounted for learner reactions to the intervention behaviors [sic] and techniques thought to influence emerging composing skills and ultimate writing proficiency' (1994:142). Indeed, apart from studies such as Auten (1991), Cohen (1987), Cohen & Cavalcanti (1990), Enginarlar (1993), Hedgcock & Lefkowitz (1994), Leki (1991b), Radecki & Swales (1988), and Saito (1994),

1

there has been very little research into student preferences and even less into the discrepancy between lecturers' practices and students' desires with respect to feedback. This oversight is unprofessional if one views students as paying customers and considers the amount of money most businesses expend on market research.

It was with this gap in mind that the researcher compiled a comprehensive questionnaire2 (see Addendum 9). Copies of the questionnaire were sent to 5784 Practical English students together with their feedback on the first assignment. They were requested to complete the questionnaire and then to staple it into the front cover of their Assignment 04, the assignment in which they submitted their revised paragraph. The 2640 questionnaires returned represent a 45.6% response rate. This high response rate can be attributed to the fact that the completed questionnaire was a prerequisite for the assignment. Because the respondents were required to give their student numbers, the researcher was also able to compare the questionnaire responses with the students' final Practical English examination results. Based on these marks, three proficiency categories

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1 These studies will not be discussed in detail. However, brief reference will be made to these research studies in instances where their findings either support or contradict the empirical research described in this chapter. To this list one can add studies such as Beach (1979) and Hillocks (1982), conducted in an L1 teaching context.

2 The results of this questionnaire have been published in an article entitled 'Responding to Student Writing: The Students' Perspective' in the Winter 1998 edition of the Southern African Journal of Applied Language Studies, 6 (1), 27-42.
were formed: fail, pass and distinction. In all, the responses from 2473 questionnaires were compared with the students' examination scores.

The questionnaire was designed to

- obtain a student demographic profile that included a self-rating with respect to writing proficiency;
- elicit students' expectations with respect to marking;
- determine the value students attach to tutor comment and the mark allocated;
- establish their perceptions of the role of the lecturer when she or he responds to an assignment;
- discover students' attitudes towards alternative methods such as peer evaluation, the portfolio approach and computer marking;
- establish student response to the five marking strategies used in the empirical study.

The questionnaire contained both closed and open questions.

1. Closed Research Questions

1.1 General Information

The first three questions under the heading 'general information' requested data concerning the demographic profile of the students: gender, home language, and number of languages spoken. In addition, students were required to give information about the frequency of written language practice and a self-rating with respect to writing proficiency. 65.9% of the students who responded to the questionnaire were female. The disproportionately high percentage of females in the sample body for the questionnaire reflects the Practical English student population, where a ratio of 63% females to 37% male students existed in 1995, the year in which the research was conducted.

As indicated in Chapter One, the Practical English student body consists primarily of people who are studying English as an additional language. The response to the question 'How many
languages (apart from English) can you speak well?" is indicative of the multilingual, multicultural nature of the student body involved in this research project. It is also a reminder that, although some of these students struggle with English, they are proficient in many other languages.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>One</th>
<th>Two</th>
<th>Three</th>
<th>Four</th>
<th>Five or more</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>24,5%</td>
<td>32%</td>
<td>25,5%</td>
<td>12,2%</td>
<td>4,1%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 24: Number of Languages Spoken (Excluding English)

The response to the question 'On average how often do you practise writing English in a week?' is indicated in the table below:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Five or more times</th>
<th>Three or four times</th>
<th>Once or twice</th>
<th>Hardly ever</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>26,7%</td>
<td>40,7%</td>
<td>27,2%</td>
<td>4,4%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 25: Amount of Practice in Writing English

The fact that the majority (67,4%) of the students practise writing English more than three times a week suggests that they are writing in English either for their academic instruction (the majority study through the medium of English) or in the workplace. Thus they are getting practice outside the limited range offered by the Practical English course. However, the 31,6% of the students who use English less than twice a week get almost no practice in the language. These students are not using English to learn the language for everyday communicative purposes. If students do not need to use English regularly, this could impact on their motivation and proficiency. However, the researcher was unable to demonstrate any significant correlation between the amount of practice students reported getting and their proficiency level as evidenced in their final examination results.

When students were asked to rate their perception of their writing proficiency, the results were:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Excellent</th>
<th>Good</th>
<th>Fair</th>
<th>Weak</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>3,0%</td>
<td>44,1%</td>
<td>48,4%</td>
<td>3,6%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 26: English Proficiency Rating
The students were concentrated in the mid-range. As a lecturer who has been involved with the problems associated with student writing on this intermediate level for fifteen years, these results indicate that the students have an unrealistically optimistic perception of their writing proficiency. This is most evident in the final category. Far more than 3.6% of students can be classified as 'weak'. Practical English lecturers are in a similar position to Hedgcock & Lefkowitz, who considered the majority of their 'subjects to be elementary level writers in the languages they were studying' by virtue of their placement in courses which were foundational in approach, design, and content' (1994:147). In addition, the fact that the pass rate for Practical English in 1995 was 65%, suggests that some of the students who rated themselves as 'fair' failed the course.\footnote{3}

The correlation between the end-of-year results and the students' proficiency assessment revealed that of the students who failed the Practical English course, 30% had rated themselves as 'weak', 23% as 'fair', 23% as 'good' and 21% as 'excellent'. Thus, for this population group, self-rating is not particularly useful. An equal percentage of students (21%) who rated themselves as 'excellent' failed and were awarded distinctions, a further indication of the difficulties students experience when required to assess their own proficiency.

1.2 How do Students View the Mark and Tutorial Commentary?

The importance students attach to marking was clearly indicated in their responses to the following question:

When you get a Practical English assignment back do you:
- Read through all the teacher's comments and consider them carefully?
- Pay little attention as you are busy with the next assignment?
- Look at the mark and then put the assignment away?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Read all comments</th>
<th>Pay little attention</th>
<th>Look at mark</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>80.3%</td>
<td>13.8%</td>
<td>4.6%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 27: Attention Given to Returned Assignments

\footnotetext{3}{This argument assumes that students have evaluated their proficiency level realistically}
The fact that over 80% of the students selected the first option was to be expected. In a distance-teaching context it is to be anticipated that lecturer commentary is highly valued as it is frequently the only direct contact between student and lecturer.

The high value students attach to marking was also confirmed when the students responded to the following question:

How much of your Practical English assignment do you read when you get it back?
- All of it?
- Most of it?
- Some of it?
- None of it?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>All</th>
<th>Most</th>
<th>Some</th>
<th>None</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>60,7%</td>
<td>22,8%</td>
<td>15,6%</td>
<td>0,6%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 28: Returned Assignment: Amount Read

Over 83% of the students reported rereading either the entire assignment or most of it on receiving it back, while only 0,6% of the students were honest enough to reveal their total lack of interest in the returned assignment and admitted to ignoring it completely. However, the positive result for both this and the previous question could be influenced by the students' desire to please the lecturers. However, this finding is supported by Cohen's research with 217 students from the New York State University of Binghamton where 81% of his sample group reported reading over 'all' or 'most' of the composition when it was returned by the lecturers. Only 17% read only 'some' of it while a mere 2% showed no interest at all (1987:60).

Question 3 read:

How valuable do you regard the teacher's comments?
- Very valuable?
- Fairly valuable?
- Not valuable?

The results were as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Very valuable</th>
<th>Fairly valuable</th>
<th>Not valuable</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>81%</td>
<td>16,5%</td>
<td>0,6%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 29: Value Attached to Commentary
This finding is supported by Enginarlar: 98% of his subjects reacted positively to the lecturers' commentary (1993:199). Likewise, Auten's informal, anonymous surveys revealed positive reactions to tutor commentary from 80% of the 100 university students and 90% of the 64 college students polled (1991:7). Similarly, all but one of the students interviewed by Paxton claimed that they read all the comments on their essays (1995:193). The same overwhelmingly positive trend was reflected in question 4:

How valuable do you regard the mark you are given?
- Very valuable?
- Fairly valuable?
- Not valuable?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Very valuable</th>
<th>Fairly valuable</th>
<th>Not valuable</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>75,6%</td>
<td>21,6%</td>
<td>1,8%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 30: Value Attached to Mark

This high value attached to the mark allocated was supported by Enginarlar's research (1993). In his study 70% of the students expressed approval of grading each item of work, while 21% favoured occasional grading, believing that it is not necessary to grade all writing (1993:199).

If one compares the 81% of Unisa students who selected the category 'very valuable' for Question 3 with the 75,6% who chose the same category for Question 4, it is noteworthy that the lecturer's comment has a higher rating than the mark allocation, although it is clear that both are regarded as important. This study contradicts Kreizman's (1984) small-scale research with ten Hebrew high school pupils. When these students received their papers back 'their primary interest was in their grade — ... they only did a minimal reading of the teacher's comments' (in Cohen 1987:58). In all of the questions the possibility that the students were giving the politically correct answer rather than their honest opinion cannot be ignored. However, the fact that studies such as Auten (1991), Cohen (1987) and Enginarlar (1993) confirm the results, suggests that the findings are valid.

The correlation between the final examination results and the value attached to both the commentary and the mark reveal a trend for the weaker students to attach less significance to both than the more capable students do. This finding supports that of Cohen (1987), who found

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4 However, Paxton warns that where feedback fails to connect, the attention students accord it exacerbates the negative washback effect (1995:193).
that self-rated weaker students were less likely to read through the paper and attend to the corrections than were the more capable students (1987:65). This finding, evidenced in the declining trend, is apparent in the following table that provides the responses of students who failed the Practical English course:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Not Valuable</th>
<th>Fairly Valuable</th>
<th>Very Valuable</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Value Attached to Commentary</td>
<td>37.5%</td>
<td>27%</td>
<td>21.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Value Attached to the Mark</td>
<td>36.6%</td>
<td>29%</td>
<td>20.8%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 31: Rating of Students who Failed Practical English

1.3 How do Students Perceive the Lecturers' Role?

Question 5 read:
The lecturer's 'main role' is that of
- an interested reader
- a judge
- an evaluator
- an editor
- an examiner

The students' perception of the lecturer's role is illustrated in the following table:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Interested reader</th>
<th>Judge</th>
<th>Evaluator</th>
<th>Editor</th>
<th>Examiner</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>13.3%</td>
<td>4.3%</td>
<td>59.6%</td>
<td>3.9%</td>
<td>16.9%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 32: Perception of Lecturers' Primary Role

The three terms 'evaluator', 'examiner' and 'judge' are indicative of the perception that the lecturer's role in responding to student writing is one of according relative weight to work, of judging merit. However, the connotative value of the words differs, with 'evaluator' being the most positive, followed by 'examiner' and then 'judge'. The students' choice among the three

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5 A valid criticism of the construction of this question is the fact that three of the five options describe various forms of the evaluating role. This biases the findings towards this outcome. However, the fact that 80% of the students selected the three evaluation-orientated options still represents a valid preference for this role. If the students had been evenly distributed over the five choices, one would have anticipated a 60% backing (evenly split with 20% support for each) for these three options.
terms reflects the shift from the most positive expression of the judging role ('evaluator' with 59.6%) to the role of examiner (16.9%) to the most negative expression ('judge' with a mere 4.3%). In short, lecturers are perceived by a total of 80.8% of the students in a judging role, albeit by the majority of those students as a benign expression of that role. Of the students, 13.3% describe the primary role of the lecturer as that of 'an interested reader'. This statistic should not be interpreted as implying that the students are not interested in a personal response from a lecturer. It could simply mean that this is not perceived to be the lecturer's chief role. The fact that only 3.9% of the students selected the role of 'editor' is an expression of the students' rejection of an approach to marking which emphasises formal correction of errors above all else. When the responses were correlated with the final examination mark the role most frequently selected amongst the students who failed was that of 'judge' while students who passed or achieved distinctions chose 'editor' as the most popular role. This finding suggests that the weaker students perceive the lecturer in the harshest judging role while the more capable students are more interested in practical editorial suggestions for revision.

1.4 Who Takes Responsibility for Improvement?

Question 6 read:

The main responsibility for improving my writing
• falls on my lecturer
• lies in my own hands.

Here students were deliberately placed in a position where they had to choose where the main accountability lies. The overwhelming majority (94.5%) of the students perceive the obligation for improvement to be their own, in contrast to 4.7% who regard the lecturer as responsible for enhancing their proficiency. The maturity of the response to this question can probably be attributed to the fact that the majority of the students at Unisa are capable, employed adults studying in their own time. Once again, the possibility that students were attempting to please the lecturer, by giving what they perceived as the desired response, cannot be totally discounted.

The correlation with the examination results revealed a tendency, at a significance level of 0.01, for the weaker students to believe that the responsibility for improvement lies in the lecturers' hands, while the more capable students tend to take control and accept accountability. Of the students who failed, 43% regard the lecturer as responsible for their advancement while a mere
22% of this category of students accepts responsibility for their own development. The statistics are reversed in the case of the pass and distinction candidates where a total of 78% are prepared to take responsibility themselves.

1.5 Is There a Gap Between the Feedback Students Want and the Feedback They Receive?

Questions 9 and 10 were designed to test both Cohen's (1987) and Cohen & Cavalcanti's (1990) findings that there is a mismatch between the written feedback that educators provide on student writing and what the students would like to receive. In Cohen's study the lecturers' comments across the language classes and levels he researched dealt primarily with grammar (83% of the students reported getting 'some' or 'a lot' of grammar feedback) and with mechanics (74%). He believes that this is the case because these are the areas that are the most easy to respond to and also that they are the aspects in which the students are most conspicuously in need (Cohen 1987:67). In contrast, considerably less teacher commentary is given to the areas of vocabulary, organisation and content as these require a higher degree of judgement and consequently are the ones more likely to consume more time. The statistics given are lower for these areas: Vocabulary (47%), Organisation (44%), Content (32%).

While Cohen's students reported giving a great deal of attention to grammar-related commentary (89% of the students fell into the 'some' or 'a lot' categories) and to commentary dealing with mechanics (83%), they also gave considerable attention to feedback relating to vocabulary (79%), organisation (74%) and content (61%). Yet in the latter three areas tutor commentary was noticeably limited. Cohen's finding that the 'poor writers paid significantly less attention to the teachers' comments regarding grammar than did students who gave themselves higher self-ratings' (ibid.:62) is important here.

In the Unisa research study, Questions 9 and 10 contrasted the type of feedback students regard as the most useful with the response they get most frequently. In both questions the five categories from Cohen's research were used, namely:

A. Content
B. Organisation
C. Vocabulary
D. Grammar
E. Mechanics
Each of these terms was clearly defined in the questionnaire. This was done to avoid the problem experienced by Cohen & Cavalcanti, who reported that lecturers and students in their study had differing perceptions of the five terms (1990:175). For question 9, 'Which type of feedback do you regard as the MOST USEFUL?', content and grammar were weighted almost equally⁶ (33.4% and 35.8% respectively) as the most useful forms of feedback. 12% favoured feedback on organisation, 8.2% on mechanics and 5.4% on vocabulary. As in Cohen's study, grammar received the highest rating. However, the higher rating accorded to content by the Practical English students is a pleasing finding as is the fact that they did not rate mechanics-related comments as highly as Cohen's students did.

While question 9 depicts students' desires, question 10 ('What type of feedback do you get MOST OFTEN from your Practical English lecturers?') represents the response they receive. Almost a third of the students (30.8%) regard grammar as the type of feedback they get most often from their Practical English lecturers. The discrepancy between what the students regard as the most useful form of feedback and the response they get is clearly revealed in the following table:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>'Most useful' feedback</th>
<th>Feedback they get 'most often'</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A.</td>
<td>Content</td>
<td>33.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B.</td>
<td>Organisation</td>
<td>12.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C.</td>
<td>Vocabulary</td>
<td>5.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D.</td>
<td>Grammar</td>
<td>35.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E.</td>
<td>Mechanics</td>
<td>8.2%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 33: Comparison Between Feedback Rated 'Most Useful' and Feedback Received

As was the case with both Cohen's (1987) and Cohen & Cavalcanti's (1990) research, there is a clear discrepancy between the feedback students regard as most helpful and the feedback they receive. While students get as much organisation-related feedback as they desire and almost as

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⁶ This emphasis on content is supported Hedgcock & Lefkowitz's study of 247 students enrolled for L2 and EFL courses. They found that the two populations expressed very distinct attitudes towards teacher intervention. For example, the priority assigned by ESL teachers to content was twice that reportedly assigned by FL teachers and that, whereas the FL students were distinctly form-focused, the ESL students were also concerned with issues relating to content and meaning (1994:157).
much grammar feedback as they want, they get far less content feedback than they desire and more feedback on vocabulary and mechanics than they believe is useful. Because of the formalistic approach adopted in the response to student writing, the students' desires with respect to grammar-related feedback are satisfied. However, their demand for more content feedback can be interpreted as a plea from the students for a less formalistic approach by the lecturers.

While Cohen & Cavalcanti acknowledge that mismatches are inevitable, they assert that these can be reduced by having a clear agreement between lecturers and students as to what will be commented on and how such comments should be categorised (1990:175).

1.6 How do Students Respond to Feedback?

To overcome the problem that Cohen experienced, which was that his students had a limited repertoire of strategies for handling feedback, for Question 11 students were presented with a list comprising possible ways of processing feedback:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>WAYS OF RESPONDING TO FEEDBACK</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>There are many different ways that students respond to feedback from their lecturers. Students can:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A. write down brief notes on problem areas that the lecturer has pointed out;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B. simply make a mental note of problem areas;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C. write to the lecturer about problems they can't solve;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D. consult a grammar or reference book on problem areas;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E. consult a friend or relative whom they regard as competent;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F. rewrite trying to correct as many problems as possible.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

They were then asked the following question:
Which of the ways of responding (A, B, C, D, E, and F given in the block above) do you use MOST OFTEN?

The results are indicated in the following table:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Brief notes</th>
<th>Mental note</th>
<th>Write to lecturer</th>
<th>Consult reference work</th>
<th>Consult other competent person</th>
<th>Rewrite</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>18%</td>
<td>12,1%</td>
<td>5,2%</td>
<td>25,2%</td>
<td>10,8%</td>
<td>18%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 34: Ways of Responding to Feedback
In the Unisa study the biggest category consisted of 25.2% of the students who reported consulting a grammar or reference book. This contrasts with Cohen's study where a mere 1% reported 'referring to other papers' (ibid.:63). The fact that only 5.2% of the Unisa students sampled resort to correspondence with their lecturers stands in direct contrast to the contact teaching situation where the lecturer would be readily available. The low response is probably directly attributable to the distance-teaching context and the lack of availability of lecturers.

The most disconcerting aspect of Cohen's research is not that its findings differ so radically from the results of the Unisa research study. An explanation for this discrepancy is that divergent teaching contexts promote their own characteristic handling strategies, a finding supported by Saito whose research revealed that 'students' strategies for handling feedback ... differ depending on the way their teachers provide feedback' (1994:63). What is distressing is Cohen's finding that only 9% of his 217 students reported rewriting the paper incorporating the teachers' comments in their revision (Cohen 1987:63).

The fact that 12.1% of the Unisa students reported making a mental note contradicts Cohen's finding that this was the strategy used by 'far the largest single group (41%)' in his research (1987:63). However, the discrepancy could be explained by the fact that this was the strategy of choice of the students in Cohen's research who rated themselves as 'excellent' (ibid.:64). Although only 3% of the students in the Unisa research study classified themselves in this category, the correlation with the examination results provides strong evidence in support of Cohen's finding that there is a link between proficiency and the choice of simply making a mental note. There was a tendency for the strongest students in the Unisa sample to select the 'mental note' category. Whereas the average examination mark for students who chose this group was 58.9%, the average for the students who selected any other option was 51.4%. This finding was at a significance level of $p<0.01$.

The most popular method among the students who failed their Practical English examination were to write to the lecturer or to ask a friend for assistance. In contrast, the pass or distinction students favoured making a mental note, consulting a reference work, making brief notes and then rewriting. This finding supports the discovery that the weaker students have a greater dependency on others whom they regard as being responsible for helping them to improve. In contrast, the more capable students take responsibility for their own improvement by utilising methods that require independence. It is the latter skills that are required for successful distance...
education. In contrast, the weaker students exhibit dependency, a characteristic that dooms them to failure in the distance-teaching context. This suggests that distance-teaching is better suited to more advanced students and that strategies that promote self-reliance need to be taught to the less capable students.

1.7 How Open are Students to Alternative Forms of Feedback?

Questions were constructed to determine students' reactions to alternative means of response. There is a slight tendency for the weaker students, who failed their Practical English examination, to be more negative towards peer criticism than the stronger students are. However, overall, a majority of the students (78%) regard peer criticism as valuable. This finding is important, especially if one bears in mind that e-mail is making peer response possible for the student in the distance-teaching context. The value of peer response should not be overlooked, especially as a means of obtaining content-related feedback in the early drafting states of writing. In contrast, the weaker students were slightly more in favour of the Portfolio Approach than were their more able counterparts. Nevertheless, 70% of all the students expressed an aversion to the Portfolio Approach. The reason for this could lie in the definition of the approach as a means by which students could put together a collection of their 'best writing at the end of the year and be given a mark for that rather than have each assignment awarded a mark'. The negative response was probably a protest against reduced opportunities to submit work rather than a negative response to the Portfolio approach as such. The weakness inherent in the definition negates the value of the question. When asked about their reaction to using a computer programme that can identify language and stylistic problems, the students were split with 51% against the concept and 44% willing to attempt such an approach. There was also very little difference between proficiency levels in this regard. Almost half of the students, representative of all proficiency levels, were willing to broaden the two-way writing relationship to include a cybernetic third party.

1.8 How Theoretically Sound are Students' Perceptions about Writing?

The students' perceptions about writing were elicited in question 16. Many of the students' beliefs are sound and in accordance with writing theory. 88.3% of the students regard writing as a creative process, which involves much reformulation and revision, while 72.3% believe that writing should be 'flexible and take the audience into account'. The fact that 71.4% of the
students regard grammatical correctness as 'the most important factor in writing' is evidence of extreme formalism. However, this response is contradicted by the fact that so few students perceive the lecturer's primary role to be that of 'editor', which is what it would be if grammatical correctness were of primary importance. In addition, 86.1% of the students believe that 'a good teacher makes detailed comments and indicates all errors'. The latter finding accords with the research cited in Section 4.4 of Chapter Three.

1.9 How do Students Rank the Five Marking Strategies?

The remainder of the questionnaire was designed to elicit feedback on the five marking strategies. The response to question 17: 'What letter was filled in ink at the top of the page on which you wrote Question 4?' indicated how evenly the scripts had been distributed into the five marking strategies. 15.4%, 16.1%, 16.9%, 14.7% and 15.9% of the students reported having been marked according to marking methods A, B, C, D and E respectively. The question was not answered by 21.1% of the students and thus it was impossible to determine which strategy had been used on their assignments.

1.9.1 Ranking by Students With Experience of the Marking Method

Questions 18, 20, 21 and 22 were designed to find out what students whose work had been marked using one of the five strategies thought about the effectiveness of each marking method with respect to:

- its helpfulness;
- its ability to make them feel positive and confident about their ability to revise the paragraph;
- the degree to which the marking enabled them to improve both content and grammar.

The incredible similarity between the responses for these questions is illustrated in the following table in which the percentage of students who responded positively is given:
The response to question 18: 'Did you find the way your assignment was marked helpful?' elicited the following response:

Methods A, D, and B received favourable reports from students. 92,1% of the students who had their work evaluated using the marking code found the method helpful, 85,5% of those who had a taped response found it useful and 73,8% of those for whom method B had been used had a positive response to the method. These three methods are the ones which are the most labour intensive for the lecturer. This result supports the finding that 86,1% of the students believe that 'a good teacher makes detailed comments and indicates all errors'.

The reaction to the Self Assessment was split, with 50,6% in favour and 49,16% averse to the method. In an attempt to find out if the response to the SA was linked to perceived writing proficiency, the two factors were statistically correlated. However, once again the students were split. 50,4% of those who rated their writing as excellent or good favoured the self-assessment method, while 47,6% of these students did not find the method helpful. 48,1% of the students who rated their writing as fair or weak favoured self assessment while 50,9% of these students were against the method. In this research project perceived writing ability does not correlate with the response to the SA method. Other factors such as learning style and field dependence or independence could possibly influence the attitude towards the self-assessment method.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Marking method</th>
<th>A</th>
<th>B</th>
<th>C</th>
<th>D</th>
<th>E</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Question 18</td>
<td>92%*</td>
<td>74%</td>
<td>38%</td>
<td>86%</td>
<td>51%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>'helpful'</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Question 20</td>
<td>93%</td>
<td>77%</td>
<td>47%</td>
<td>86%</td>
<td>56%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>'positive &amp; confident'</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Question 21</td>
<td>90%</td>
<td>74%</td>
<td>41%</td>
<td>84%</td>
<td>56%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>'improve content'</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Question 22</td>
<td>90%</td>
<td>73%</td>
<td>43%</td>
<td>86%</td>
<td>52%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>'improve grammar'</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 35: Percentage of Students Who Responded Positively to the Various Marking Methods

Key: A = Marking Code
     B = Minimal Marking
     C = Control
     D = Taped Response
     E = Self Assessment

* All figures in this table have been rounded off to the nearest point.
Question 20 read: 'Did the way your paragraph was marked make you feel positive and confident that you would be able to improve your writing?'. The findings for this question echo those for question 19. The same order emerged with positive responses for labour-intensive methods A (92.9%), D (86.1%) and B (77.4%). Compared to question 19, a higher positive response was recorded for method E in question 20, with 56.3% of the students believing that the method made them feel confident about their ability to improve their writing. The self-assessment method forces independence and thus one can anticipate an increased measure of self-assurance on the students' part.

Question 21 asked if the marking method helped the student to improve the content of the revised paragraph. Once again, high positive responses were recorded for the labour-intensive methods, A (90.2%), D (84.2%), and B (74.1%). Just over half of the students (56.3%) felt that the self-assessment brochure enabled them to improve the content of their paragraphs, while 41.4% of the students marked by method C believed that they were able to improve the content of their paragraphs without assistance, either in the form of teaching commentary or self-assessment brochures. These findings are all supported by the empirical study where all the groups were able to improve the content of their work through the revision process regardless of the marking strategy adopted in response to their first draft. The following table ranks the marking methods in order of effectiveness in terms of content as revealed in the empirical study and compares this sequence with the students' ranking of the methods:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Empirical Study Results</th>
<th>Students' Opinion</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D</td>
<td>D</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E</td>
<td>B</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B</td>
<td>E</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C</td>
<td>C</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 36: Effectiveness of Marking Methods with Respect to Content Improvement: Comparison of Study Results and Student Opinions

The table shows that the students were correct in their ranking of Methods A, D and E. However, the Minimal Marking method is less effective than students believe in terms of its ability to

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7 See Section 2.5.2 of Chapter Four
improve content, while Self Assessment is more beneficial in this regard than they presume it to be.

In question 22, which asked 'Did the way your paragraph was marked help you to write a grammatically more correct revised paragraph?', the same sequence emerged: A (89.9%), D (85.5%), B (72.6%), E (52.3%) and C (43.2%). Only with respect to marking methods C and D were the anticipated form-related improvements resulting from the method higher than the content improvement ratings. In contrast, the empirical study showed that all the marking methods resulted in higher improved language ratings than they did content improvements. The following table ranks the marking methods in order of effectiveness with respect to formal improvement levels as revealed in the empirical study and compares this sequence with the students' ranking of the methods in this regard:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Empirical Study Results</th>
<th>Students' Opinion</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D</td>
<td>D</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B</td>
<td>B</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E</td>
<td>E</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C</td>
<td>C</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 37: Effectiveness of Marking Methods with Respect to Form Improvement: Comparison of Study Results and Student Opinions

This table shows that the students were completely accurate in their evaluation of the relative effectiveness of the methods with respect to form.

The students' consistency in their responses to the questions in this section could be attributed to a certain extent to their marking all four questions identically without thinking about differences between the questions. However, the trend remains clear. Methods A, D and B are popular while E and C have far less support.

Question 23 asks 'Did you find any aspect of the marking confusing or difficult to understand?'

The statistics of students who experienced difficulties were as follows:
The strategies without lecturer intervention (C and E) caused the most problems, followed closely by Method B. Details concerning the nature of the problems experienced were elicited in question 24, an open-ended question that read:

If your answer to question 23 was YES, please list specific details from your Question 4 in the space below. List corrections or comments you did not understand.⁸

1.9.2 Ranking by All Students

The reactions to the various methods were also elicited in question 26, which required all the students to rate the five methods on a three-point scale where 1 = of no use at all, 2 = useful, and 3 = very useful. Question 26 canvassed the opinion of all the students and not simply those whose paragraph had been marked according to a specific method (as was the case with questions 18 - 24). For this reason the methods were described so that students who had not had personal experience of a marking method could give their opinion of the strategy. The results are illustrated in the following table:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Marking Method</th>
<th>A</th>
<th>B</th>
<th>C</th>
<th>D</th>
<th>E</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 - No use at all</td>
<td>7%</td>
<td>22%</td>
<td>73%</td>
<td>11%</td>
<td>11%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 - Useful</td>
<td>36%</td>
<td>39%</td>
<td>8%</td>
<td>33%</td>
<td>29%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 - Very useful</td>
<td>44%</td>
<td>25%</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>41%</td>
<td>45%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 39: Students' Rating of the Marking Methods

* All figures in this table have been rounded off to the nearest point.

Once again, the students' disapproval of method C is clearly expressed, with 73% rejecting the method as of 'no use at all'. The popularity of methods A, B, and D is reinforced. The finding that 74% (29% + 45%) of the students regard Self Assessment as either 'useful' or 'very useful' is particularly significant for anyone involved in teaching at a distance. Including a self-

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⁸ The results of the open-ended questions are reported in Section 2 of this chapter.
assessment brochure with an assignment is thus regarded with approval, while sending the assignment back with only a mark is regarded by an almost identical proportion of the students (73%) as useless. The negative reaction to an assignment being returned unmarked disappears for almost three-quarters of the students if a self-assessment sheet is stapled into the assignment.

2. Open-ended Research Questions

Five of the questions were open-ended. A systematic sampling technique was used whereby every tenth questionnaire was included for analysis of the open-ended questions. This resulted in a total of 266 questionnaires being coded. For the open-ended questions responses were categorised and then the frequencies were calculated. These questions fell into three categories.

2.1 How Useful is the Lecturers' Commentary?

Questions 7 and 8 required students to identify the type of comment they find most useful and those that they experience as least useful.

For question 7, the following response categories were recorded as the type of comments students find most useful. The percentages of students who selected each option is placed in brackets and the categories are ranked.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Comments Students Define as 'Most Useful': Ranking of the Code Categories</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. identify specific mistakes – 'Guide me through my mistakes and offer alternatives that I may use next time, so as not to repeat those mistakes.' (25.6%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. specific and constructive comments, including criticism (19.9%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. encouraging – 'Comments which encourage you to work more, to improve your English language and grammar.' (15%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. language, grammar (12%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. content (2.3%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. marking method E – instruction for self correction (2.3%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. tutorial letters – 'typed by the lecturers and sent to all ... students.' (1.9%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. marking method A (1.5%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. marking method D (1.5%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. lecturers' commentary (as opposed to peer review) (0.8%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11. marking method B (0.8%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12. general comments – front of assignment cover (0.4%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13. hints for the examination (0.4%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14. organisation (0.4%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

9 All quotations are given in the students' words. Editorial alterations have been kept to a minimum.
There were only four categories that could be regarded as having support from a significant number of students, with the largest group, consisting of 25.6% of the students, stating that they found commentary relating to the identification of specific errors the most helpful form of assistance. The 12% of the students who favoured information on language and grammar were also indirectly requesting specific, error-related data. The size of these categories confirms the response by 86% of the students that a good teacher indicates all errors. The preference for specific, constructive commentary (including criticism) made by 19.9% of the students is in effect a vote against the vague 'rubber stamping' approach to marking indicated in the research of Hillocks (1982), Jenkins (1987), Sommers (1982) and Zamel (1987). The fact that 15% of the students specified that they valued encouraging commentary confirms the findings of Lynch & Klemans (1976). This is a cry for affirmation from students studying in isolation and serves as support for researchers such as Creber (1965), Gee (1972) and Zak (1990) who emphasise the value of praise.

All four experimental marking methods received limited support. Marking Method E received the highest level of support (2.3%). This once again confirms the value students attach to the approach. In contrast, 1%, 0.8% and 1.5% were the ratings received for methods A, B and D respectively. Although the percentages in each of these instances are small, it is important to remember that this number of students identified the marking method as the 'most useful' form of tutor response. A very small percentage (0.8%) of the students registered a vote in favour of tutor response as opposed to peer criticism.

In Auten's research, lecturers were amazed by the level of antagonism some lecturers' comments aroused. As one lecturer stated, 'I guess I always took it for granted that students were interpreting my comments in the way I intended' (1991:7). The fact that commentary can be inhibiting rather than enabling is disconcerting. With Auten's words, 'Even the most encouraging comment will have little positive effect on an audience that reads it negatively' (ibid.:7) in mind, the researcher decided to explore students' negative reactions. Thus for question 8, the following
Response categories were recorded as the type of comments students find least useful. Once again, the support accorded each option is indicated in brackets:

**Comments Students Define as 'Least Useful': Ranking of the Code Categories**

1. general, vague and not specific—
   "Read questions carefully" because you'll find that I have read questions but my understanding is not that good. (15,4%)
2. discouraging comments—criticism only
   'Comments that are discouraging and those that state the student's hopelessness.' (13,5%)
3. all comments helpful—This category was included to cover students who responded that the question was a contradiction in terms as no comment from the lecturer could be defined as 'least helpful'. Any commentary was a bonus.
   'I find all comments useful.' (8,3%)
4. no comments—This differs from category 4 in that students are registering a protest against lecturers who do not comment at all, as in a 'mark only' strategy. The resentment is clear:
   'Have no comment and don't provide reasons why.'
   'What I don't like is no comments at all.' (7,5%)
5. marking method C (6,8%)
6. minor infringements (e.g. 'write neatly', 'staple assignment') or what students perceive to be obvious mistakes, for example those relating to mechanics or punctuation (6,8%)
7. difficult—can't understand (1,5%)
   tutorial letters (1,5%)
   marking method B (1,5%)
8. vocabulary (1,1%)
   tenses (1,1%)
   organisation of ideas (1,1%)
   false flattery—
   'telling a student with an average mark that his or her work is excellent.' (1,1%)
9. other students' mistakes (0,8%)
   form, language, grammar (0,8%)
   content (0,8%)
   marking method A (0,8%)
   personal response—
   e.g. 'I was very moved by this.' (0,8%)
   refer to other students (0,8%)
   comments that show a lack of understanding (0,8%)
   marking method E (0,8%)
10. based on an opinion (0,4%)
    too many comments (0,4%)
    assignments returned late (0,4%)
11. marking method D (0,1%)

The findings were characterised by a spread of pet aversions, each with very limited support. Only two categories received backing from over ten percent of the students. The students' dislike of general, vague, non-specific commentary is indicated by the fact that 15,4% selected this category. They specifically expressed their disapproval of terms that do 'not really mean anything. e.g. "Good", "Not bad" etc.' Another student sagely remarks that 60% and a comment 'report well written' tells the student nothing about how he or she 'could have improved this mark'. Their frustration is evident in their dislike of lecturers who 'tell me I can do better or have
not put in enough effort without any positive suggestions (and I did do my best!)'. A similar response was given by one of Auten's students: 'If I knew the right way, I wouldn't have gotten it wrong in the first place' (1991:7). When the researcher was coding the students' choices for questions 7 and 8, she became aware of a tendency for students who selected option 08 ('specific, constructive commentary') as the most positive form of commentary for question 7 to choose option 7 ('general, vague commentary') as the least useful form in question 8. This can be seen as a double vote expressed in favour of specific commentary and in an aversion to its antithesis.

The second biggest group (13.5%) expressed a distaste for discouraging, negative criticism. In one student's words, these are comments that 'critical without explanation, and that tend to belittle my efforts'. Students also reacted negatively to harsh phrasing such as 'I have penalised you for the fatal error of not reading instructions'. A more fluent student explained that 'diplomatic censor is preferable'. This group of students also tended to select the antithesis, encouraging feedback, as their choice in the 'most useful' category. Auten's work also revealed students' hatred of any commentary that seems sarcastic (ibid.:7). Parkerson (1993) notes how upset students become when they are the objects of character assassination. Likewise, Van Heerden notes the negative consequences of sarcasm and unclear comments: 'Under such circumstances it is only normal for students to protect themselves by using another person as a buffer between themselves and the reader, and produce work closely resembling other authors' writing, copying their vocabulary, style and register' (1993:298). In the process an accommodationist stance is adopted and the student's voice is silenced.

The fact that students value commentary was indicated by the 8.3% of the students who selected category 4. Their opinion is that no commentary can be defined as 'least useful' as 'all comments are valuable' and that in essence the question was a contradiction in terms. This support is also expressed in the numbers of students who selected categories 6 and 19,10 which protest a 'mark-only approach' or a response style where commentary is reduced to a justification of a grade. If these two groups are added together then a protest against marking method C was registered by 10.9% (6.8%+ 4.1%) of the students. There was also more limited protest, 0.8%, 1.5%, 0.1%,

10 The two categories are distinct, however. Whereas option 6 is a protest against marking method C specifically, option 19 is broader in that it includes what students term 'mark motivation', commentary that is based on justifying a grade.
and 0.8% against methods A, B, D, and E respectively. It is important to note that 1.5% of the student specifically named method B as being problematic.

There are numerous small categories, some of which are indicative of a lack of information on the part of the students. There are students who specifically dislike commentary on tenses, form, content, and vocabulary. Punctuation and mechanics are deemed by some students to be 'obvious' mistakes, not worthy of attention. However, other categories serve as a criticism of current response strategies. Students dislike excessive marking, having scripts returned defaced, figuratively speaking, by a pencil sea. Likewise students are intimidated by commentary that is pitched at such a high level that it becomes incomprehensible. There is also a warning sounded that scripts that are returned very late lose their impact, regardless of the amount of tutor commentary. The caution against false flattery should be seen in conjunction with students' desire for constructive criticism. Parkerson (1993) observed that students distrust comments that are too encouraging in comparison to the quality of the writing, stating that students would then interpret the discrepancy as indicative of the fact that the lecturer did not believe that they could do better and that this mark represented the student's optimal performance (1993:256). In the Unisa study, there was also a protest against subjective marking, in which commentary is based on 'an opinion'. In Auten's research students also revealed a distrust of 'reader reactions' from the instructors and in some instances found commentary extremely debilitating: 'I become so personally insulted that I see no way of improving' (1991:7). The latter reaction has implications for response within the emotive paradigm.

### 2.2 How Do Students Define the Term 'Revision'?

The second focal point of the open-ended questions related to the students' perception of the term 'revision'. The following list contains some of the more effective definitions of the term:

- Witte and Faigley (1984) have classified text revisions as 'meaning changing' or 'meaning preserving' (in Nystrand et al. 1989:226).
- Beach believes that the 'level' of revision refers to the extent to which students may primarily retain their semantic content employing a "detect/rewrite" strategy ..., or whether they want to change the semantic content by making more substantive revisions.
In essence what passes as revision ranges from simply deleting repetitive information to recasting, or reorganising the same information, to a higher level of revision, which involves changing the meaning, and in so doing, redefining the context (ibid.:144). Revision strategies include adding, deleting, modifying, rewording, truncating, and reorganising.

Murray cites instances where a major revision is necessary. In these cases planning and revising are collapsed into 'an activity that is best described as reconceiving. To "reconceive" is to scan and rescan one's text from the perspective of the external reader and to continue re-drafting until all rhetorical, formal, and stylistic concerns have been resolved, or until the writer decides to let go of the text' (Murray in Van Zyl 1993:27).

According to Dewey, the three elements in the writing situation are the writer's personal beliefs, her cultural convictions, and the developing text. In his or her transaction with each of these the writer needs to decide which to conserve and which to reform. Dewey's belief is that an individual's writing is an active, creative transaction which involves a 'mutual reshaping of author, culture, and text. It is never just private but always private and social, personal and political: to change one's text is also to change one's self and one's culture' (Fishman 1993:323). This description of revision goes a long way towards explaining the resistance students have to revision.

In order to determine the students' perception of revision, question 15 asked students to explain briefly what they understand by the term. The following response categories were recorded:

**Revision Question: Ranking of Code Categories**

1. Revision in an examination context (50,4%) –
   'Revision is looking through or reminding yourself of what you have studied.'
   'Revision is to go over work that you have already done, especially in preparing for an examination.'
2. 'rewriting' with the aim being to rectify 'mistakes' (20,7%). Here the focus is on surface correction –
   'Repeating with corrections what I previously did which has some mistakes.'
3. aimless repetition – Revision is conceived of as simply as 'doing a thing more than once' (14,3%).
4. 'reworking' with the aim of achieving an 'improvement' – Here revision involves 'redoing' or 'reworking' a document in order to facilitate an 'improvement' (7,1%).
5. A more mature concept including work on content and form (4,5%).
6. total misunderstanding or circular definition (1%) –
   'Revision is revising.'
Even although this questionnaire was completed as part of a revision assignment, 50.4% of the students view the term in the examination context where the primary aim is to recall information and to promote understanding. The students' fixation with marks is indicative of the examination-centred thinking that prevails in South African education and of a teaching approach that stresses grading rather than learning or growth.

The fact that the next biggest group revealed an error-fixation accords with the research findings discussed in this thesis and with the response to the questionnaire indicating a belief that good teachers are those who mark all errors. This view of revision as rewriting, with the primary objective being to rectify 'mistakes', was held by 20.7% of the students. These students fail to comprehend that 'you can't just change the words around and [thereby] get the ideas right' (Sommers 1992:26). Here editing is restricted to lexical and grammatical structures. Sommers explains that this is the 'thesaurus philosophy of writing ... [evidence of students' belief] that most problems in their essays can be solved by rewording' (1982b:381). Here 'changes are made in compliance with abstract rules about the product ... These revision strategies are teacher-based, directed towards a teacher-reader who expects compliance with the rules' (ibid.:383). This is the restrictive view of writing that characterised the work of inexperienced writers in Sommers' experiment (ibid.:383).

A mere 4.5% of the Unisa students were categorised as having a mature perception of revision. This holistic perspective embraces the concept of rewriting, while concentrating on both content and form. This represents a more developed view of revision, in which students perceive the need to modify their ideas. The primary focus is on the argument and then form. This fuller vision embraces the notion of revision as a means of discovering and refining meaning. This is the view Sommers found was held by experienced writers (ibid.:383). In contrast, the view of 'revision' as simply redoing a task without having any specific objective in mind was held by 14.3% of the students while 7.1% of the students, were very vague about the purpose which they defined as an 'improvement'.

- 202 -
2.3 How Do Students React to the Various Marking Strategies?

The third section was designed to elicit detail about the students' response to the various marking strategies. This is an area where research is sadly lacking. In Enginarlar's words, 'student reaction to various types of feedback has received relatively little attention' (1993:153). Question 19 required students to substantiate their answer if they replied to question 18 that the marking method used in their assignment was not helpful. Likewise, question 23 invited them to give specific details about any aspect of the marking of their original paragraph that they found 'confusing or difficult to understand'. For both of these questions the first category contained the 'no comment' option, either because students found the marking method helpful or because they did not find any aspect of the marking confusing or difficult to understand. Where students had problems, the marking method involved was noted. An additional category had to be formed for students who experienced difficulties but who had not supplied the marking method which was used in their assignments. The similarity in the answers given to both questions is clearly indicated in Tables 40 and 41.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Did you find the way your assignment was marked helpful?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>59.8%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 40: Percentage of Students In Favour of the Marking Method Used

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Did you find any aspect of the marking confusing or difficult to understand?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>54.9%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 41: Percentage of Students Who Rated the Method 'Confusing or Difficult to Understand'

The majority of the students responded positively. 59.8% of the students found the marking method used on their original assignments helpful, while 54.9% did not find any aspect of the marking method confusing or difficult to understand. In both cases, marking method C caused the most difficulty, with 10.9% and 8.3% of the students describing the method as unhelpful and confusing respectively. The students' ranking of the marking methods can be determined by
comparing the numbers of students who reported a negative response to the manner in which their work had been marked.

- The ranking from least to most helpful is as follows: C (10.9%), E (8.3%), B (4.1%), D (2.3%), and A (1.5%). In short, the more labour-intensive the marking is, the greater the students' approval is.
- The ranking of students who reported experiencing the marking method as confusing or difficult to understand is, from most to least confusing: C (8.3%), E (6.8%), B (6%), A (5.3%), and D (3.8%)

Although the statistics are low, all the marking methods left some of the students confused. This confirms the prediction made in the Markers' Questionnaire, in which the opinion was expressed that none of the methods is totally unproblematic.

Questions 19 and 24 brought to light specific problems with the various marking methods, expressed in the students' own words. The worst confusion resulted from the symbol for the Marking Method being interpreted as a grading symbol, which frequently contradicts the mark allocated for the work. 'There is just a sticker saying revise for Assignment 04 and a C and in pencil 10 +10 = 20/25 which doesn't tell me anything. My interpretation is C = average [and this is contradicted by the high mark awarded to the work].' This misinterpretation was common, despite the specific instruction to the students to ignore the symbol written in ink in a circle at the top of the page.

Enginarlar (1993) used a questionnaire to determine the attitude of 47 English Composition 1 students at the Middle East Technical University to the institution's marking policy, which is very similar to the marking code used by Practical English lecturers. The students responded positively and did not perceive the method to be restricted only to surface-level errors and mechanics. 70% of the students indicated that they found the codes clear and understandable. One student, however, complained: 'I think you should read the composition without considering the gr / sp / p and then correct it. Sometimes, I feel my paper is being graded only in terms of gr and sp' (Enginarlar 1993:199). However, the majority of the students were aware of the fact that the method demands more from the lecturer than it does from them. Whereas 60% of the students

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11 This policy is described as the use of an abbreviated code system for surface error correction combined with symbols for larger problems (e.g. ? = vague), combined with brief comments relating to aspects such as organisation and a general comment about the student's progress (Enginarlar 1993:196).
classified the method as 'very time-consuming' for the lecturer, only 2% put it in this category for the student (ibid.:201).

Enginarlar's (1993) research reinforced the tripartite division of students hypothesised in Radecki & Swales's (1988) study of 59 ESL students. Learners can be divided into three groups determined by their attitude to feedback from their lecturers.

- Receptors are positively-orientated students. Enginarlar's (1993) students, who fell into this category, revealed an awareness that learning was more important than the time it took them to revise their work.
- Semi-resistors are more neutral in attitude. They prefer substantive comments relating to content, ideas and accuracy, marking of all linguistic errors and one word or short, evaluative adjectives.
- Resistors are negative. In Enginarlar's (1993) study these students felt that marking students' papers was a lecturer's job, no matter how time-consuming it may be (1993:201).

The questionnaire indicates that the majority of the Unisa students fall into the group Radecki & Swales (1986) define as Semi-resistors in that they prefer detailed content-related commentary and favour a formalist approach that stresses accuracy and indicates all linguistic flaws. However, the fact that they are prepared to take responsibility for their work is a characteristic of 'Receptors'. In contrast, the students' demand that lecturers mark all errors is characteristic of 'Resistors' in its lack of concern for their instructors' time.

Cohen's research (1987) indicates that students have the greatest difficulty understanding lecturers' commentary when this is restricted to single words or short phrases (1987:65). Sadly, the research of Cohen and Connors & Lunsford (1993) shows that this is the form that most tutor intervention takes. From this research, one can anticipate that students have even greater difficulty understanding marking codes. Cohen cites a student who thought that 'sentence

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12 However, rather irrationally, given the results for the time-consuming category, when students were asked to rate the level of work and responsibility taken by lecturer and student respectively, 60% voted for an equal work load and 59% for an equal responsibility rating (Enginarlar 1993:202).
fragment' meant that the sentence was out of place and another who believed that 'quest.' part of the phrase 'rhet. quest.' referred to a search, rather than to a rhetorical question (1987:58).

Based on Cohen's (1987) and Enginarlar's (1993) research, the main problem that could be predicted with Marking Method A was that students would be unable to understand the codes. The Unisa students' comments confirm this hypothesis:

- 'I understand the letters [marking symbols] but somewhere, somehow I don't understand'.

Specific codes (e.g. agr, arg, ?, Meaning ?, ww) gave some students problems. Here the weaker students predictably experienced the most difficulties:

- 'I don't understand as to wether 'ww' refers to word order or not.' (WW is the symbol for wrong word.)

This type of misunderstanding arises despite the fact that the symbols are explained in Tutorial Letter 101. The fact that the markers believe that these explanations are clear is apparent in the fact that none of those who responded to the Markers' Questionnaire anticipated that the students would have difficulty understanding the codes.

Method B resulted in two problems, both of which were predicted by the markers. Some students were unable to identify the errors indicated by means of the X, while others had the ability to locate the errors but were unable to correct them without assistance:

- 'I found the X's very confusing. I am still unable to tell what the grammatical errors are.'
- 'Although I received a good mark, I did get an "X" in the margin and I am not sure how to correct the sentence.'
- 'An "X" obviously indicates an error. It doesn't really tell me anything else. It doesn't really help, except that it makes one think of alternative ways to express yourself.'

Method C resulted in the highest level of confusion and resentment. The single most common false interpretation is expressed in the following quotation:

- 'I was confusing because my paragraph was not having an error.'

The same opinion was more fluently expressed as follows:

- 'No grammar mistakes noted or corrections inserted. Does this mean grammatically and mechanically perfect?'
- 'I am not satisfied to see only the marks. Please write comments.'
- 'I needed to know in what areas I had the least marks so that I could improve on those.'

The resentment, anticipated by the markers, is clear in the following quotation:

- 'There were no comments at all. The assignments take a lot of time and effort.'
Students feel they have a right to know 'How could I have improved my writing? Where did I lose marks?'

With respect to Method D, there were complaints from two of the 366 students that their tapes were not audible. Some students were unable to make the connection between the number in the margin and the comment on that number on the tape:

- 'I noticed that only numbering is indicated on the lines of the paragraphs but without some comments.'

In contrast, the reservations expressed by the markers were based on self-interest and concern about the practical implementation of a novel approach. Two of the markers expressed the conviction that the method was the ideal interactive medium for distance education. This, combined with the fact that so few problems were expressed by the students, reinforces the positive research results associated with a Taped Response that were discussed in Section 1.4 of Chapter Four.

Method E, self assessment, caused the same misunderstanding as Method C.

- 'No comment was made at all, although the mark given indicated satisfaction.'

The criticism, also foreseen by the markers, is implicit in the following statement:

- 'There were no comments and again not a single mistake was noted or corrected.'

The point of a self-correction brochure has escaped one student, who feels betrayed by a lecturer whom the student perceives as not doing his or her work.

- 'It gave me no indication of problem areas - or how I could have improved.'

SA is once again interpreted as a sign of perfection:

- 'According to the comments the letter had no errors. I am sure there is space for improvement.'

A new slant was provided by the following student:

- 'Marks were awarded but no comments made - not on content, organisation, vocabulary, grammar or mechanics - which is indicative of subjectivity. Another lecturer may (or may not) have awarded a different mark.'

In essence, the argument is that detailed evaluation supports a mark and can be used to substantiate it, thus protecting the lecturer against charges of subjectivity and bias.

While the tape results in the least confusion, it is disturbing to note the numbers of students who report that the final effect of the lecturers' effort is confusion and misunderstanding.
3. Conclusion

The cry from the students is loud and clear. They desire
• input from their lecturers in the form of detailed commentary;
• a mark;
• specific, encouraging, honest, criticism;
• to take responsibility for their own writing and are open to the concepts of computer-assisted instruction and peer review.

However, the questionnaire also reveals that students need to gain insight in the following areas:
• Students need to be educated to perceive their lecturers as facilitators rather than people whose primary role is that of evaluators. They need to broaden their view of lecturers to envision them, not solely as judge and executioner, but rather as representatives of the academic discourse community whose aim is to assist them to gain entry into this community.
• Students need to have the concept 'revision' explained to them so that they can move away from the flawed perception that this activity is primarily concerned with error identification and correction or that it is a term associated with preparation for examinations.
• Students need to be made aware of how counter-productive their error-fixation is. Grammatical competence is one of the important aspects of communicative competence, but it is not the only one.
• Students should be made aware that the belief that a good lecturer corrects all errors is flawed, partly because of the fact that research has thus far been unsuccessful in proving that error correction results in improved performance over a period of time, and also because of the negative emotional impact of excessive correction.
• Whereas students' desire for marking methods involving the maximum lecturer input is understandable in the distance-teaching context, students should be made aware of the benefits associated with self-correction, peer review and rewriting, even without lecturer input. In Saito's words: 'Few ESL students ... realize the importance of peer or self-correction of their writing ..., and if they knew its benefits, then their attitudes might change' (1994:65).
• The weaker students need to be encouraged to pay more attention to the tutorial commentary they receive, to become less dependent on the lecturers and to take responsibility for their own progress. They also need to overcome the tendency to view lecturers in a negative, judging role.

• There is a need for more learner training. Since real world writers do not demand from their readers what these apprentices expect, the learners should move away from reliance on their tutors.

This chapter has explored the students' position. However, in order to gain a fuller understanding of the issue of responding to student writing in the academic discourse community the students inhabit, the third facet of the triangle needs to be examined. Chapter Six explores the lecturers' perspectives.
Chapter Six:

The Readers' Perspectives

Imagine that you enter a parlor [sic]. You come late. When you arrive, others have long preceded you, and they are engaged in a heated discussion, a discussion too heated for them to pause and tell you exactly what it is about. In fact, the discussion had already begun long before any of them got there, so that no one present is qualified to retrace for you all the steps that had gone before. You listen for a while, until you decide that you have caught the tenor of the argument; then you put in your oar. Someone answers; you answer him; another comes to your defence; ... the discussion is interminable. The hour grows late, you must depart. And you do depart, with the discussion still vigorously in progress (Burke in Warnock 1989:59).

In accordance with Fish's conviction that 'communications occur within situations and ... to be in a situation is already to be in possession of (or to be possessed by) a structure of assumptions' (1980:318), it is the author's contention in this chapter that each time lecturers respond to student writing, they are, in terms of Burke's metaphor, putting in an oar, taking a position on writing and reading theory and indicating a belief about how students learn. In essence this response is a stand in the heated theoretical debates that ground the discipline of English studies. This is inevitable because, before lecturers evaluate or respond to student writing, 'they must interpret it, and the ways in which they interpret it are shaped by a multitude of assumptions and values - about language, about student writing, about their students, and about their roles as readers' (Lawson et al. 1989:viii). This chapter is founded on the belief that no neutral reading exists, not even in a course with prescribed skills-based objectives, and that all reading is value-laden.

1. Analysis of Global Commentary

A lecturer's guiding 'structure of assumptions' can be deduced from the global commentary he or she makes on assignments. Although Marking Method A, the strategy adopted in the Practical English course, is fundamentally formalist in approach, nevertheless, the comments the tutor makes at the end of the assignment are not prescribed. These are inherently value-laden and can be examined to reveal the lecturer's underlying axiological assumptions. The purpose of the experiment described in this section of the thesis is to scrutinise the global commentary given at the end of the script, written as a summarising response to the paper, which usually includes rhetorical aspects, such as sentence structure and organisation. This aspect is vital as the image 'that comes off the page becomes the teacher for that student and has an immediate impact on
how those comments come to mean [sic]' (Straub 1996:235). This is more important in the
distance-teaching context, where there is no reassuring contact-context impression to temper any
negative impact created by the global commentary.

1.1 The Sample Group

The first step in the analysis of the global commentary is the selection of a representative sample
for analysis. The scripts marked by means of the correction code in the experiment serve as
samples of the status quo: the marking policy and response strategies that are adopted by
Practical English Unisa lecturers when they respond to student writing. For this reason the
sample group was taken from scripts originally marked by means of Marking Method A. The
technique of systematic random sampling was adopted. By selecting every fifth script for
inclusion in the sample, a group of 50 scripts was obtained.

1.2 The Parsing of Responses

Prior to analysis of global commentary, the tutors' comments were parsed. This technique,
developed by Squire in 1964, divides commentary into units, each of which can be defined as
'the smallest combination of words that conveyed the sense of a single thought' (Newkirk
1984b:286). In classifying the parsed units, errors become apparent because 'excessive parsing
will result in statements that are not informative enough to code, if parsing is too infrequent,
statements will contain references to more than one criteria [sic]' (ibid.:287).

Because of the intermediate level of the Practical English course, tutor commentary is normally
expressed in simple sentences. This eases the parsing process, as the following example of a
global commentary, divided into seven parsed units, indicates:

\[ You \ have \ not \ explained \ why \ this \ incident \ is \ significant. / You \ need \ to \ revise \\
\text{sentence \ construction.} / \text{Use \ the \ past \ tense \ consistently} \ / \text{when \ referring \ to \ past} \\
events. / \text{Watch \ your \ choice \ of \ words.} / \text{Try \ to \ write \ short,} / \text{clear \ sentences.} \]

This process enabled the researcher to classify responses. A point was awarded if one or more
parsed units from a script within the sample group fell into a specific category. Thus the statistics
given in this section indicate the number of scripts that contain categories of response.
For example, in the case quoted above, six of the seven parsed units contain commentary on local, formal issues. In categorising the whole response, however, the number 1 was recorded to indicate that this script contained information on local issues.

1.3 Developing a Taxonomy for Analysis of Response Styles

In order to evaluate response styles, a taxonomy had to be developed to classify the key issues, namely, axiological orientation, focus of commentary, locus of control, cognitive level, the local / global, form / content, and positive / negative distinctions, modes of response, grammatical structure, length, overall purpose, and reader roles. The taxonomy, developed for the purpose of classifying response statements, is outlined in this section of the thesis together with examples to illustrate the specific type of response.

1.3.1 Axiological Orientation

- **Formalist** – This approach is characterised by prescriptiveness relating to issues of economy, clarity, style and grammatical perfection. The emphasis is on the mechanical. The view promoted is of the reader as dogmatic, distanced, authoritarian. This approach may also be regarded as being fair, as the following quotation by one of Newkirk’s readers indicates: ‘Judging on the number of errors, while not adequate, is at least less subjective [than an emotive approach]’ (1984b:293). The fact that markers cannot be accused of being biased, combined with the ease with which mechanical faults can be detected and corrected, makes this an attractive option, particularly for the inexperienced or lazy educator. The following are examples of comments cited from the research data that arise from a formalist axiological orientation:

  - Revise word order and tenses. Use a dictionary to check spelling and correct usage of words.
  - You need to pay attention to

1 The author acknowledges her indebtedness to Connors & Lundsford (1993), Greenhalgh (1992), Newkirk (1984b), Perry (1970), Straub (1996) and Warnock (1989), as aspects of their research have been incorporated in the taxonomy developed for the analysis of the global commentary.
1. Subject / Verb agreement – plural subject and plural verb or singular subject and singular verb – for example '... there were a lot of metal appliances'.
2. Awkward phrasing – for example, 'the maize sacks were packed one on top of the other'

** Please work mainly on tenses – when to use the Past Ind., the Past Perfect, and the Past Cont. Tenses – and on incorrect expressions, eg I board (not bought) the train. Keep trying!

- **Emotive** – Commentary is characterised by an emphasis on the expressive. It emphasises sincerity, values self-discovery, and advances the view of the lecturer as an interested, empathetic reader. Elbow's 'climate of failure' is promoted. Emphasis on mechanics is delayed to the final stage. The following are examples of an emotive axiology:

** Your story is definitely significant for you.
** And what do you feel about that?
** What a shocking story. You have written truthfully and sincerely.

- **Cognitive** – Here the commentary emphasises accurate information and logic and promotes a view of writing as recursive rather than linear, as the following examples indicate:

** Rather describe one of those visits as you were asked to describe an incident from your childhood. The significance you claim for these visits does not follow logically from your story: you say that you do not have a clear idea that you wanted to be a lawyer but conclude by saying that this was a clear idea in your mind.
** Your last sentence does not make sense. If you gave up smoking why did you still lock the door?
** Your organisation of ideas is confusing. Revise pronouns and where you are uncertain try to be more specific. When you say, 'those men', which men do you mean? Who is Michael? I can't follow this story.
** You missed a few steps here. Were you caught? Were your parents very angry?

- **Socio-Constructionist** – Here the response style emphasises the effect on a real reader and a belief in discourse communities. In the following example, the Western discourse
pattern of up-front identification of the topic is prescribed without any indication that this is not a universal requirement for effective writing:

• You have written about the importance of attending school and arriving on time. You had to write about ONE incident. You should therefore have described the incident of your choice in the first few lines in more detail. What happened? Were you late for school? Were you punished?

The marker is confident in her claim that up-front identification of the topic is vital. She would probably also have been critical if the student had failed to comply with any of the other characteristics of Western discourse – linear, rational argument, signposting, structuring, causally-connected narrative, generalisation – and had produced patterns that were circular or contained digressions.

1.3.2 Focus of Commentary:

• Text-centred response styles are product-based, highlighting aspects such as autonomy, unity, organization, coherence and intensity (Warnock 1989:68). This approach has obvious appeal for lecturers. Not only is it pragmatic, but it also maintains the illusion of fairness and objectivity. A text-centred response style is usually associated with a formalist or cognitive axiological orientation. This is the response category Newkirk defines as 'text-based' and Elbow (1981) as 'criterion-based'. Newkirk (1984b:303) divides text-based responses into six categories, namely content (including information and logic), focus, organisation, point of view, language and mechanics. Below are examples of this style of response:

• You describe general impressions of this incident rather than specific details. For example, how did your girlfriend respond to your letter of proposal?

• In my youth days I went to a movie along with my father to see one of the movies he admired best. The movie was interesting and educating in my opinion though it was violent.

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2 The five focal areas described in this section are derived from Warnock's classification system.

3 Newkirk's (1984b:288-9) research revealed the following to be the most frequently used response categories: order / organisation, interest / humour, information / ideas, appropriateness, logic, focus, point of view, and word choice. Of these all but two (interest / humour and appropriateness) are text-centered response styles.
1. Do not use 'youth' and 'days'. Say 'in my youth' or 'when I was young'.
2. 'Along' is not necessary. 'I went to a movie with my father.'
3. 'Best' is not correct. You are describing how much he admired the movie, so you would say 'the movie he admired most'.
4. The correct expression is 'in my opinion'.
5. As you have a problem expressing yourself clearly, do NOT permit your sentences to become so long and involved. Read through this paragraph now and NOTE the length of your last sentence – this you must deal with in future work!

• Author-centred response styles are based on the intentionalist fallacy, described by Warnock as 'voyeuristically seeking for what the author meant' (Warnock 1989:67). Biographical approaches focus on development and stress the importance of the author finding her own voice. An author-centred response style results from adherence to an emotive axiology, as the following example illustrates:

• How did you feel? Why is this detail of your namecard so important to you?

• Reader-centred response style is founded in the pathetic fallacy, that can easily be reduced to a 'wallowing in our own responses' (ibid:63). Here subjectivity and honesty are valued. It is characterised by comments such as 'I don't get it' (ibid. 68). Newkirk defines this category as 'subjective responses', based on personal reaction, while Elbow (1981) employs the term 'reader-based'. Newkirk divides subjective responses into eight categories (1984b:303-304):

• Assumptions about the author (references to the reader's image of the writer):

• The way you introduce this story (including the dramatic detail) makes the reader aware of how angry and disappointed you must have felt with yourself; but you do not actually evaluate the incident and tell your reader why it is significant in your life.

• I admire your strength of character.

• I admire you for your determination to rise above such difficult circumstances. Well done!

• Personal reactions

• What is the 'moral' of the story? There is nothing technically wrong with your paragraph, but I am left with a feeling of deflation and dissatisfaction – like you haven't given me enough to chew on!

• What an awful experience! I am sorry you were upset in this way.

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• What a truly horrible experience! I hope he was punished.

- Interest level (references to holding the attention of the reader):
  • Interesting – and I liked your conclusion.

- Easy / difficult to read
  • This is confusing to your reader. How were you going to watch it?

- Informative (references to the reader learning something)
  • You have taught me a great deal about initiation rites.

- Persuasive (references to the reader being convinced of the writer's point)
  • I agree. Boys that age are very tough!!

- Original / creative
  • This is a very common incident, I'm afraid, but you have told it in a memorable and creative way.

- Appropriate / easy to identify with (reference to the closeness of the event depicted in the paper to the experience of the reader (1984b:303-4))
  • Your content is highly relevant. I, too, have experience of living with an alcoholic. You describe your feelings very well. Good work!
  • I guess there are many of us with a 'bathroom saga'? A most amusing paragraph, well written with the incident clearly described.

- Subject-centred response style – This is founded in the cognitive paradigm. It will give rise to responses that question accuracy and the need for statements to be developed and supported.
  • There is too much detail of the surrounding circumstances. This makes the incident seem like an invented story rather than a real event which made a great impact on you. Do not start with a date, unless it is vital to the meaning.
  • Try to make your ending more concrete so that it links clearly to the main idea of your paragraph and so that it is as interesting as your opening sentence.
• Logic? How could it have been Christmas?

• Context-centred response style – This approach is based on a socio-constructionist paradigm. It questions appropriacy and delves into political and power relationships.

• The phrase 'to date' is too pompous – use it in business letters, not in storytelling.

1.3.3 Locus of Control

Greenhalgh (1992) explains that the 'locus of authority' can be determined by examining the origin of the power and force of a statement. It can appeal either to external realities (extra-linguistic authority) or to the reality of the reading experience (linguistic authority). The two categories relating to locus of control are:

• Interpretation4 – The power inherent in this form of commentary is based on an authority external to the reading experience, such as textbooks, style guides, language, and research methodology.

• Please revise all English grammar rules, especially those of concord and tense. Check spelling in a dictionary.

• Interruption – In this instance power is derived from the linguistic authority of the reading experience itself.

• I liked the last two sentences; you described the significance of the incident clearly and well.

1.3.4 Cognitive Level

Newkirk states that 'the writing instructor must respond to two sometimes conflicting mandates: on the one hand, to teach students to write well and, on the other, to use writing as an activity to foster intellectual growth. Writing is both an end and a means' (1984b:297). With respect to the latter objective, it is important to remember that the responder's intellectual and ethical

development will determine the maturity of the response. In this regard Perry's taxonomy can be used to classify response styles in terms of the level of cognitive development they represent on the continuum from dualistic to reflective thought:

- **Dualistic** – In this response style right is opposed to wrong, rules are emphasised and correctness is valued. Thus the focus is on surface features, meaning is regarded as secondary to linguistic and rhetorical correctness, the tone is dogmatic, the role is primarily that of judge and guardian of the establishment, and adherence to authority is assumed, with power firmly in the hands of the educator. Dualistic responders have very limited suggestions for revision. In terms of Phelphs's (1989) taxonomy, the most likely response style of a dualistic responder is that of an evaluative attitude towards a closed text. Anson explains that this type of response can have a negative effect on the student who might reduce risk-taking for fear of an increased number of errors (1989:345). A formalist axiology will inevitably give rise to a dualistic response style.

> You will never improve until you have revised all your verbs. Study tenses and see that the subject always agrees with the verb.

> Revise prepositions – this can only be done by repeating the correct use over and over again.

- **Relativistic** – In this response style the student is accorded the right to weigh alternatives. There is a total lack of prescriptiveness, the emphasis is on freedom of choice, meaning is stressed above local issues, and power is transferred to the student. Anson explains that paradoxically, this approach has benefits for the weaker student who is paralysed for fear of error (ibid.:349). An emotive axiological orientation is often closely associated with a relativistic response style.

> In the case I have indicated in the margin, you have two options:

1) another comma has to be added

2) the commas should be omitted altogether.

- **Reflective** – This response style falls between the dogmatic dualistic and the open relativistic stances. Here the view is taken that any balanced, well-substantiated argument

---

5 The sentence in question was punctuated by the student as follows: 'An incident from my not-so-long-ago childhood which I remember clearly, happened when I was in Standard Seven'.

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is accepted. The reader is regarded as a representative of a discourse community and writing is perceived as an in-draft process. Alternatively stated, in Phelphs' (1989) terms, the response style will contain a formative attitude and will tend to view the text as evolving. In contrast to the authoritarian, teacher-centric dualistic mode and the open, reader-based relativistic approach, here the text assumes a central position as the means by which the reader responds to the writer's meaning. This higher-order thought pattern can find expression as a reasoned response to the text as process / understood, to the craftsmanship, to aesthetic qualities or as value-related responses (Hilgers 1984).

• Your story would improve if you tried using a different tone. You relate dramatic events very factually, and I think more emotion is needed.

• 'Sustained an injury' is somewhat too formal for a childhood memory. 'I got hurt', maybe?

1.3.5 Focal Point

The focus of commentary is a vital issue because of the bearing it has on the issue of power. Straub explains:

The more comments a teacher makes on a piece of writing, the more controlling he or she will likely be. The more a teacher attends to the text, especially local matters, and tries to lead the student to produce a more complete written product, the more likely he is to point to specific changes and thus to exert more control over the student's writing. The more a teacher attends to the student's writing processes and the larger contexts of writing, and gears his comments to the student behind the text and her ongoing work as a writer, the less likely he is to point to specific changes or to assume control over the student's writing. ... Thus, a teacher who does a lot of work with sentence structure and correctness will tend to be more directive, than, say, a teacher who frequently asks the student to consider the rhetorical situation or to try some technique of revision (1996: 234).

In terms of the focus of commentary, the following three categories were examined:

• **Local Issues**, such as formal accuracy, sentence structure, and wording.
  - The plural of fish is fish! You need to pay attention to tenses, as these are often incorrectly used in your work. Revise prepositions.

• **Global Issues**, such as content and organisation.
  - The details, that I have indicated by means of *, make your whole account come alive. Good Work!
• Larger Writing Context – This would include an emphasis on writing as a process, on the rhetorical situation, the specific demands of the assignment question, or on the student's development as a writer.
  
  • Don't you have any specific childhood memories? Your mindmap [in which students brainstormed various childhood memories] suggests otherwise. I like what you say but unfortunately it's off topic!
  
  • Please pay through [sic] attention to my comments, [sic] revise and submit this par [sic] for assignment 04, to be marked in detail.

1.3.6 Mode of Response

This aspect focuses on the way the commentary is framed. Indeed, 'the way we phrase our responses to students is just as important as what we actually tell them' (Krest in Straub 1996:234). Straub explains that 'different modes of response enact different roles for the teacher and exert different degrees of control over the student's writing' (ibid. 234). Straub's categories have been adopted and are listed, together with examples.

• Corrections
  
  • You spell this word - PRETENTIOUS. (Lazy! Haven't you got a dictionary?)

• Criticism
  
  • I am afraid that this is not an incident from your childhood but a comment on your childhood at large.

• Command - imperative form
  
  • Pay attention to instructions. Go over tenses in the Study Guide again. Edit your work more closely.

• Qualified Evaluation or Advice
  
  • Due to long sentences containing many thoughts, the meaning of what you say is not clear. Break up into short, simple sentences. Do not use high falutin (fancy) words such as 'intimidator'.

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Do you understand what you have written here? Read your work aloud to a friend before submitting it. If your friend does not understand what you have written, rewrite it until the meaning is clear.

Praise

I loved this! A different, vibrant, expressive account. Good!

Questions

How old were you when you saw this movie? Would a child be affected in such a manner?

A student's opening sentence: 'I was beaten by mother for not being loyal and she said I had no respect' evoked the following open questions – *When?*, *In what context?* and *Why?* The value of specific questioning can be seen in the student's revised version – 'It was on Saturday evening when I was beaten by Mother because I did not go to the shop where my sister had sent me to buy bread'. Later the lecturer asked 'what kind of lesson?' in response to the vague statement 'she gave me a lesson I will never forget.' The student was able to respond effectively although there is still a gap in logic between the final sentences: 'From that time I learned the lesson that I had to be faithful to my parents, sisters and brothers. I had to respect all people. I started to be loyal and to listen to my teachers. Now I am an experienced teacher'.

Reflective commentary

It certainly must have been a memorable day for you. Your last sentence is a little puzzling – was the teacher handsome or did he look very trustworthy?

Examples

*Use the Simple Present Tense to refer to an action that happens regularly: 'My mother goes to work every day'.

The Present Continuous Tense describes an action that is taking place now / at this present moment: 'I am marking your assignment now'.

The initial categories are more authoritarian, while the latter are increasingly facilitative and allow the student greater freedom. However, the order is fraught because of the complexity of the questioning and praise categories. Straub explains that whereas open questions promote freedom, in that they invite students to clarify or reconsider issues, closed questions 'imply an evaluation or indirectly call on the student to add certain information or consider certain text-based revisions' (1996:234). Praise is an even more complex category in that, as Straub explains, these comments 'place the teacher in the role of an appreciative reader or satisfied critic and obviate
the need for revision. Nevertheless, they underscore the teacher's values and agendas and exert a certain degree of control over the way the student views the text before her and the way she likely looks at subsequent writing' (ibid.:234).

1.3.7 Grammatical Structure of the Response

The issue of grammatical correctness is significant in two ways. First, it is vital that lecturers, particularly those teaching L2 students, remember that their writing serves the function of providing input for the learners. Second, it is unfair to reprimand students for flawed language in a comment that is itself far from grammatical perfection.

- **Full Statement** – The use of full, grammatically correct sentences is ideal, especially in intermediate courses where they serve the function of modelling formally correct sentences for the students.
  - *You tend to write long, run-on, conversational sentences instead of more formally constructed prose.*

- **Abbreviated form** – Here commentary is reduced to phrases or staccato-like comments. Abbreviations are used.
  - *Thoroughly revised!*
  - *Sentence structure and verbs!*

1.3.8 Positive / Negative

The research of Creber (1965), Lynch & Klemans (1976), Cardello & Corno (1981), Gee (1972) and Zak (1990), outlined in Chapter Three, indicates the positive attitudinal results of praise and the debilitating effect of criticism. Given the non-affirming nature of the Correction Code, it is thus important to establish the degree to which the global commentary is positive. The four categories are:

- **Positive Only**
  - *What a charming story! A very big improvement!*
Negative Only

• Your opening sentence is weak. Remember to punctuate your work. Use a dictionary both to check spelling and to ensure that you have used the correct word. Poor spelling creates a bad impression. One of the books prescribed for this course is a dictionary! Revise your ending, which is also weak.

Positive / Negative

• This is a very good paragraph, your story is very moving and you have expressed yourself clearly. Your biggest error is your misuse of tenses, especially the past tense.

Negative / Positive

• You have actually written about TWO incidents – your first day at school as well as the way the drought influenced your father. As you had to write about ONE incident only, you should have focused on one of the two incidents in detail. Your work, however, is good and your paragraph has been well written.

1.3.9 Global / Local Sequence

Research, such as that of Connors (1985), Connors & Lunsford (1993), and Zamel (1985) indicates that much response to student writing concentrates on local issues and tends towards error fixation. This section of the taxonomy seeks to identify both the attention accorded local / global issues as well as the sequence in which this is given.

Global / Local

• I can see that you are trying but you do not always write logically. Also you need to revise your verbs and be sure that your subject agrees with your verb.

Global Only

• You succeed in explaining how the experience changed your life, but the experience itself is not clearly described.

Local / Global

• Please revise the Past Ind. and the Past Continuous tenses, so that you are absolutely sure when to use each of these tenses. How does this incident fit into your life?
1.3.10 Length

If one considers the limited teaching opportunities open to Unisa lecturers, then the amount they write on students' scripts assumes a disproportionate significance. The length of comments was classified into units of ten, starting with a group consisting of comments comprising fewer than ten words and ending with comments in excess of seventy words.

1.3.11 Focus

- Effectiveness
  
  You managed to convey the suspense and excitement of this incident.

- Organisation
  
  Spend more time on the conclusion, explaining how this fits into your life story.

- Purpose
  
  The way you introduce your story (including the dramatic detail) makes the reader aware of how angry and disappointed you must have felt with yourself; but you do not actually evaluate the incident and tell your reader why it is significant in your life.

- Audience / Voice
  
  Remember your audience. Your tone tends to be far too casual. Never use the word 'kid' for 'child' in formal writing.

- Success in relation to the Question
  
  Your paragraph is quite well-written, Vusi. However, it is not really relevant to the set topic. You should have selected an incident that occurred when you were
a child, described it fully and explained why this incident is significant to you even today.

- Writers' Growth – Because of the fact that this was an initial assignment, there were no comments relating to the students' development as writers. However, even if this had been a later assignment, the reality of the high student numbers, combined with the distance-teaching context, would have made this unlikely. The closest example that could be found is given below:

  • I enjoyed reading this well-expressed, vividly recalled memory and I would like to encourage you to continue writing in exactly this way.

- Minor Issues

  • Please staple the assignment so that it reads like a book.

1.3.12 Overall Purpose

- Grade Justification

  • Your use of language, not the content of your work, has caused you to fail.

- Advice

  • 1. Please go through your paragraph again carefully and note the corrections as there are still many errors.
  2. Before you put pen to paper, always think carefully about exactly what thought or action you wish to describe. Then set it down in a short, simple sentence. After that read the sentence out aloud – how does it sound? Does it have a subject, verb and object?
  3. In your study book there are chapters devoted to the structure of sentences. Study these and do the exercises and self-tests.

1.3.13 Reader Impression / Reader Roles

- Interested reader – The term, derived from Tobin (1993), is used to describe a response style that is facilitative, collaborative, and student-based. It is an approach Flynn (1989) has termed 'feminine' and Danis has described as the role of collaborator / midwife / coach (1987:19).

  • Thank you for sharing this traumatic memory with me. You wrote sensitively – well done. Keep up the hard work.
• **Objective, judging role** – This is an approach that has been described as masculine (Flynn 1989) and as forensic, based as it is on analytic or symptomatic commentary.

  • Avoid using the word 'indeed'. It is unnecessary in both sentences in which you used it. Generally of a satisfactory standard.

• **Chagrin / Acrimony** – This is the impression described as 'disappointment brimming over into accusation and acrimony' in the Connors & Lunsford study (1993:215).

  • Rather short! This should have been the same length as the first version.

  • ONE paragraph of twenty lines. You were asked to write on ONE incident from your childhood, not the general circumstances of your growing up.

1.3.14 Form / Content

• **Form Only**

  • Revise word order and tenses. Use a dictionary to check spelling and the correct usage of words.

• **Content Only**

  • You have described your entire school career whereas you should have selected a specific incident.

• **Both Form and Content**

  • You have not explained why this incident is significant. You need to revise sentence construction. Use the past tense consistently when referring to past events. Watch your choice of words. Try to write short, clear sentences.

1.4 Findings

1.4.1 Axiological Orientation

The findings with respect to the axiological orientation evident in the global commentary are:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Formalist</th>
<th>Emotive</th>
<th>Cognitive</th>
<th>Socio-Constructionist</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>80% (formalist tendencies)</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>18%</td>
<td>2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8% (strongly formalist)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Table 42: Axiological Orientation**

Please note: In certain instances, in the tables that follow, the percentages do not add up to 100 because two cases are evident in different comments on the same script.
It is clear that by far the majority of the markers can be described as formalist in orientation. However, the 80% statistic represents the number of markers in whose commentary formal issues dominated their response. This tendency could be anticipated in an intermediate-level course, where the majority of students have severe problems with linguistic competence. However, only 8% could be classified as 'hardened formalists' in that the focus on the formal was accompanied by the impression of the marker as prescriptive, dogmatic, distanced and judgemental. The following comment serves to illustrate the point:

- 1. You were instructed to write ONE paragraph. See Tutorial Letter 101.
- 2. Use a dictionary to look up the meanings of words before you use them.
- 3. You must watch your subject/verb agreement and use the past tense.

The fact that only 4% of the commentary could be classified as emotive is surprising, bearing the expressive nature of the question in mind. Mitchell & Taylor (1979) have warned that an expressive axiology makes student vulnerable to criticism that can be interpreted as personal rejection. Yet in the exposed context in which the question places students, 80% of the markers have adopted a formalist approach even though the topic was constructed within an expressive paradigm. At the other extreme, there were instances where the marker crossed the line and served more as a therapist than an English lecturer:

- Thank you for sharing this harrowing memory with me, Peter. I'm sure you yourself realise that your parents were rejecting each other— not you, though you seem to have borne the brunt of the suffering.

- The sex act is natural and God-given. It is the culmination of the love between two people. If this incident [the student described his shock at seeing an old man and woman making love] worries you unduly, perhaps you should consider seeing your minister or a therapist.

A mere 18% of the commentary can be classified as cognitive as a result of its emphasis on accuracy of information and logic. Yet this is an area that requires attention as Practical English students need assistance in writing for academic contexts, a target community in which cognitive skills are indispensable. The following example was selected to illustrate the tendency towards an emphasis on the formal even in instances where the student would benefit from a cognitive approach:

- I grew up in a family of eight members. My father, mother, with six children— two sisters and two brothers

In this case the lack of logic was ignored but the fact that fragmentary sentences had been used was pointed out by means of a marginal comment.
Almost no attention is given to social issues. The single script (representing 2% of the 50-script sample) that could be classified as social constructionist in orientation was only indirectly so, in that it specifically prescribed Western writing patterns. This finding is supported by Schwegler, who claims that 'professional practices and assumptions have encouraged composition instructors to suppress value-laden responses to student writing and to ignore the political dimensions of their reading and teaching practices' (1991:205).

1.4.2 Focus of Commentary

The results in terms of the focus of the response are as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Focus</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Text-centered</td>
<td>82%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Author-centered</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reader-centered</td>
<td>36%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Subject-centered</td>
<td>2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Context-centered</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 43: Focus of Commentary

The fact that by far the majority of commentary is text-centered is directly linked to the formalist and cognitive paradigmatic emphasis of the markers.

1.4.3 Locus of Control

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Locus of Control</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Interruption</td>
<td>74%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interpretation</td>
<td>24%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Both</td>
<td>16%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 44: Locus of Control

The category of interruption, with its locus of control outside the reading process, is characteristic of a formalist, text-based approach that underpins its authority by means of external sources, such as dictionaries and grammatical tomes. A Reader-response mode favours interpretation, an approach adopted by 24% of the markers. In 16% of the cases the markers combined interruption and interpretation in the commentary, as the following example indicates:
Sample Comment

You were quite fortunate – you did not miss any lessons.

You were required to write only one paragraph (See Tut Letter 101).

Pay attention to the following:
1. Subject / verb agreement – for example: I was not I were.

2. I am confused when I read – You refer to some – Who are you talking about? Be specific – some pupils.

Check your spelling in a dictionary.

Table 45: Example to Illustrate Source of Authority

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Classification based on source of authority</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Interruption</strong> – authority gained from conclusions resulting from the reading process itself.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Interpretation</strong> – power inherent in instructions in <em>Tutorial Letter 101</em>.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Interpretation</strong> – authority derived from grammatical rules.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Interruption</strong> – authority based on the reading process itself.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Interpretation</strong> – external control in the form of a dictionary.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

1.4.4 Cognitive Level

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Dualistic</th>
<th>Relativistic</th>
<th>Reflective</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>68%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>14%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 46: Cognitive Level

The Unisa study findings support Anson's discovery that the majority – about three-fourths – of teachers in his sample group could be classified as dualistic, in contrast to the very small numbers that could be described as either relativistic or reflective in orientation. In a language-based course one could have predicted that there would be little evidence of relativistic thought, which would be far more prominent in a literary course. At the same time, it is disconcerting that 68% of the Practical English markers are modelling the lowest cognitive level on Perry's continuum, in contrast to the mere 14% who are promoting the mature, balanced reflective mode of thought.
1.4.5 Focal Point

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Local</th>
<th>Global</th>
<th>Larger Writing Context</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>78%</td>
<td>26%</td>
<td>38%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 47: Focal Point

The high percentage of commentary relating to local issues suggests that the marking done in Practical English tends to be detailed, focusing mainly on local issues, and is thus more controlling than it would have been if greater emphasis had been placed on global issues. With respect to the larger writing context, the commentary on all but one script concentrates on the degree to which the student had succeeded in meeting the requirements of the question. The single comment relating to growth as a writer read as follows:

• This is an interesting recollection. It could be improved if you spent more time checking your tenses and articles, but overall you write well and should continue to practise writing.

1.4.6 Mode of Response

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Correction</th>
<th>Criticism</th>
<th>Command</th>
<th>Advice</th>
<th>Praise</th>
<th>Questions</th>
<th>Reflective</th>
<th>Examples</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>72%</td>
<td>44%</td>
<td>32%</td>
<td>54%</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>12%</td>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 48: Mode of Response

Because the Correction Code allows tutors to identify and to rectify local problem areas, it is to be anticipated that the global commentary will deal with other issues. The decreasing trend (72%, 44%, 32%) in the Criticism, Command, and Advice categories is indicative of the bluntness of the commentary as the factors are ranked from the most to the least abrupt forms. This harshness was balanced by the fact that 54% of the scripts contained praise. There is a need for lecturers to make increasing use of open questioning, reflective commentary and specific examples. The latter three categories are evidence of active engagement in the sense that they represent a text-specific response and not a simple multi-purpose rubber-stamping.
1.4.7 Grammatical Structure of the Response

Parkinson & Mattson point out that markers frequently do not keep to the laws of grammar that they demand from the students and offer comments in sentence fragments, such as the ironic comment – 'not a sentence' (1993:28). Through the use of abbreviated forms, the lecturers also restrict the 'written input that can serve as meaningful intake relevant to the writing skills they are seeking to develop in their students. They are unequal partners in written interaction with students' (Pica in Parkinson & Mattson 1993:28).

Full, grammatically correct sentences were used by 90% of the Unisa lecturers. While none of the end comments in the sample group could be classified as abbreviated, 14% of the lecturers made use of abbreviations, such as, e.g., par, punt, etc, NB and of the symbols , : or . rather than writing out the terms in full. In the main, abbreviated forms and phrases were restricted to the marginal commentary.

1.4.6 Positive / Negative

The results in this category have been compared with those of Connors & Lunsford (1993), who evaluated the global commentary of 300 randomly selected scripts from a sample of 3000, that was randomly selected from a nation-wide American sample of teacher-marked, college-level essays. The remarkable similarity between the two sets of results is revealed in the table below:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Positive Only</th>
<th>Negative Only</th>
<th>Positive / Negative</th>
<th>Negative / Positive</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Unisa Study</strong></td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>32%</td>
<td>42%</td>
<td>14%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Connors &amp;</strong></td>
<td>9%</td>
<td>23%</td>
<td>42%</td>
<td>11%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Lunsford's Research (1993)</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 49: Positive / Negative

In both studies, the smallest group, comprising a mere 4% and 9% respectively, consisted of nothing but positive evaluation, what Baumlin & Baumlin (1989) term the rhetoric of praise or
of celebratory address. These findings are reinforced by Daiker, who quotes two studies in which the ratio was a consistent nine errors or problem areas to each positive comment (1989:104). The low statistics in this category reinforce Connors & Lunsford's conclusion that 'rarely can teachers keep themselves to completely positive commentary' (1993:210). In both studies the 'positive only' approach was restricted to instances where the student had been awarded very high marks, an indication that the lecturer felt that little could be done to improve the writing. In these cases comments such as 'Excellent; Fluent; Shows a very good and natural command of English. Well done' were the norm. This response did little to challenge the students, as the following quotations indicate:

- Above did not need editing. Signed by student. (25/25)
- As my mark was 24/25 I do not think that I can improve it to get 100%. Signed by student.

The low statistic in the 'positive only' category suggests that Zak's (1990) faith in an exclusively constructive approach, even in cases where the student's work is riddled with problems, is not shared by Practical English markers.

The next most rare category in both studies was the negative / positive one, termed *admonitio* by Connors & Lunsford (1993:210). Their statistic is 11% for this category, which is very similar to the 14% in the Unisa study. The pattern here is to begin with a critique of some aspect of the students' writing, which is normally a formal or mechanical aspect, and then move on to a more positive comment on the effectiveness of the paper, for example:

- *Always read the instructions very carefully – you had to write ONE paragraph. Avoid the use of abbreviations in formal writing. Your writing has potential.*

The 'negative only' category is what Baumlin & Baumlin (1989) refer to as the rhetoric of accusation and defence, the language of the law courts. It is primarily used, they claim, to justify a grade by forensically accusing the 'guilty text' (1989:176). In both Connors & Lunsford's study (1993:210) and the Unisa research the number of comments in the 'negative only' category was over double those in the negative / positive format, with the ratios being 11% to 23% in the Connors & Lunsford's study (1993:210) and 14% to 32% in the Unisa research sample. Daiker has attributed this negativism to the legacies of a punitive school tradition and believes that the term 'correcting' papers is indicative of the prevailing belief that it is the lecturer's duty to find flaws. Daiker goes so far as to state that 'there is no clearer embodiment of the negative and narrowly conformist values of the school tradition than the popular correction chart'
(1989:104-105) and proceeds to point out that in most correction codes, including the Unisa one, there is no symbol for praise or approval! In courses, such as Practical English, where the Correction Code is used, the fact that 23% of the comments contain only criticism serves to exacerbate the already non-affirmative climate. This needs to be addressed seriously, bearing in mind Hillock's discovery that negative comments have a detrimental effect on students' attitudes (1986:160-8).

In both studies the positive / negative response style proved the most popular format, probably because lecturers adhere to the 'by-now traditional wisdom about always trying to find something to praise in each student's work' (Connors & Lunsford 1993:211). In addition, prefacing criticism with an element of praise softens it. This pattern is so frequently followed by specific commands or suggestions, normally phrased in the imperative form, and more often than not focusing solely on surface-related problem areas that one could describe it as formulaic. Examples are:

- *Your account is interesting and well-narrated. However, please note that you were asked to write only one paragraph. Revise the use of commas.*

- *Your story is quite interesting but you have not explained why it is significant to you. You must not leave out words when you write your sentences. Use the simple past tense. Revise sentence construction carefully.*

1.4.9 Global / Local Sequence

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Global / Local</th>
<th>Global Only</th>
<th>Local / Global</th>
<th>Local Only</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>50%</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td>22%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 50: Global / Local Sequence

In both Connors & Lunsford's research and the Unisa study the majority of the comments begin with global remarks and go on to local issues. This sequence is in line with the positive / negative duality, as the examples given at the conclusion of the previous section indicate.

1.4.10 Length

The length of comments was classified into units of ten, starting with a group consisting of comments comprising fewer than ten words and ending with ones in excess of seventy words.
The findings were as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>-10 words</th>
<th>11 - 20</th>
<th>21 - 30</th>
<th>31 - 40</th>
<th>41 - 50</th>
<th>51 - 60</th>
<th>61+</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 51: Length

The average length of commentary in the Unisa study was 31 words, which, remarkably, is identical to the average in the Connors & Lunsford research. However, while the longest comment in the Unisa study consisted of 70 words, the Connors & Lunsford study boasted one comment of 250 words, with 5% of their sample group producing comments in excess of 100 words. In stark contrast, 24% of their sample had comments less than 10 words in length, many of which were reduced to terse phases such as: *Tense! Handwriting! Learn to type! Organisation!* In the Unisa sample three scripts (6%) had no comment at all. In these instances one can only echo Connors & Lunsford words:

> The portrait of teacher-student interchange painted by these numbers is one in which overworked teachers dash down a few words which very often tell students little about how or why their papers succeed or fail. The rarity of longer comments seemed to our readers to indicate not so much that teachers had nothing to say as that they had little time or energy to say it and little faith that what they had to say would be heard (1993:211).

### 1.4.11 Focus

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Effectiveness</th>
<th>Organisation</th>
<th>Purpose</th>
<th>Audience / Voice</th>
<th>Success in relation to question</th>
<th>Writer's Growth</th>
<th>Minor Issues</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Unisa Study</td>
<td>84%</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>18%</td>
<td>50%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>14%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Connors &amp; Lunsford</td>
<td>56%</td>
<td>28%</td>
<td>11%</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td>11%</td>
<td>8%</td>
<td>Not examined</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 52: Focus

As in the Connors & Lunsford study, the percentage of comments relating to effectiveness (84% and 56% respectively), dealt more with the lack thereof, as the following quotations indicate:
• You have not described an incident (happening) that occurred in your childhood that you still remember. Make sure that your answer is relevant to the question. Make sure that your subject and verb agree. Watch your use of tenses.

The harshness of the negative evaluation results in the perception of the reader in a distant, judging role.

One could anticipate that the Unisa study would have a lower statistic with respect to organisation than the Connors & Lunsford research, given that the latter examined essays while the Unisa inquiry explored a paragraph only. Nevertheless, the fact that only one lecturer from the sample examined commented on effective organisational patterns within the paragraph is indicative of a failure to achieve the expressed cognitive aims of the course.

Despite the fact that more than twice as many comments in the Unisa study related to the concept of audience/voice (18% versus 6%), the researcher was left with the same impression as were the readers in the Connors & Lunsford study, namely 'the audience for the writing was clearly the teacher, only the teacher, and nothing but the teacher, and thus most comments on audience outside of those parameters seemed redundant' (1993:212). This failure is partly attributable to the nature of the question. It would be preferable for lecturers to prescribe topics designed for a specific target community for whom they could then act as a surrogate audience.

Half of the comments contained references to the writer's success in relation to the question and the impression gained from the commentary was that teaching students to read and obey instructions is a primary objective. The statistic of 11% in the Connors & Lunsford study shows that this aspect does not receive such disproportionate attention in the contact-teaching situation.

The fact that in the Unisa study no commentary related to the writer's growth is indicative of the problematic nature of distance teaching. In a course where the student numbers are counted in thousands, the scripts are frequently documents devoid of history. In all probability the lecturer in a Practical English course would not have marked a particular student's work before, and, if he or she had, would most likely not recognise the student number, name and address on the front cover – the only identification available. At present, there is no way of determining the quality of the script in relation the student's past performance or of knowing if it represents progress in a particular area that was the focal point of tutorial comment in the previous
assignment. In contrast, 8% of the contact teachers in the Connors & Lunsford study were in a position to comment on their students' growth as writers.

During the research an additional category, not examined in the Connors & Lunsford study, was added, namely comments dealing with minor issues. Not only did 14% of the comments in the Unisa study deal with relatively insignificant irritants, such as students writing in the margin reserved for tutor commentary or exceeding the prescribed length, but the vexation was expressed so forcibly (by means of capital letters, underlining, or both, and compounded in certain instances by the use of exclamation marks) that the tone of the comment overall degenerated into chagrin and thinly-disguised irritation. For example:

- You were supposed to write only TWENTY LINES.
- Eeeee!!! So short! This should have been the same length as the first paragraph.
- Please do not write in the column in which your lecturer should make comments. See assignment question: ONE par!
- Please tear loose all pages. What would the title of your par be? Due to incorrect expressions, it is not clear what you wish to say.

While the last two comments are softened through the use of the word, 'please', the irritation relating to length in the first comment is totally unacceptable, given that the student's work in this instance is only seven lines in excess of the prescribed length and the assignment was written for Practical English, a language course designed to enhance writing proficiency. One marker went as far as drawing a line across the page after 20 lines and refusing to mark further, even though the passage was only fractionally over the prescribed length limit.

1.4.12 Overall Purpose

Whereas 28% of the scripts contained comments that could be classified as grade justification, by far the majority of comments (86%) focus on specific, ongoing advice. This formative attitude towards an evolving text was to be anticipated given the 'revision assignment' context.
1.4.13 Reader Impression

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Interested Reader</th>
<th>Objective, judging role</th>
<th>Chagrin / Acrimony</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>34%</td>
<td>92%</td>
<td>16%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 53: Reader Impression

In the Unisa questionnaire 13% of the students describe the primary role of the lecturer as that of interested reader. It is to the Unisa lecturers' credit that 34% of their commentary falls into this category because, in contrast to the judging role, this response style is facilitative, collaborative and student-based. The Connors & Lunsford study was less successful in this regard and reported a mere 17% of their lecturers adopting a Reader-response stance: only 24% of the papers made an attempt at engaging students and by far the largest portion of these were actually implicit criticisms on weak argument strategies. They conclude that teachers seem to be 'conditioned not to engage with student writing in personal or polemical ways' (1993:214).

By far the majority of comments in both the Connors & Lunsford study (83%) and the Unisa research (92%) can be described as fitting the criteria of an objective, judging role - traditional, directive, detached, authoritative and teacher-based. This is to be expected as the Unisa questionnaire indicates that it is a judging capacity that 80% of the students have come to regard as their lecturers' 'primary role'. This ties up with Schwegler's conclusion that 'the language of marginal and summative commentary ... is predominantly formalist and implicitly authoritarian' (1991:222).

In the Unisa study an unacceptable 16% of the comments fell into the 'chagrin / acrimony' category. Even worse was the fact that chagrin was described as the 'primary emotion' readers felt when they studied the comments made in the Connors & Lunsford study:

These papers and comments revealed ... a world of teaching writing that was harder and sadder than they wanted it to be – a world very different from the theoretical world of composition studies most readers hoped to inhabit. It was a world ... whose most obvious nature was seen in the exhaustion on the parts of the teachers marking these papers .... A teacher with too many students, too many papers to grade, can pay only small attention to each one, and small attention indeed is what many of these papers got (1993:214).
1.4.14 Form / Content

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Form</th>
<th>Content</th>
<th>Form &amp; Content</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>84%</td>
<td>56%</td>
<td>42%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 54: Form / Content

The disproportionate emphasis on form is in line with the findings outlined in Chapter Three, such as the research of Connors & Lunsford (1993), Leki (report at 1986 conference – in Leki 1990:62), Spingies (1990) and Zamel (1985). Although the findings indicate that 56% of the tutors attend to content in their global commentary, the primary emphasis is on the relation of the content to the requirements of the question rather than being in line with Santos’s research (1988), which indicates that content-subject professors desire teaching within the cognitive paradigm – with emphasis on lexis, organisation of ideas and logic.

1.4.15 Conclusion

The overall impression that emerges from this study is that the marking is very uneven. There are examples of genuine engagement and specific, caring commentary:

- You have made some improvements to this paragraph. For example, you changed 'jump the road' for the idiomatically correct phrase: 'crossed the road'. You also included a final sentence emphasising the significance of the incident and explaining why your scar is a constant reminder of the lesson you learnt.

However, there are also comments that reveal negative attitudes and outmoded approaches. First, not all markers have a mature concept of revision as involving more than just correcting grammar. A tutor who writes 'Had you just corrected the mistakes you made in your first paragraph, you would have got more marks' is promoting the concept of revision as editing, encouraging an immature writing style and placing disproportionate emphasis on the grade.

There are examples of the sarcasm and high-handedness that the students complained about in the questionnaire. The response quoted below is the even more unacceptable given the tutor’s own spelling error:

- Although I note that the spelling of German Shepherd still eludes you, I can see that you have made an effort to be more succinct [sic].
There are instances where the commentary, such as the statement 'You will be able to write well when you cut down on these mistakes', is illogical. Also, there are examples of vagueness in the tutors' responses, such as the statement that 'there are still improvements to be made', without any indication of where or what these might be. At times responses are based on a faulty knowledge of Applied Linguistics, for example, 'Try to read English aloud as often as possible so that you can hear the correct expression of the language'. There are lamentable instances where the marker has not read the question. A student's 19-line paragraph elicited the comment: 'Rather short! You should write at least a page'.

Yet these are isolated horror stories. The worst problem is that in general the marking approach adopted is outdated. With rare exceptions it is a formalistic, text-based approach that is reliant on external sources for its authority, promotes low-level cognitive thought patterns, and concentrates on local, form-related issues. The dominant mode is criticism, mainly relating to lack of effectiveness and the inability to follow instructions. The impression is of a distanced judge. Fortunately over half of the markers use praise and the positive / negative pattern, with its associated global / local model, is followed. However, in many instances this is merely a formulaic rubber-stamping – an expedient pattern that allows many scripts to be processed in a short period of time.

1.5 Individual Marking Styles

The experiment outlined in the previous section provides a general overview of marking patterns employed in Practical English. However, detailed analysis of individual marking styles is necessary to enable lecturers to step back and take an objective look at their commentary. This would also be valuable for teacher training. Two examples have been included to illustrate this point.

---

6 The three-phase pattern reads as follows:
ONE: The account is interesting (or other favourable generalisation)
TWO: but (or synonym such as 'however', 'unfortunately' ...) – identify main flaw
THREE: list language problems.
1.5.1 First Example

*Your spelling is often careless – check every new word in the dictionary.*
*Your punctuation is often careless – look up the rules.*
*You write well here and there, which shows that you can do it if you try!*

The taxonomy allows one to classify this comment as a formalist, text-based response in which the focus falls on local issues. The locus of control is firmly in the Interpretation camp, revealing a dependency on grammatical rules and dictionaries. There is no consideration of how daunting it would be for the student to look up each new word in the dictionary and to review grammatical tomes. The final sentence contains a reader's response founded on assumptions about the author. In this instance the repetition of the word 'careless', together with the phrase, 'if you try', shows that the marker views the student as lackadaisical. The commentary is slightly above average in length (37 versus the 31 word average). The focus is on the effectiveness, or rather primarily the lack thereof, and the negative / positive, local / global format has been used. However, the praise ('You write well') is partially negated through qualification ('here and there') and then it is twisted into criticism ('which shows that you can do it if you try'). The implication in the final clause is that the student is careless and that the flaws are a result of indifference. The focus falls on mechanics, in this instance on the relatively minor issues of spelling and punctuation. This is an example to support the finding in the questionnaire that students get more feedback on mechanics than they regard as useful. The same applied to excessive feedback on spelling, an aspect students believe they can correct without assistance.

The judging role has more than a hint of chagrin as the tone in this comment is harsh, exhausted, impatient and punitive. The criticism / imperative format of the opening two sentences, combined with the emphasis on form, reveal a ruthlessly judgemental attitude that must be extremely discouraging. The student's response, which was simply to rewrite the original paragraph, indicates this. The dualistic thought inherent in the commentary is evident in the problem / solution format adopted in the opening two statements. In addition to the ruthlessness of the lecturer's criticism, she is guilty not only of dualistic thought, but also of inadequate knowledge of Applied Linguistics (learning rules does not always result in improved proficiency). Two of the instructions are decidedly vague. Where are 'the rules' to be found? Where exactly can the 'here and there' be located? If the student cannot identify the instances in
where he or she wrote 'well', how can these serve as a model for future writing? Most distressing of all, however, is the implication that the student is an outsider and will remain so until spelling and punctuation improve.

1.5.2 Second Example

You have not answered this question correctly. You have to describe a specific incident that happened in your childhood. Describe this incident in detail. Your paragraph will then be personal. You have written about the significance of Christmas to people in general. Read instructions. Do EXACTLY what is required.

In this example, the impression of the reader as critical, accusing and dogmatic is enhanced through the use of capital letters and underlining, the written equivalent of shouting. The imperatives that conclude the commentary are formulated harshly as non-negotiable orders, leaving the student no option but to alter the paragraph totally. The emotive element, evident in the expressed desire for a 'personal' response, is contradicted by the brutality of the tone. This text-based response falls into the interruption category, as its authority lies in the formulation of the question and the need for the student to follow instructions. The dualistic nature of the response is so extreme that the tone is almost militaristic. The global commentary is restricted to the question requirements. The criticism / solution / imperative format is a negative-only response style. The focus is on the student's purpose and the emphasis is on advice, but it is also a form of grade justification. The fact that the objective, judging voice degenerates into acrimony detracts from the sole redeeming features, namely that the comment is long (49 words) and is expressed in full sentences.

1.6 Samples of Various Approaches

In this section of the thesis scripts have been selected to illustrate various approaches that are employed and to demonstrate the effect these have on student revision.
1.6.1 Marking as Editing – Response Reduced to a Handwriting Exercise

In the example that follows the revision process has been reduced to a handwriting exercise. This is because the marker has acted as copy editor and, in response, the student has simply rewritten the original including the corrected forms. One needs to ask what the student has learnt from this exercise. One possible message that this approach conveys is the misconception that 'writing is basically the production of a perfect text, that the quality of the product as an artifact is the key. This then stifles students' intellectual and creative capacity and prevents them from ever becoming effective ... writers' (Gennrich 1997:24-5). A further misapprehension is that, apart from minor editorial alterations, the text is perfect.

Original Draft

Incident from my childhood.

I entered formal school when I was five years old. I was afraid to go alone to school. At home, I was staying with my eldest brother who was doing the same class as mine (5A). Usually my brother used to take the cattle for clipping once a week. I used to dress my mother as if I was going to school. I turned off on the road and hide under small trees so that no one would see me. I waited for him on the way to school until he came from the clipping and went with him to school. When the teacher asked why we were late, we told her that we were from the clipping of cattle.

Write in full

WW abd

Art

inc T

T sp

T

awk

Key: * First Mark
** Second Mark
*** Average Mark

The examples that follow have been photocopied. However, in this instance, only the first section of this paragraph has been printed, because the point can be illustrated without having to reproduce the entire document.
### Revised Draft

```
Incident from my childhood

I entered formal school when I was five years old. I was afraid to go alone to school. At home I was staying with my eldest brother who was also doing sub standard A. Usually my brother used to take the cattle for dipping once a week. I used to dodge my brother as if I was going to school. I turned off the road and hid under the small trees so that no one would see me. I waited for him on the way to school until he came from the dipping and went with him to school. When the teacher asked why were we late we told her that we were coming from the dipping of the cattle.
```

### Tutor's Comments

The comment on the revised version is reflected in the improved marks given by the markers to both form and content, despite the fact that the content is unchanged. The form has undoubtedly improved, but to what degree is this improvement an example of extreme accommodation on the student's part? Evidence of the mechanical nature of this process is to be found in the fact that in instances where the lecturer has overlooked errors, the flawed original has simply been repeated. The compliment on the revised edition suggests that, in the lecturer's opinion, surface revision is all that is required. If lecturers reward an editing approach, how can one expect students to adopt a more mature view of the revision process?

---

* 8 + 7 = 15
** 8 + 7 = 15
*** 8 + 7 = 15
F
1.6.2 Extreme Formalism

Fishing at Phongola river.

It was Saturday early in the morning when we went for fishing with my cousins. Thursday we felt that we were ever excited before leaving our homes. We intended to go fishing at a very dangerous wide and deep dam which we had never seen at the area that day. They said that dam was seen at the area that was not flowing and surrounded by trees. We arrived there shortly after and do fishing.

Furthermore, five minutes later we had heard that there was something coming behind us. Suddenly we felt scared and scared at that coming sound. Moreover, we saw something which was we were unable to define, any even now I really do not know how may I define it. We then all feared simultaneously for the whole day from approximately at about 09:00 until 17:00 afternoon and went back home. This memory is important because I saw something which I had have ever seen in my life.

You had to write ONE paragraph, twenty lines in length. Your expression is very poor. You tend to use too many commas. Please revise Units 1 - 9 in Workbook 1, paying close attention to the structure of the sentence.

* 5 + 4 = 9
** 5 + 4 = 9
*** 5 + 4 = 9
There is no question that this marker is painstaking, conscientious, and has taken time to respond to this script. The editorial alterations are detailed and the global commentary of 40 words in length is above average. This is an example of the work of a marker with a marked formalist axiological orientation that finds expression in a text-based response style. The marking code has been used to its fullest capacity, the result being an example of the 'battle-field' syndrome with extensive circling, underlining and inserting, including some editorial alterations. However, one must concede that the impression in the original assignment is softened through the extreme neatness of the editorial alterations. The focus is entirely on local issues – formal accuracy, sentence structure and wording. Yet there are content issues that beg commentary. The writer should make some attempt to describe the 'something' that caused such consternation, the logic surrounding the fainting episode and the fact that they were all thus affected requires scrutiny, the use of 'approximately' together with the exact times is irrational, and the section describing what the author learnt is very superficial and could be developed. Overall, the emphasis remains entirely on effectiveness – or rather, lack thereof – with respect to grammatical control and the inability to follow instructions with respect to writing a single paragraph.

The roles modelled are those of an editor and objective judge, although there is a hint of chagrin in the emphasis, achieved by means of underlining in 'one paragraph'. The overall purpose is to provide corrections and advice. In this regard, the lecturer's use of full, grammatically correct sentences serves as a model for a student who has problems with linguistic competence. This is an example of Greenhalgh's 'interpretation' category, as the locus of control falls outside the reading process and relies on grammatical correctness and the authority inherent in Units 1-9, Workbook 1. In its emphasis on rules and formal correctness, the response style is directive and strongly dualistic. The underlying thinking is unambiguous – the student's linguistic competence is flawed and this can be corrected through extensive editing, the modelling of grammatically-correct sentences and a section of the course that deals with these formal issues.

The modes of response are correction, criticism and command, albeit softened through the use of 'please'. The 'negative only' response style has been adopted, and this, together with the extensive use of the marking code, has resulted in the impression of a reader who is critical, controlling, and primarily evaluative. In Straub's words such a lecturer has 'a definite and rather narrow agenda for the writing, and she clearly imposes this agenda on the student writer. She
does this in spite of the fact – or because of the fact – that she gives little attention to the content of the writing. Her goal is not untypical of many another writing teacher: to get a student to produce clean, formally correct prose' (1996:226). The revised version provides the opportunity to determine the success she has achieved in this regard.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Revised Draft</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Fishing at Phongola river  
I clearly remember the day when I was fishing with my cousin at Phongola river. It was Saturday and the morning when I went fishing with my cousin. We intended to fish at a very dangerous, wide and deep dam. It was surrounded by tall trees. We arrived there after thirty minutes. I heard that there was something coming behind us. We felt scared and soon gazed at moving reeds and saw something which I did not know how it was structured. Even today I do not think I can define nor describe about how it was looked like. However, we then fainted for the whole day from approximately 09:00 to 17:00 and went home. I think we should have died of this but the Lord helped us. This memory is very important because I saw something which I had ever seen before. |

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Tutor's Comments</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

This is much better!

<p>| | |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>*</td>
<td>8 + 8 = 16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>**</td>
<td>7 + 7.5 = 14.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>***</td>
<td>7.5 + 7.5 = 15</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Both markers of the revised script awarded higher marks for both content and form. In addition, the second marker awarded this script the symbols that indicate an improvement in terms of both form and content as well as a pleasing response to commentary. Although the improvement in
form is undeniable, once again, grammatical flaws that were not corrected in the original remain, one example being the missing article in the opening sentence. The sentences used in the revised paragraph have been rewritten incorporating the marker's editorial changes, with the result that the revised version contains far more grammatically correct sentences. Yet one needs to ask to what degree this exercise is valuable.

The content, too, has improved. In this regard, this script serves to illustrate the point that, without any content-related commentary, students are able to make content improvements. In this instance, the irrelevant detail relating to the student's 'other activities' has been omitted, probably as a result of the instruction to keep to the prescribed length limit. The revised version is now closer to the Western norm that prohibits the digressions evident in the opening paragraph of the original.

The improved average mark from 9 to 15, the first marker's comment, 'This is much better!', and the second marker's codes indicate that this revision has been accorded the official stamp of approval. Yet one needs to ask, first, to what extent this is an example of appropriation of student writing and the imposition of the tutor's idealised text; and, second, if the student's response is an example of extreme accommodation in which revision is reduced to editing. If the student had incorporated the editorial changes made to the revised version in a further draft, then one would be justified in questioning how much of the student's work remained in this now, virtually grammatically flawless version.
1.6.3 Question in Emotive Paradigm – Formalist Response Style

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Original Draft</th>
<th>Tutor’s Comments</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>MY CHILDHOOD INCIDENT</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>This incident took place during my childhood while I was doing my primary education. At that period of time I was seven years of age. This incident is about the death of my father, who was killed by a mob of people who turned themselves as comrades. This emanated from a misunderstanding among some family members who joined force with the people from outside. My father was responsible in the leadership of the Nguni tribe, his role was to inspect and direct the Sequence of hierarchy who was going to be succeeded by who. There was one person who wanted to be taking while he doesn’t belong to the family. My father disallowed such an action. The person therefore plotted the death of my father and he was burnt into ashes. This memory will not leave my mind simply because it happened in my presence.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Please tear loose all pages! What would the title of your par be? How does this fit into your life? Remember that a . not a , ends a thought / sentence. e.g. royal family. My father... Due to the fact that you use high faluting language, the meaning of what you say isn’t always understood. Please simplify your thoughts / sentences. Please revise and submit par for Assignment 4, to be marked in detail.

* 5 + 4 + 9
** 6 + 5 + 11
*** 5.5 + 4.5 + 10
The example serves to illustrate the point of the injustice of setting a question within the emotive paradigm that encourages a student to describe, through the eyes of a seven-year old child, his father's death at the hands of a mob, and then responding with a formalist approach. The inappropriacy of the grammatical corrections screams in this context: The response to the statement that a person 'plotted the death of my father and he was burnt into ashes. The memory will not vacate my mind simply because it happened in my presents' was that the 'in' is deleted and 'prep' is written in the margin, 'presents' is underlined and 'sp' is written in the margin! In addition to the negative impression relating to a formalist response style, discussed in section 1.6.2, the overriding impression, as a result of the emotive topic, is one of a ruthless, uncaring judge for whom grammar is literally more important than life itself. The impression is that minor issues relating to the tearing loose of pages and punctuation are more worthy of comment than is the hideous nature of the crime described. How can one ask of such an act: How does this fit into your life? There is also dubious modelling in that, in the marker's very injunction to the student to use plain English, she has used the term 'high falutin'! It is relatively simple to provide some emotive response, as the following two comments in response to other harrowing descriptions indicate:

- I am so glad you are getting help.
- A terrible story! What an awful memory.

The student's revised draft shows a marked improvement in content, with the specific detail making the horror of the incident even more apparent, once again an example to give flesh to the statistic resulting from the empirical study, that the students can still improve their content by 3.6% without any tutorial intervention. The extreme formalism adopted in response to the student's revised version can only be conveyed in photostat form. The negative effects of this response strategy are exacerbated as a result of the emotive nature of the topic. This is an example of the 'pool of blood' syndrome, described by Gennrich as follows:

This is an extreme form of surface feature marking. Essays that look like a murder scene tend to shock and discourage students leading easily to the development of affective barriers to writing. Moreover, students will not go

---

8 In her analysis of the response of markers to Practical English students' personal narratives, Dowling makes the same point under the heading: 'Can you get your life wrong?' (1996:28).

9 The department's only defence is that this person who was on the external marking panel, is no longer employed as a marker.
through and analyse every error that is marked to understand and correct it. It is more likely that the script will be hidden away in shame (1998:25).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Revised Draft</th>
<th>Tutors' Comments</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>My Childhood Memories</strong></td>
<td><strong>See opposite!</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The only childhood memory which is still clear in my mind is a terrible one. It took place around the vicinity of Helipruit when I was eight years old and during my primary education. The dispute amongst the royal family members started. They then joined forces with outside people who framed themselves radically and assassinated my father. My elder brothers and I armed ourselves with axe and spear. We were then joined by some relatives who fought to defend my father. My mob broke into carrying my father's body. They were chanting and singing. My brothers, my relatives and myself jumped to helping our weapons trying and tried to stop them, but all was in vain they ganged up and disarmed us and drove us back. My father's body was burned to ashes. They screamed and laughed. I shouted at him, humiliated me and threw at me. I was taken to hospital.</td>
<td><strong>See opp</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Your edited version should be almost exactly what your original version was – with only the mistakes reworded.

* 5 + 5 = 10
** 5 + 7 = 12
*** 5 + 6 = 11
C
Her comments provide evidence of a reductive view of revision. Her phrase 'see opp' stands for 'see opposite'. On the page opposing the one on which she is writing, this marker provides detailed grammatical instruction, such as the sample given below:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>N.B.</th>
<th>see</th>
<th>sees</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Poor</td>
<td>Poor</td>
<td>Poor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I saw</td>
<td>I wrote</td>
<td>I went</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Future</td>
<td>Future</td>
<td>Future</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I shall see</td>
<td>I shall write</td>
<td>I shall go</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

N.B. She says she is going. (Present) \(\text{She learns all by heart}\) \(\text{She said she was going (Past)}\) \(\text{She said that she had been (Past)}\)

The phrase, 'learn all by heart' represents a regression to the Audio-lingual approach to teaching. Recent developments pertaining to language acquisition have escaped this marker.
1.6.4 Conflicting Instructions

The following example has been included to illustrate the confusion that results when there is a detailed form-related response to a paragraph where the content still requires such major revision that the student needs to be sent back to the thinking stage.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Original Draft</th>
<th>Tutor's Comments</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>When I start to attend school, it was a different time in my life. Before I was not attending school, my life was interested to go to school. My parents told me that I am still young for going to school. When I began to attend school, I was happy about that but when the years went on, I started to neglect the school. My friends were encouraging me to be absent, but my parents they look after me. I will never easily forget my parents' teachings. Of my parents have stopped to encourage me to be educated, I was going to be uneducated. My future was going to be doomed. I am what I am today because of my parents. In my life, I will never forget my childhood, how my future is bright.</td>
<td>T</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>not cap voc ank</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>p T</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>You have written about your school days in general. You should have written about ONE specific incident from your childhood. Is there one incident that stands out above your other school memories? Your expression is very poor in places and needs to be rephrased.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>* 6 + 6 = 12                                                                             <strong>6 + 4 = 10</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>** 6 + 5 = 11                                                                            *<strong>6 + 5 = 11</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

An obvious conflict exists between formalist marginal comments, suggesting that only surface-level alterations are necessary, and the global comment that indicates that an entire re-think is
needed. The student has opted to follow the marginal comments and has simply rewritten making minor editorial changes. This response is anticipated by Gennrich:

Students who receive both surface feature corrections within their text as well as feedback to do with the way they have communicated their thoughts, may be confused as to what the marker requires. As a result, they are likely to respond to the surface level feature corrections, because they are easier to correct in a cloze fashion. This is likely to cancel out any benefit of the feedback designed to assist students to reformulate their ideas for clarity and logic (1998:24).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Revised Draft</th>
<th>Tutor's Comments</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>When I started to attend school, it</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>was a various time in my life.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Before I was not attending school. My</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>parents told me that I was still</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>too young to go to school. When I</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>began to attend school, I was happy.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>about that, but when the years went</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>on, I was not holding the interest</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>of schooling.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My friends were encouraging me to be</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>absent, but my take care after me. I</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>shall never easily forget my parent's</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>teaching. If my parents would have</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>been stop to encourage me to be</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>educated, I would have been uneducated. My future would have been doomed. I am what I am today because of my parents. In my life I will never forget my childhood, now my future is bright.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

One specific incident should have been discussed. Expression is very flawed.

* 5+4 = 9
** 6+4 = 10
*** 5.5+4 = 9.5
The result of this conflict of focus is that the revised version is worse than the original. The commentary on the revised draft is simply a paraphrase of the original comment, indicative of the fact that little has been gained from the tutorial intervention in this instance.

1.6.5 Responding Within the Cognitive Paradigm

Unlike marking that is viewed primarily as a means of assessment, didactic marking has the aim of communicating knowledge and is frequently content-orientated in that 'tutors are likely to comment on content, style, structure and the validity of the arguments that students present' (Jarvis (1978) in Roberts 1996:97). Both approaches are limiting. In contrast, the primary aim of Socratic marking is to facilitate learning. Jarvis (1978) believes that 'the highest level at which a tutor can function ... is that of facilitator [who encourages] two-way communication or "dialogue" between their students and themselves and thus challenge[s] and stimulate[s] a student, so that deeper level learning and commitment occurs' (ibid.:97). Only one marker in the research sample could be classified as Socratic. She responded consistently within the cognitive paradigm. Hers is an example of genuine engagement with a text in which she challenges content, questions vagueness and lack of supporting detail. The following example has been selected to illustrate her approach.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Original Draft</th>
<th>Tutor’s Comments</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I remember how hard my mother tried to give me a better life. My father was one...</td>
<td>article</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>At the age of eight I couldn’t come to terms...</td>
<td>write out</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How old were you? How did it happen? Where had he been?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tense “up then?”</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How does this relate to your story?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cliché: How does this relate to your story?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>It seems too general.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Although the primary emphasis is cognitive, the marker has adopted a flexible approach that includes elements of both the formalist and the emotive approach, as the grammatical alterations and the question, 'How does this relate to your story?' indicate. The technique is not excessively formalist. Certain errors, such as 'competible' and 'competitants', have been overlooked. Here the value of the sentence is being questioned and thus it can be argued that it is inappropriate to place too much emphasis on formal correctness in this particular instance where the student needs to be referred back to what Sommers refers to as the 'chaos' and Semke describes as 'talking to the paper.'
The number of questions is indicative of what Gennrich terms 'dialogic feedback', which she defines as a means of responding to student writing 'as a reader would, by asking pointed questions at key points, as a listener would in a dialogue' (1998:27). The impression created is of a critical, demanding responder, who is modelling the confusion felt by a reader when inadequate detail is supplied. The aim of this response strategy is to model an example of critical reading for the students. In Gennrich's words, the intention is to assist students 'to learn to reflect critically on their own writing, as they develop their own form of internal dialogue ... and become increasingly independent as writers' (1997:29). Baughey & Goodman's research with Biochemistry students at the University of the Western Cape in 1994 reveals the value of questioning. They found that while both the summative comments at the end of essays relating to structuring and the need to develop a coherent argument and the statements in the body of the essay are unhelpful to students, direct questioning in the body of the essay appears to be effective in facilitating revision by assisting students to clarify their understanding of concepts (in Dison 1997:278).

This response style falls into the category of interruption, because its authority lies in the reading process itself. This is a true Reader-response style – if the student's work contains gaps, in that it is vague or fails to make logical transitions, the perplexity that results is expressed in the marginal comments. The cognitive level is reflective. This is an example of the mature, more personal, content-orientated style Siegal describes as being characteristic of experienced responders (1982:307). Although she is not prescriptive, this lecturer is prepared to take a stand, for example, when she states that the script contains too much reflection and not enough detail.

The modes employed are criticism, correction and reflective commentary and the focus is on local and global issues, although the global commentary is restricted to content issues. The response contains both full and abbreviated forms. Of interest is the fact that the correction code has been modified in the instance in which the word 'article' has been written out in full.

In contrast to the previous examples where the teacher is dominant, here the power issue is more complex. The reader is obviously a sophisticated, initiated member of the target community and thus has authority. However, her open questions transfer power to the student and invite a response. The student proves that she is worthy of this trust. In her revision she answers each
of these questions and in the process improves the paragraph beyond measure. This progress has
been achieved through an approach that is primarily critical. However, the criticism is
counterbalanced by the fact that this is an example of genuine engagement with a script. There
is no rubber-stamping in that the remarks are specific to this particular piece of work. However,
although the response contains only criticism, there is no evidence of chagrin or irritation despite
the fact that this particular marker has admitted that she is frequently exasperated\(^ 10 \) when she
responds to scripts but that she believes that this level of interaction is necessary, particularly in
instances where the topic is personal. The student's response shows the value of genuine
engagement.

\(^{10}\) This irritation could be related to the criticism of dialogic feedback, namely that it is time-
consuming (Gennrich 1997:29).
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Revised Draft</th>
<th>Tutor's Comments</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I remember how hard my mother tried to give me a better life. My father</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>seemed to have been a person who cared little about everything. When I</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>saw him for the first time I was eight years old. My mother contacted him</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>and asked him to come and see me. He came to my home where I had lived all</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>my life with my mother. We were strangers to one another. He asked me to</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>sit next to him, and he started telling me how he had left my mother and</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>went to live with another woman. When he mentioned that my mother's face</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>went pale because, I thought to myself, she felt too embarrassed to tell</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>me herself. He regrets not raising me because he doesn't know what it's</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>like to be a father. Since then I used have always had this negative</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>attitude towards men because I viewed them as liars. Sometimes I think</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>women should not marry, life is hard without proper adult care.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

A sad and understandable story, quite competently told. Quite an improvement.

* $7 + 7.5 = 14.5$
* $7 + 6 = 13$
* $7 + 6.5 = 13.5$

In contrast to the original marker, this lecturer responds partly as empathetic reader but also as copy editor. The student's response to feedback invites praise. This script serves as an example of how true engagement can result in a positive response from a student.
2. Conclusion

A frequent criticism of distance education has been that it is a 'packaged approach to education, underpinned by a behaviourist model of teaching and learning' (Roberts 1996:95) and much of the marking examined does little to challenge this negative perception. Indeed, this chapter has demonstrated that the primary response strategy of the majority of the Practical English markers is formalist. This conflicts with the cognitive, process-orientated approach adopted in Practical English. The result is a text-based response style that has its locus of control outside the reading process in that it relies on the authority inherent in dictionaries and grammatical rules. This results in a dualistic cognitive orientation that stresses formal correctness above the more complex global issues or the larger writing context. The emphasis is on the effectiveness of the text and this places the tutor in the role of objective judge. This approach impacts negatively on the lecturers, as the frequent examples of chagrin indicate. Students are subject to a range of injustices that include a formalistic approach to a question set in the emotive paradigm, to confusion relating to form and content revisions given at the same time and to marks that are justified on the basis of linguistic competence but that actually test a hidden agenda – the student's adherence to the norms of Western discourse.

There is a patent contradiction between the Practical English course content and the axiological orientation of the assessment that cries out to be addressed. There is an urgent need to find solutions for responding to writing in the distance-teaching context that will bring the marking ethos in line with the theoretical orientation of the course. This elusive goal and its attendant challenges is the objective of Chapter Seven.
Chapter Seven:

Conclusions and Recommendations

If the artist does not perfect a new vision in his process of doing, (s)he acts mechanically and repeats some old model fixed like a blueprint in his [sic] mind (John Dewey, quoted in Gennrich 1998:16).

Three questions relate to the existential levels of any problem and demand thorough investigation:

- What is happening now?
- In what sense is the situation problematic?
- What can be done about it? (Van Heerden 1993:296)

With respect to response strategies, the first two issues have already received attention and thus only a brief discussion of the main findings will be presented in this chapter. However, the final question requires comprehensive exploration in order to assist lecturers to break away from old blueprints, comfortable and expedient as they are, and enable them to adopt the 'new vision' Dewey demands.

1. What is happening now?

This thesis has focused on the response strategies of lecturers to the writing of Unisa's Practical English students. In an attempt to explore the question 'What is happening now?' this thesis has moved from overviews of theory and research in the field to a three-fold examination based on the learners' texts, the students and the lecturers involved in this teaching context. This area of focus is in line with Huot's argument that 'assessment practices [should be based] within specific contexts, so that raters are forced to make practical, pedagogical, programmatic, and interpretive judgements' (1996:559) for a specific discourse community.

The Unisa experiment was designed to test the relative effectiveness of four experimental response strategies open to the lecturer in this specific distance-teaching context. The experiment is unique in the huge sample size, the distance-teaching context and in the incredibly high significance indices achieved. The study investigated the following hypotheses:
- Response to student writing can have a positive influence on writing.
- Some response strategies are more likely to produce a positive effect than others.
- Some strategies are more suited to a distance-teaching context than others.

The researcher believes that the experiment provided support for the hypothesis: Response to student writing can have a positive influence on writing. Each of the experimental marking strategies resulted in statistically significant improvements in the revised paragraphs in all the categories tested (content, form and overall improvement). The fact that this was also true for the control group supports studies such as Matsuhashi & Gordon (1985) and Fathman & Whalley (1990), which show that students are able to improve their writing without any tutorial intervention at all. However, one cannot overlook the fact, established in the questionnaire, that students resent a 'no comment approach' and frequently incorrectly assume that their original draft is flawless. The problem is compounded by the fact that students struggle to identify errors.

The improvements recorded in the experiment were in terms of the revised draft alone. Thus the experiment does not test if any specific marking approach resulted in improved proficiency over a period of time and does not refute the studies cited in Chapters Three and Four, which assert that, in terms of providing evidence of increased competence, the labour involved in marking is questionable. It is the researcher's belief that any attempt to establish such a link is misguided as response style forms a minor part of any student's total language learning environment. In addition, over a period of time it is virtually impossible to control the other factors that impact on language proficiency.

The experiment also supported the hypothesis: Some response strategies are more likely to produce a positive effect than others. The order of effectiveness established in terms of both content and 'total improvement' was as follows: Correction Code (A), Taped Response (D), Self Assessment (E), Minimal Marking (B), Control Group (C). The sequence remained constant for form improvement, with the exception that the positions of Minimal Marking and Self Assessment were reversed. The experiment demonstrated clearly that increased salience in the indication of errors results in higher form-related improvements in the revised draft. Throughout the experiment the following sequence – Correction Code, Minimal Marking, Control Group – was maintained in terms of form improvement, thus revealing that the labour involved in the
more salient error-correction methods bears fruit in terms of improved formal capacity in the revised draft. However, while Minimal Marking has a slight benefit in terms of promoting formal improvement over the Control and Self Assessment groups, the method is not as effective as studies such as Haswell (1983), Hyland (1990) and Lisman (1979) might lead one to anticipate. Throughout the experiment the improvements with respect to form outstripped those relating to content. This suggests that intensive tutorial intervention is more suited to the final editing draft, while content improvement can be achieved through less labour-intensive means.

The thesis provided indirect support for the hypothesis: *Some strategies are more suited to a distance-teaching context than others*. In this regard, the most significant finding is that students benefit from self assessment, particularly in terms of content improvement. In addition, the students who have the confidence to use the approach are able to improve their content more than students whose work was assessed using the other, more labour-intensive marking methods. This includes those marked by means of the correction code. However, in terms of form improvement, the correction code and the taped response are still slightly more beneficial than self assessment. However, overall, the first three options (Taped Response, Correction Code, Self Test) were very close, within 0.4% of each other.¹ Thus, in terms of 'total improvement', when students use their self-correction brochures, the three methods are virtually on a par. The fact that students do not resent a self-assessment approach contrasts with their antagonism when work is returned without tutorial commentary. Thus the least labour-intensive method – returning scripts unmarked – should be rejected in the light of student opinion. The experiment showed that students can use self-assessment brochures to improve their work. However, in order to prevent students from being discouraged by the approach and simply resubmitting virtually identical work, the benefits of self assessment need to be explained. The method also serves to promote independence and counteract the dependence on tutors that the questionnaire revealed to be a characteristic of the less able students. These benefits make the method attractive for the distance-teaching context.

¹ When students who had submitted virtually identical drafts were excluded from the study, the sequence in terms of overall effectiveness was as follows: Taped Response (D), Self Assessment (E), Correction Code (A), Minimal Marking (B), Control Group (C). See page 162 of this thesis.
The labour-intensive methods, namely the taped response and the use of the correction code, although effective, also caused some confusion. One needs to acknowledge that the majority of the lecturers' formalist approach to taped response is a negation of the potential strength of the medium which allows for detailed discussion of complex, discourse-level problems. The experiment was thus flawed, as the tapes could have been used to far greater advantage. From the year 2000, Unisa will implement a modular, semesterised system. This will have the effect of cutting the number of assignments and will make the adoption of detailed response methods, such as the Correction Code, increasingly problematic as a result of inadequate time to return scripts to the students because a module is completed in six months from registration to examination results. This effectively reduces the time to three or four months of study. It is in the light of this development that the findings with respect to the effectiveness of self assessment become invaluable.

A flaw in this thesis lies in the fact that the project was originally conceived as an experiment to determine the relative effectiveness of four experimental marking strategies. However, as the investigation progressed, the researcher became aware of a chasm between the theoretical orientation and response strategies adopted in Unisa's Practical English course. This resulted in a shift in emphasis and necessitated an additional hypothesis: *The response strategies adopted by Practical English markers represent a regression to the traditional, product-orientated approach to writing. As a result, there is a marked discrepancy between the teaching and evaluating practices in the Practical English course.* The researcher believes that she has been successful in proving this hypothesis. The thesis has demonstrated the growth from the formalism inherent in the instructions for the 1986 assignment to the process-orientated approach adopted in the 1995 revision assignment. The Practical English course as described in Chapter One has since undergone a further metamorphosis in its provision of modules designed for specific purposes in an attempt to meet the demands of the various discourse communities for which the students are writing. However, the marking has remained fixed in a formalist mode more suited to the 1986 course content and this aspect requires transformation.

Unisa is not unique in this regard. In their research at the University of Natal, Parkinson & Mattson discovered a 'disjunctive relationship that exists between the knowledge that is "transmitted" and the knowledge that is "evaluated"' (1993:19). Likewise, in her work with
students at the University of the Western Cape, Van Heerden describes a situation that mirrors that of the Practical English:

Lecturers may be under the impression that they are implementing the rhetorical approach to writing ... In actual fact their classroom practice may show that they have a traditionalist product orientated approach to writing. Another instance where a discrepancy arises is when their teaching and evaluative practices differ substantially. Students are disempowered as a result, as they continue to approach writing as a linear activity .... Since no demands are made on these student writers to engage in writing tasks where ideas are shaped and reshaped while writing is in progress their composing ability remains at a basic level (1993:302).

The present disjunction between current writing theory and evaluation methods is illustrated in the following table:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Current Writing Theory: Writing is viewed as:</th>
<th>Evaluation Techniques: Writing is viewed as:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>a meaning-making process focusing on the discovery of ideas</td>
<td>an editing process that emphasises form</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>a dialogic process designed for a specific audience</td>
<td>an exercise that restricts readership to the lecturer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>an activity that signals membership of a particular discourse community</td>
<td>a test to determine the degree to which the student can function in the academic discourse community</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>a recursive process that involves drafting and moves backwards and forwards through various stages</td>
<td>a product that is an end in itself</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>postponed attention to surface-level correction</td>
<td>synonymous with formal correctness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>an enterprise that does not always require evaluation</td>
<td>an activity to be graded</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 55: Comparison between Current Writing Theory and Evaluation Techniques

Outcomes Based Education (OBE), the policy at present being implemented throughout South Africa, is a large-scale attempt to rectify just such discrepancies and unify teaching and assessment.

During the course of the investigation additional problems were identified. In line with numerous research studies quoted in this thesis, Practical English lecturers focus almost exclusively on surface-level problems and on the textual function of student writing to the detriment of the ideational or interpersonal aspects. This remains the approach even in the case of the taped response – a method that invites a Reader-response style and provides the opportunity for
detailed discussion of complex issues. These response strategies remain static despite the body of inquiry dating back to Briggs (1913), Lyman (1929), and Seely (1930), that cautions against a formalist orientation. The fact that research at the close of the century, such that of Dison (1996), Parkerson (1993) and the Unisa study described in this thesis, echoes the early findings is testimony to the truth of Dewey's words (quoted at the beginning of this chapter) and indicative of the fact that teachers are repeating response patterns that are no longer in step with current writing theory.

The reasons for this regression are easily identified. Formalism is an enticing option because by concentrating on surface-related issues scripts can be processed swiftly, a characteristic that has financial implications for external markers who are paid per script. An editing approach is not as demanding as genuine interaction or engagement with a specific text. In contrast, response to content and structure is both challenging and time-consuming. This characteristic makes the formalist approach appealing to inexperienced, lazy or insecure markers. In Parkinson & Mattson's words, 'when faced with essays which seem inadequate in more important ways, but that are difficult to "unravel", markers may resort to noting surface errors rather than deeper, meaning-related problems' (1993:24). To compound the problem, research has indicated that students demand form-related feedback and thus lecturers adopting a formalist approach can argue that they are meeting expressed student needs. In addition, the lecturers who respond to student writing are frequently members of English Departments, a discourse community that places undue emphasis on formal correctness.

The use of the correction code exacerbates the situation as this promotes a superficial editing approach to response to student writing. While the Unisa study has shown that this is the most efficient means of bringing about an overall improvement in the students' writing and that students respond positively to the method, it has also revealed that some students are confused by the codes. The situation is aggravated in that the global commentary, which should then relate to more complex cognitive issues, is frequently formulaic and emphasises formal correctness. Yet the temptation to take short cuts will remain for as long as overburdened lecturers are required to function as the all-purpose surrogate audience for student writing.

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2 These original documents were not consulted. The reference is from Gennrich (1997.16)
2. In what sense is the situation problematic?

Not only are response strategies out of step with current writing theory, but the form-fixation encourages characteristics associated with inexperienced writers, such as premature closure. In addition, a dualistic cognitive mode in which language is either right or wrong is modelled. This promotes the view of the lecturer as authoritarian and distanced. The power structures inherent in the traditional authoritarian model of education are retained and the fact that 'the best learning is ... most likely to happen where the distinction between teacher and learner is blurred' (Gennrich 1998:22) is disregarded.

The challenge is to bring response strategies into line with the cognitive axiological orientation of the course, in the process encouraging students to adopt the strategies of experienced writers. At present a flawed 'one-size-fits-all' approach is used in which the marking approach remains constant regardless of the nature of the writing task. This technique is a 'one-reader-fits-all' method, where the lecturer takes the place of a diverse range of people who can provide valuable input. Students receive coded commentary that they frequently do not understand and are unable to prioritise feedback as they have no indication of the relative gravity of the diverse range of problems indicated. In fact, the formal emphasis reflected in the vast numbers of grammatical issues coded encourages the view that accuracy is the primary objective, the key to the all-important grade. An apposite sequence of activity needs to be worked out for each script. Whereas there are times when superficial polishing is all that is required, the majority of scripts require rethinking. If students simply edit, then any flawed logic inherent in the original draft remains unchallenged. The fact that content and formal comments are given as they occur in the script confuses students. In the majority of cases they solve the problem by ignoring complex instructions and by adopting a word-for-word, cloze-type editing approach. There is little individualisation of response to scripts and valuable opportunities for genuine engagement are lost.

In the Christian faith, the majority take the wide way in preference to the narrow, demanding route that leads to salvation (Matthew 7:13-14). This parable is also applicable to the writing context where both lecturers and students prefer not to be challenged. Lecturers make copious comments, fill scripts with corrections and round off the process with a formulaic rubber-
Students, in turn, adopt cloze-like procedures, polish surfaces and all relax – secure that they have fulfilled their relative tasks. This approach does not challenge students cognitively and encourages immature writing strategies. In the writing context 'salvation', in the form of mature, flexible, efficient writers, remains elusive.

3. What can be done about it?

This chapter seeks to answer the third question by describing the 'narrow way' to salvation, the way that will confront obstacles and provide optimal conditions for growth. First, the convenient marking blueprint that for so long has enabled lecturers to process scripts with a formulaic efficiency that is far removed from genuine engagement, has to be challenged. The issues of audience, transparency, appropriacy, ownership, emphasis and the timing of intervention require attention. Lecturers need to be trained in order to make them effective responders and viable means of lessening the marking load should be implemented. The assessment and teaching programmes need to be integrated and all means possible have to be sought in order to counter the anonymity of scripts in their present form.

3.1 Audience

Teaching and evaluating in a manner that acknowledges the nature of writing as a collaborative social act is particularly challenging in the distance-teaching context. In this regard, the viability of self assessment and peer collaboration needs to be investigated. This interaction is not only a prerequisite in terms of the Communicative Approach, but is also a feature of Outcomes Based Education (OBE), which requires students to interact with other learners and a wide variety of audiences from both familiar and unfamiliar contexts. There is a need to identify readers other than the overburdened educator and to move away from lecturers serving as all-purpose surrogate audiences.

This thesis has not focused on OBE because the empirical study was conducted in 1995, prior to the introduction of OBE in South Africa. All university qualifications have to be registered in OBE format with the National Qualifications Framework by June 2000. This approach should serve as a further extrinsic motivation for matching teaching / learning and assessment criteria. In addition, it should assist in making education more transparent.
3.1.1 Self Assessment

The need for and effectiveness of self-monitoring have been widely acknowledged. The most significant finding of the Unisa study was that if students can be persuaded that self-assessment is beneficial, then this method of feedback is as efficient a means of achieving an improvement in a revised draft as are the more labour-intensive Correction Code or Taped Response. In addition, the Unisa study has demonstrated that students do not regard a self-assessment approach in the same negative light as they view a script that has been returned unmarked. The fast turn-around time is vastly beneficial, particularly in light of the modularisation of courses. Self-assessment impacts positively on the power differentials in the response situation in that the students' status is enhanced when they share responsibility for the learning outcomes. In fact, where possible, students should negotiate assessment criteria in advance with the lecturer. Where this is not feasible, assessment criteria should be stated prior to the writing task to enable students to assess their own work and to make the process as transparent as possible. This places students in a position where they can review their own learning outcomes. Self-assessment also counters student dependence on the lecturer (as revealed in the questionnaire) by forcing students to take responsibility and become independent. In addition, this self-reliance should impact positively on other learning situations.

Students require training in the skill of reading their own writing. At present, reading skills are taught in isolation from writing skills in the Study Guides. Certain Lessons contain excellent material relating to vocabulary building, key words, text mapping, the identification of main ideas and critical reading. Thus students are taught to analyse texts, to interact with texts and to view the parts of the text in relation to the whole – but these skills are taught without any reference to the students' own writing. When assignments are set, students should be required to transfer the skills learnt in the reading section to their own writing. This can be achieved by asking students to write and then posing a question. Any of the following tasks could serve this purpose:

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Underline all key words in your paragraph. Now use these key words to express the main idea of your paragraph.

Provide a mind map of your essay.

When you have completed your essay, draw a flow chart to illustrate your writing.

List two facts and two opinions in your essay. Do you believe that you have given adequate support to substantiate your opinions? List the arguments you have used in this way.

Find one factual and one emotive statement in your essay. Explain what you hoped to achieve by using the emotive language.

Write down the key arguments that you have provided in the passage.

When you have completed a writing task, try to correct as many errors as you can yourself. Identify the paragraph you regard as the strongest.

Identify difficulties you had with the passage. Award yourself a mark. Justify your mark.

Use your flow chart / mind map to assist you to identify your weakest paragraph. Explain what is wrong with it and rewrite it.

The material each student generates in these exercises becomes the source of individualised activities and the whole editing / redrafting process, laid out in the assignment, becomes personal. In evaluating their writing students will develop their responsibility. In terms of OBE, the cross-field critical outcome achieved in this manner is organising and managing oneself and one's activities responsibly and effectively. In addition, requiring students to apply critical reading skills to their writing has implications for response strategies because it encourages the lecturer to concentrate on cognitive issues such as the structuring of the argument and the degree to which the student has been successful in achieving his or her stated intentions. In this way power shifts to the student. This change is essential as 'writing and reading are flip sides of the same action ... every writer must learn to be her own critical reader' (Warnock 1989:70). The aim is not only to aid students to 'develop their writer- and their reader-selves ... [but also to] help students confront themselves in the mirrors of their own writings' (Warnock 1989:63). This approach fosters the ultimate aim of writing instruction – independent and self-sufficient students who have the confidence to revise in the fullest sense of the word.

### 3.1.2 Peer Evaluation

Peer evaluation, also termed peer feedback, peer response, peer editing or peer critiquing, is in line with the OBE's aim to promote teamship. This cross-field critical outcome is defined as enabling students to work effectively with others as a member of a team, group, organisation or community. The Unisa questionnaire revealed that 78% of the Practical English students in 1995
had a positive attitude towards teamship in the form of peer evaluation (and one might argue that
this figure might have increased if its benefits had been outlined to them). Peer response counters
many of the negative attributes associated with tutorial intervention. First, the fact that student
response groups can be regarded as unique discourse communities, with the authority to generate
their own rules and the obligation to operate within these structures, shifts responsibility for
learning back to the students. Second, Van Heerden explains that responsible peer response
assists students with the ideas and content of their writing (1993:304). This counterbalances the
formalism so characteristic of lecturers' response styles.

One of the most significant benefits of peer review is explained in Nystrand et al.., who found
that their students, like those in Practical English, view their lecturer readers chiefly as judges
and increasingly regarded 'revision as a matter of editing and tidying up texts ... [because] their
focus was mainly on lexical and syntactical concerns' (1989:212). For them editing and revision
were almost synonymous. In contrast, 'students writing for one another increasingly viewed their
readers less as judges of their writing and more as collaborators in a communicative process ...
Increasingly these students treated revision as a matter of reconceptualization' (Nystrand et al.
1989:212). In this way the lecturers' debilitating form-related emphasis is challenged. In
addition, Nystrand et al.'s group became more positive in their attitude towards writing and came
to view the process as a means of balancing the writer's purpose with the reader's expectations.
The value of peer response is not in question5 but the challenge is to find viable means of
implementation in the impoverished distance-teaching context.

3.1.3 Unisa Learning Centres

A contact-teaching opportunity exists in the form of Unisa's Learning Centres. Here students are
given the benefits of contact both with their lecturers and their peers. At present tutors operating
at these centres work closely with the course designers of the modules that they teach. Tutors'

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A detailed assessment of the benefits of peer response is outlined in articles such as Connor &
training should include instruction designed to enable them to provide constructive feedback and to make use of the contact situation to facilitate peer evaluation.

3.1.4 Study Groups Throughout the Country

A further contact opportunity exists in the form of the lists, provided on request, of students living in the same area who are registered for a particular course. Students need to be encouraged to obtain these lists, take the initiative and form small study groups throughout the country. This will promote independence, allow genuine interaction and give students the opportunity to respond to each other's work. Individuals in remote areas, who have no contact with other students, should be encouraged to consult friends or family members.

3.2 Transparency

To date the problem has been that feedback is frequently the only way in which rules and conventions of the academic discourse community that have been internalised by the lecturers are communicated to the student who has to crack the code in order to achieve success. However, the move in OBE is towards increased transparency. It is no longer acceptable to evaluate students in terms of criteria that are self-evident to initiated members of this discourse community but not to the culturally-diverse student body they are paid to serve. Lecturers' expectations must be brought into the open and students should be given the necessary cognitive scaffolding so that they can apply norms with respect to referencing and structuring of arguments.

In the case of self assessment, the evaluation criteria are given with the assignment. This is a further endorsement of the self-assessment approach used in the Unisa experiment because the formulation of the brochure demands that criteria are made apparent and are expressed in terms that the students can understand. In Unisa's revised English 1 course (ENN101-D), the general assessment criteria are outlined at the outset of the course while more specific, assignment-related ones are given for each assignment under the heading 'what we'll be looking for' (ENN101-D Tutorial Letter 101 for 1999:15; 18; 22). Here instructors have selected specific criteria and have made these the focus of a single assignment.
3.3 Ownership

If one considers the implications in terms of power relations of the various theoretical positions, then the Current-Traditional paradigm would be located on the power side of the continuum, whereas an Expressivist approach allows the maximum freedom for the student. The present formalist orientation in Practical English lecturers' response styles implies a high level of lecturer control that contradicts current learner-centric pedagogy. Thus throughout the assessment process, the lecturer has to be aware of the danger of appropriating student writing and develop strategies to promote independence.

Even within the current evaluative practices used in Practical English, there are techniques that can be employed to redress power imbalances. First, students should be accorded the right to accept or reject suggestions. Another approach that shifts power away from the lecturer is the requirement that students provide 'quasi-theoretical comment[ary] for the right hand margin' (Grundy 1995:10). Next to the introductory paragraph a student could write, for example, 'Opening sentence is designed to attract attention and to indicate the subject of the essay'. This approach forces students to develop their metacognitive skills by formulating their writing objectives. A vital power shift occurs in that the lecturer has to respond to what the student intended to accomplish with the writing. By requesting students to identify areas they believe require attention, the tutors' responses will also be more likely to address the students' needs. The introduction of peer and self assessment also has a major benefit in terms of transferring responsibility and ownership to the student.

3.4 Innovative Approaches

It is clear that in the distance-teaching context all available means must be sought to provide additional input for students that does not make demands on the lecturer. For example, if the aim of responding to student writing is simply to assess proficiency, then the viability of less labour-intensive means, such as multiple-choice questions, needs to be investigated. In Lombard's (1988) study, for example, she compared the validity and reliability of an objective measuring technique in the form of multiple-choice questions and subjective measuring of an essay-type question. She found that, although the objective test lacked face validity and credibility among
language teachers,\textsuperscript{6} it is a reliable and valid means of testing writing proficiency. She concludes that it is 'a highly effective external moderating device where large groups of students ... are to be examined' (1988:ii). She believes that there is no empirical reason why multiple-choice cannot be used as a test to measure writing proficiency. Lombard determines that 'on comparing the correlations between the two variables (the multiple-choice test and the writing test), it can be concluded that the multiple-choice test is at least as good a measure of writing proficiency as is the highly valid and reliable measure of writing proficiency – the writing test used in this investigation' (ibid.:40).

She believes that an even higher correlation would have resulted had the multiple-choice questions included more items specifically related to writing skills. She cites three additional studies (Godshalk \textit{et al.} (1966), Breland & Gaynor (1979) and Karzmarek (1980)) in support of her conclusion of the multiple-choice test as a 'highly effective external moderating device where large groups of ... students are to be tested' (Lombard 1988:41). A further factor is the relatively low cost involved in this form of testing. The implication of these research findings for responding to student writing in the distance-teaching context is far-reaching. There are methods that are as effective as the time-consuming, labour-intensive essay marking and these should be employed if the reason for the marking is simply evaluative, designed to provide a proficiency assessment. When lecturers respond to scripts on an individual basis, they should have higher ideals.

Students should also be encouraged to operate computers. This will assist students in achieving the outcome of using science and technology effectively and critically. Already, as the questionnaire has shown, many students have a positive attitude towards computer-marked assignments. This finding is reinforced by research such as that of Mullett (in Roberts 1996:98), whose distance-teaching students commended three aspects of computer-generated responses. These are the fact that the comments are always legible, are more detailed than written comments and are in a tone which is always friendly, patient and encouraging. This serves as an indirect, but nonetheless severe, indictment of the type of response students receive from tutors.

\footnote{This finding is supported by Hinofotis (1981), who concluded after interviews with 25 ESL professionals in the United States that the primary objection to indirect testing measures lies in its lack of face validity (in Stanfield 1986:225).}
Sommers's work with the 'Writers' Workbench' also clearly demonstrates the value of computer programmes, which remove the drudgery of identifying surface errors with a calmness and efficiency that eludes even the most dedicated educator.

Computer technology has moved beyond simply evaluating grammar, spelling and syntax. One such development is a computer programme, called the 'Intelligent Essay Assessor',\(^7\) which uses mathematical analysis to measure the quality of knowledge expressed in essays. This is made possible by feeding into the software programme up to 10 million words on a subject. In a test of the programme involving 500 psychology students at the University of Colorado, a high correlation was recorded between marks received by the programme and the tutors: 'It was as if two humans were reading the essays' (Highfield 1998:18). This programme has the additional advantage that students who submit essays to a web page receive immediate feedback. When students were given the choice of this or a tutor-marked assignment, all chose the computer option.

As computer literacy increases, as it will, even among Unisa's least privileged students, learners should be encouraged to make use of tools such as spell checks, the thesaurus and grammar programmes that accompany word processing packages. The questionnaire showed that 44% of the 1995 Practical English students were open to the concept of CAI (Computer Aided Instruction). It is the author's contention that this figure will increase as students become more familiar with the computers installed in the Regional Centres. Unisa has the technology. 'Students On Line' is already in place. Introducing a programmes such as the 'Intelligent Essay Assessor' is an obvious next step. Professor Schutte, formerly of Unisa, formulates the urgency relating to this issue:

If we wait for the present paper-and-classroom age to save education in South Africa, we are going to wait very long before something happens – the country just does not have adequate resources and fully-trained teachers to do it. We at Unisa have to leapfrog from the paper age into the electronic age in order to ensure better teaching and training for our students (1995:3).

\(^7\) The 'Intelligent Essay Assessor' is described both in Highfield (1998) and on the Internet in a press release entitled 'Computer Software Grades Essays Just As Well As People, Profs Announce' at the address: http://lsa.colorado.edu/essay-press.html (30 November 1998).
Schutte demonstrates how increasing involvement is demanded from the student as the teaching moves from the first single-medium paper stage, through the multimedia phase where a diversity of media, such as Taped Response, are used to deliver the course, through to the interactive phase where direct interaction between students and lecturers is possible via educational technology such as computers, the Internet and satellite TV; and finally to the fourth phase which combines face-to-face contact teaching methodology with electronic distance-teaching methods (ibid.:3-4). In terms of response strategies techniques from all four phases should be employed. Written response can be given, the tape recorder can be used for a more intimate interaction, the fully interactive facilities of computer technology should be employed and all response should be reinforced in the study package.

Lecturers have to be aware that the electronic revolution presents massive challenges to received notions of autonomous, free-willed, stable, uniquely creative "authors" and equally autonomous, free-willed, stable, uniquely creative "readers" or "responders". Indeed, in cyberspace, reader / responder and author / writer often merge, voices collapse and multiply, often belonging to no single source – or even to a person at all, all familiar notions of textuality and especially of where meaning resides are called into question. In many ways the traditional labels of "reader", "writer", and "text" don't even name useful distinctions anymore (Lunsford 1995:4).

Allowing students to negotiate meaning in this context will be invaluable to their development as thinkers and writers.

3.5 Appropriacy of Feedback

There is a tendency for a fixed set of response strategies to be used for all writing. The danger inherent in the research conducted for this thesis is that one method will be identified as the 'most efficient' and will be adopted across the board for all assignments. Ideally, the response strategy should vary in accordance with the stage of the writing.

- For a first draft, the reading should be reassuring and sensitive. Practical suggestions for improvement need to be made and the reader has to ensure that the text is not off topic and that the content is sound. The response style demanded need not be restricted to the lecturer. E-mail facilities and taped responses are ideal in this context. A response can

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be given by other students or by members of the target audience for whom the students are writing.

- In a second draft, there needs to be increased evaluation, stringent questioning of content, argument and logic. However, the emphasis should still fall on the clarification of ideas. It is at this stage that response by educators trained in language and writing is most beneficial because intervention should take place during the writing process, not before or after it. In this way commentary will take the form of intervention in the process rather than evaluation of the product.

- In the final stages, response should still be encouraging but the emphasis should be on accuracy and polishing for publication. It is here that the form-related improvement that can be achieved by means of the Correction Code is most valuable. The input of language experts is helpful at this stage, but one should not overlook the fact that computer programmes can be used if editing is all that is required.

Throughout the process, self-assessment questions are a valuable means of facilitating revision. For the first draft, questions such as the following would be beneficial:

- Underline your main idea. Do you think this is the best place to introduce this concept?
- Identify the topic sentence of each of your paragraphs.
- What is your purpose in writing? Do you think you have achieved this goal? If not, how could you improve your draft?

During the second phase questioning should become more intense. In the final stage students should be directed to edit carefully. This could be achieved by requesting that students underline pronouns and ensuring that the reference for each pronoun is clear. They could check sentence and paragraph lengths, eliminate repetition and use a thesaurus and a dictionary to improve vocabulary and spelling. They also need to check each bibliographical reference.

Response strategies also need to be specifically tailored to suit divergent writing tasks. In the case of descriptive writing, the outcomes tested are the ability to provide information, to focus on facts and to use descriptive adjectives. This task invites a cognitive axiological orientation although, in this instance, there will be an element of formalism inherent in the language emphasis of the task. By contrast, an argumentative piece of writing should test if the writer is
capable of formulating his or her point of view and of providing information to support this stand. Ideally, the work should also include arguments that could be raised to counter the position taken. In any such writing task, an exclusively formalist or emotive axiological orientation is out of place. The ideal would be a combination of cognitive and social-constructionist stands. The latter would be particularly relevant if the writing task were tailored for a specific discourse community. An example was an assignment given in 1998 to English Communication for Law students. They were given the following checklist:

Did you
- write on the topic?
- introduce the arguments?
- use different paragraphs for each main point?
- link ideas?
- where possible include support for arguments in the form of properly referenced quotations from other sources?
- conclude the arguments?
- use appropriate connectives?
- use the present tense?

Students were also informed in advance how marks would be allocated and told that general language problems would not be considered. The main criteria would be whether they had used the type of language required for argumentation. In contrast to the example cited above, an emotive axiological orientation would apply in the case of narrative writing composed in the context of a course that has a communicative orientation. In this instance, the students' skill at sequencing events and using chronological signposting could be the focus of the task.

There is no easy solution to the question of which response strategy to use. Each task, with its stated outcomes, needs to be evaluated individually to enable the lecturer to identify the most appropriate axiological orientation and the ideal reader for the task. When an assignment tests students' ability to adopt a process approach to writing, then criteria relating to the Communicative Approach are appropriate. However, when the assignment tests understanding of the ESP guides, in the sense that the writing is designed for specific genres and audiences, then a portfolio approach is more suitable. To add to the problem, most tasks benefit from a combination of approaches and an element of eclecticism is a prerequisite for success. It is thus vital that lecturers receive adequate training.

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8 Portfolios are discussed in Section 3.9 of this chapter.
3.6 Training

Parkerson states that 'giving successful feedback is not an automatic skill. As much as students have to learn to write well, tutors have to be trained how to give effective and valuable feedback' (1993:261). Cumming (1990) showed that only two decision-making behaviours, 'editing phrases' and 'classifying errors' accounted for 90% of the total number of behaviours reported in his experiment (1990:38). Thus markers have to be trained to expand their range of behaviours and become more self-reflexive. Training is needed to help markers to envision the situation of the student writer and to direct their reading to key criteria. This sentiment is echoed by Paxton (1995:197).

Markers need to be made aware of students' desires with respect to marking. They could be given a summary of the components of effective composition instruction, such as that drawn up by Cole et al. (1986) after discussions with students and lecturers at the Open University. Students require:

- respect;
- fair and objective grading;
- explanations and justifications of grades as well as an account of the significance of the grade;
- a clear indication of how they can improve;
- a sympathetic and supportive tutor;
- encouragement and reassurance, but that this is balanced with honesty;
- positive comments, not only negative, critical ones;
- specific comments rather than vague generalities;
- constructive criticism with references to course material;
- full comments that can be used for revision;
- clearly expressed, legibly written comments;
- an invitation to respond;
- that the stronger student is challenged, not just congratulated;
- a quick turn-around time and that the assignment is returned at least before the next is due (Cole et al. 1986:(16-17)).

Markers could then be asked to evaluate the extent to which their marking satisfies the student desires identified in both in Cole et al. (1986) and in the Unisa study. A checklist of criteria would be invaluable to lecturers, who would then be reminded of the larger goals inherent in response to student writing.
Does the commentary support characteristics associated with effective writing, such as the need to revise beyond the word level?

Does the response style provide an example of reflective cognitive engagement or is it restrictive (either dualistic or relativistic)?

Does it foster creative, independent thinking?

Does it promote the development of ideas?

Does the response give students the freedom to challenge ideas?

Does it oppose the culture of silence and encourage students to find their own voice?

Does the commentary allow the student to maintain self-esteem?

Is there any way lecturers from other disciplines can be encouraged to work in collaboration with the language experts to give guidance to students on how to write in that discipline?

Is it essential that the lecturer responds or could the purpose be served by a wider audience?

Has the communicative effectiveness of the writing been emphasised?

Is the student able to differentiate between the serious and the less dire problems that have been indicated?

Has the most efficient means of revision been identified for the student?

Are the discipline-specific requirements of the discourse community for which the student is writing clearly explained? (Paxton 1993:132)

Are all the comments text-specific? (ibid.:132)

Is the response directed at the student writer rather than at the written product? (ibid.:132)

Does the commentary intervene in the process? (ibid.:132)

Have 'unhelpful stock phrases' been avoided? (ibid.:132)

Have the 'the one-word-marginal, whether negative or interrogative, such as Why?, How?, or Rubbish! that only indicates that the student has gone wrong but not how or what to do about it' been avoided? (Cole et al. (1986:19)).

Should the student be referred back to the thinking stage? If so, what method (freewriting, clustering, crazy contrasts, title fights) will be the most beneficial?

Has the student considered the audience? If not, would an audience questionnaire be helpful?

There is a need to promote self-awareness by requiring lecturers to evaluate their response styles. Parkinson & Mattson have recommend that lecturers be encouraged to study their own responding behaviour by keeping log books that record the types of responses made and the students' response (1993:20). Self-knowledge can also be enhanced through training responders to use a taxonomy for evaluation of their commentary, such as the one developed for tutorial evaluation in Chapter Six of this thesis. In this way lecturers will become aware of their axiological orientation, the focus of commentary, their locus of control, the cognitive level their writing mirrors, their attitude towards local and global issues and the way they treat form and content. They will be in a position to assess how positive or negative their comments are and to determine if they use a range of modes of response or if they have a limited repertoire. They will
be able to evaluate the grammatical structure of their commentary and consider the extent to which it provides comprehensible input for the students. They should evaluate their overall purpose and be critical of the reader roles they employ. Lecturers also need to be informed of the findings of research into response strategies and should be alerted to the pitfalls identified in Chapter Six, such as reducing responding to editing, the dangers of extreme formalism and particularly of adopting this approach when the question has been set in accordance with an emotive axiological orientation. Lecturers need to be assisted to separate form and content so that instructions do not contradict each other. Samples of successful interaction, such as the example given in Section 1.6.5 in Chapter Six, could be provided and lecturers should be trained in asking open questions. In addition, lecturers need to conduct student questionnaires in order to identify instances in which student opinion contradicts current writing theory and to ensure that they are addressing the perceived needs of the students.

3.7 Integrating Assessment and the Teaching Programme

Wiggins observes that the 'constant failure to receive good feedback is a legacy of defining education as "teaching" and assessment as "testing" after teaching' (1993:187). In time the shift to OBE should overcome this problem because, in this paradigm, a qualification represents the achievement of the learning outcomes set out in a learning programme. The qualification is a demonstrable achievement of a planned and purposeful combination of learning outcomes. Course material and assessment are irrevocably linked.

Another means of achieving this unity in the present Practical English course would be to incorporate the marking symbols and exercises relating to these into the Study Guides. The first step would be to identify codes that are omitted from the Correction Code but that form part of the teaching programme. For example, the following codes should be developed to indicate signpost word omission:

- $S/Ch$ – Chronological Signpost Word
- $S/ C&E$ – Cause and Effect Signpost Word
- $S/ Com$ – Comparison Signpost Word
- $S/ Con$ – Contrast Signpost Word

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The next step would be to include instructions to assist students to self-correct if they find one of these symbols in the margin of a returned assignment. In the *Study Guide*, after the section on Chronological Signpost Words, the following instruction could be given:

**Assessment**

_The code S/Ch means that you have left out a Chronological Signpost Word. If you find this code in the margin of an assignment that has been returned to you, please:_

- Revise this section on Chronological Order;
- Read through the list of signpost words on page 43;
- Choose one word from the list that you wish to insert into the faulty sentence;
- Now re-write your sentence. Does the inclusion of the time signpost word make the sentence clearer?
- Now do Practice Session 4 as this exercise has been designed to test your understanding of Chronological Ordering.

### 3.8 Enhancing the Marking Code

This section of the thesis proposes alterations to the correction code method. These will address the weaknesses inherent in the method while retaining its strengths. The Unisa research has shown that the correction code method is an effective way of promoting writing improvement, especially in the area of formal accuracy. This results from its being a very salient method of error indication. In addition, the students approve of the approach as shown by their response to the questionnaire. There is, however, a need to avoid the debilitating over-marking that the method invites. In line with Chenoweth (1987) and Van der Walt et al.’s (1994) proposal for limited correction, lecturers, particularly those marking weaker students’ work, should restrict the number of errors they indicate and identify only the most crippling.

The formulaic emphasis promoted by the correction code needs to be counteracted. This formalism is almost inevitable because the present codes are virtually restricted to grammatical issues. The correction code could be enhanced by means of the inclusion of a number of codes that facilitate commentary relating to the ideational and organisation aspects of discourse. For a start, Dixon’s categories of interactive feedback could be incorporated into the correction code (1996:10):
Con addressing conceptual misunderstandings
Dev requesting development of ideas
Clar requesting clarification of a concept
R/S rephrasing a sentence
R/P or R/Es restructuring a larger piece of discourse
V? challenging views
Voice? querying which voice is used

However, the value of these codes will be negated unless the higher-order issues they represent are carefully explained and integrated into the study package.

One of the central problems relating to the correction code is the fact that no scale of priorities is offered to the students. It is difficult for students to determine which errors are more significant and require urgent attention. A possible solution could be for markers to place a circle around the code representing the error that they regard as the most serious, the one that requires immediate remediation. If the symbols are integrated into the study material, students will then be in a position to go back to that specific section, revise it and do extension exercises. The primary emphasis for all response should be on communicative effectiveness. A specific code, possibly $\bigcirc$, needs to be developed to indicate instances where the language problems have resulted in communication breakdown.

An additional problem is that the code is negative in its fixation on the flaws in the students' writing. The positive attitudinal benefit of praise, revealed in the research cited in Chapter Three, is overlooked. Boswood et al. say that 'multiple, complex symbol systems have to be devised for indicating errors to student writers, yet no one, to [their] knowledge, has expended comparable time and effort in devising a coding system of the identification of writing success' (Boswood et al. 1993:79). There is no need to develop a separate system for praise. A symbol, such as a $\checkmark$, could be used in conjunction with any of the codes to indicate achievement in a particular area.

Students who are given both content- and form-related commentary tend to ignore the former and simply rewrite incorporating minor grammatical corrections. Students need to be given direction with respect to the most appropriate course for revision. In this regard, a reverse arrow could serve as a code to indicate to the student that a return to the thinking stage is necessary while a forward arrow could be used as a symbol to mark the fact that the student's writing is at
the stage that it requires only minor editorial work. A single line could be used to indicate that there are content- and form-related issues that require attention, although, in this instance, the content problems are not so great that the student has to revise completely.

There is an urgent need to separate content- and form-related problems. The ESL Marking Profile has taken the first step by requiring separate evaluation. The left-hand side of the page could be restricted to commentary relating to content. As this margin in Unisa assignment books is small, lecturers would only be able to write a number here and should then comment on the problem at the end of the assignment. This would encourage lecturers to place greater emphasis on the larger issues relating to logic, organisation and discourse-related matters. These comments should be formulated in complete, grammatically-correct sentences. This would serve as input for the students. A balance would then be achieved with lecturers' discussion of more complex issues counteracting the numerous, frequently minor grammatical infringements indicated by means of the codes.

The researcher will now mark four of the students' original paragraphs in accordance with the revised correction code in order to demonstrate its effectiveness.
Example 1

As no singular or particular incident has
* had an adverse effect on what Joan, by
analyzing myself. I came to the conclusion
that a multitude of factors makes up
the "me". Yearning for the impossible;
* raising one's stress levels by trying to
do much more than possible; reaching for
the stars, only to find oneself timiously
on ground level .... Oh! Why me? The end-
less question. As if nobody else ever
experiences the same dilemma. Ultima-
tely one has to accept the human factor
of frailty. Learn to love oneself, despite
the shortcomings, by loving oneself love
can easily be given to others. It is
important to be honest in one's rela-
tionship with people, but also subtle,
so as not to hurt feelings unnecessa-
ry. Without friends I cannot survive
and although my family sometimes drives
me insane yet I will not exchange
them for the world. Life in general can
be experienced as the four seasons of
nature. Thank God I am living in a
Summertime! And the cold should
stay where it belongs - far far away.

why

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In this instance the language is fairly proficient and the student simply needs to be redirected to the question and sent back to the thinking phase outlined in the mindmap. The reverse arrow together with the instruction to describe a specific childhood memory is a clear indication that no superficial editing will be adequate. The √ has been used to compliment the student on her imagery. The main focus of attention will fall on the mixed pronouns as the shifts from personal to impersonal and back again are disconcerting.
Example 2

I was still a toddler and I sp--
 lived on farms with my family.
I remember one day my father
* telling the family that we were
to move to another farm that
was two hundred kilometers away.
The reason was that the owner
of the farm wanted all his
labourers to sell their cattle and
my father wanted to keep them.
They had to sell their cattle to him.
He used the oven to plough the fields,
Later on that farmer forced him to
sell his livestock because blocks
were not allowed to keep livestock.

This memory fits in my life story
because my parents never lived a decent
life and that influences my development
in life.

This does not describe a single, vivid
incident from your childhood.

Why is this specific instance such
an important detail?

What specific influence has this had?

The code $ has been used twice to indicate that grammatical flaws have led to a breakdown in communication. In the first instance the use of the plural is confusing and the student needs to consider if it is possible to live on many farms simultaneously. The vague pronouns also lead to confusion. This is the aspect that has been signalled out for special remediation. In this regard the student has been referred to a textbook that deals with nouns and pronouns. The student is given direction in the form of the reverse arrow instructing him or her to revise completely and select a single incident rather than a general description. The student also needs to explain carefully how the specific incident has influenced his or her life. Clear instructions are given to return to the drawing board, but also to take particular care in the revised version that there is no confusion as a result of vague pronoun use.
Clear instructions relating to content are given. The student has to describe her feelings and explain why the namecard is important. In terms of form the aspect requiring the most immediate attention is tense. In addition, the student needs to take note of the fact that 'so' is usually followed by 'that'. The sign '—' indicates that the student should attend to both content and form but that the content problems are not so great that the student is required to revise completely.
In the following example the benefits of separating commentary relating to content and logic from the plethora of verb errors is clearly visible. The forward arrow indicates that it is mainly editorial work that is required.

Example 4

Incident from my childhood.

I still remember what happened to me when I was 10 years old. I told my friends to accompany me to the bush. We came across a deep hole, then we started jumping over the hole one by one while we were jumping one of my friends who was younger than all of us fell into the hole, because we were still young we all ran away instead of helping her. Fortunately there was a woman who was picking up woods, she saw me, running like a madman. She tried to stop me and ask what was happening, but I did not even want to look at her. She heard the voice crying deep inside the hole and quickly helped the child to get outside. After that she rushed at me. Because I was very much afraid I fell down and the woman caught me. I tried to tell a lie but it was too late. She beaten me until I told her the truth and then she beared me. It that time I realized the wound on my leg. I was taken by my mother to the clinic for my wound to be cured. My wound really was cured but what is left in my mind is that, always when I see the scar on my leg, I think of telling the truth — why?

* Explain context in greater detail.
* Logic? I don't understand where this came from?

→ Edit carefully.

✓ answered question
3.9 Breaking the Anonymity

The weakest Practical English students require far more intensive input than any correction-code assessment can supply. For this reason, students who have failed the course are invited to join a 'Veterans' Project', which gives them the opportunity to correspond with a lecturer throughout the year. The focus is solely on using language to communicate and no errors are corrected at all. The remarkable improvement levels achieved in 1995 and 1996 are reported by Kilfoil (1997) in an article entitled: 'Putting Correspondence Back into Distance Education: The Light Comes Near'.

This high level of contact is only possible in isolated cases. However, there remains a need to counteract the lack of history and anonymity of all the students' scripts. A feasible option in the distance-teaching context would be to require students to identify the key problem area in a previous assignment, to allow them to request specific feedback, to acknowledge any emotive reactions to past feedback and to comment on the mark awarded to the previous assignment. Grundy's (1995) suggestion that students provide metacognitive commentary is also invaluable in this regard.

Another means of breaking the anonymity would be the adoption of the portfolio approach. Elbow claims that no serious assessment of someone's writing should take place without numerous samples of multiple genres produced on various occasions and in natural writing conditions and that a single sample can be completely misleading (1996:83-84). He is not alone in this view and the benefits of adopting a portfolio approach to assessment have been outlined in works such as Clark (1993), Elbow & Belanoff (1986), Hamp-Lyons & Condon (1993), Roemer et al. (1991) and White (1995b, 1996). The portfolio approach allows continuous assessment and permits the lecturer to review student progress over the duration of the course. It promotes a process approach, gives the script a history and furnishes the lecturer with an indication of the student's development over a period of time. The method also promotes metacognitive skills in that portfolios frequently require students to select their best and worst pieces of writing, to identify the one in which they learnt the most and/or to make a selection that demonstrates their progress during the course. Students are also frequently required to assess their own portfolios and to support their evaluations. Portfolios go a long way towards
countering a product-orientated, text-based response and help to make this a relic of the past. The researcher believes that students' opposition to the method in the questionnaire was more a result of faulty formulation of the question than a genuine rejection of the method.⁹

Portfolios were introduced into the Practical English course in 1998. For each module, two assignments were set, one a multiple-choice assignment and one portfolio. Evidence that markers are still operating from a formalist paradigm in their evaluation comes from the fact that in the portfolio assessment sections are being singled out for individual, correction-coded attention. Thus the formalist axiological orientation is subverting the purpose of the portfolios and there is a need for training in designing, implementing and assessing portfolios.

Unisa's revised English I course, ENN101-D, has overcome many of the difficulties identified in this thesis. Their assessment policy is described in terms that redress power imbalances by deliberately placing authority in the hands of the student and counteracting the negative image of a controlling lecturer. Students are told that in the evaluation of their portfolios they will be given every opportunity to show what you have learnt during the module. We do not see assignments as a means of punishing or controlling our students. Rather, we see them as a chance for practice and enjoyment. The teaching team views assignments as

- an opportunity for students to communicate what they think and understand about the contents of the module and its prescribed texts;
- a chance for students to respond creatively and thoughtfully to a range of issues relating to English language and literature;
- an integral part of the teaching and learning involved in this module.

We would like to encourage you to approach the assignments positively. Allow yourself enough time to prepare and submit your work so that it will show your abilities to the best advantage (ENN101-D Tutorial Letter 101 for 1999:11).

The function of portfolios has been taken a step further in that ENN101-D course designers have introduced a non-venue-based examination, which requires students to submit a portfolio in the place of writing an examination.

⁹ See page 190 of this thesis.
4. Conclusion

If one accepts Warnock's definition (1989:63), quoted at the start of this thesis, then response to student writing is indeed an action that is motivated and consequential. Where the motive is expedient processing of a vast number of scripts, the consequence is an undesirable formalism that reinforces strategies associated with weak writers and promotes an immature concept of revision. The inevitable result is a chasm between the course content and the evaluation strategies. In contrast, response should:

- be motivated by a desire to test outcomes that are integral to a course;
- have been explained to and negotiated with the students;
- clearly indicate the direction revision is to take; and
- should highlight a limited number of formal areas that require attention.

This approach is less likely to result in confusion. Response is not the lecturer’s sole responsibility. Indeed, one of the major achievements of this thesis has been that it has demonstrated the positive consequences that accrue when students are required to assess their own work. The challenge is to identify effective readers, both human and cybernetic, and to implement responses to student writing that fulfil Warnock’s requirement of providing strategies for coping and equipment for living and functioning in a specific discourse community.
Addenda

Addendum 1: Assignment 01 of 1995

Question 1: Prewriting Exercise

This assignment requires you to write about yourself, and what kind of person you are. The first pre-writing technique you are going to practise is Listing. How would you begin to describe yourself? The easiest way to describe yourself to another person is to give a list of characteristics. Another way of describing yourself is to compare yourself to an object of some kind. The following prewriting exercises will give you an opportunity of exploring these methods of getting to know yourself.

A. If you were to compare yourself to a type of music, what kind of music would you choose? Are you like reggae or rap, chamber music or rock? Are you like a symphony concert or a lone banjo?

Choose ONE type of music which has aspects in common with you. Now on your answer sheet, draw two columns. In the left hand column, write the type of music you have chosen. Underneath the type of music, list its characteristics (for example: audience appeal, tempo, instruments required, mood created, popularity). In the right hand column, write your name. Underneath your name write a list of your characteristics.

Look at the two lists. Are there any points of comparison between you and this type of music? For example, rap music often has a moral message: are you a person of high morals? A symphony concert is a formal occasion; are you a very formal, restrained person?

Draw lines across from one column to the other where you can see points of comparison.

B. If you were to compare yourself to a book, what type of book would you choose? Are you like a romantic novel or a western? Are you like a textbook or an anthology of poems? Are you like a telephone directory or a private diary?

Choose a book which has aspects in common with you. Now on your answer sheet, draw two columns. In the left hand column, write the type of book you have chosen. Underneath the type of book, list its characteristics (for example: the audience it appeals to, its contents and uses). In the right hand column, write your name. Underneath your name write a list of your characteristics.

Look at the two lists. Are there any points of comparison between you and this book? For example, a textbook is full of information: are you a teacher, or a very knowledgeable person? A diary is a very private book: do you value your privacy?

Draw lines across from one column to the other where you can see points of comparison.
C. If you were to compare yourself to a building, what kind of building would you choose? Are you like a large institution or a rural hut? Are you like a hotel or a post office?

Choose a building which has aspects in common with you. Now on your answer sheet, draw two columns. In the left hand column, write the name of the building you have chosen. Underneath the name of the building, list its characteristics (appearance, functions and responsibilities). In the right hand column, write your name. Underneath your name write a list of your characteristics.

Look at the two lists. *Are there any points of comparison between you and the building?* For example, *a large institution has many departments: do you have several facets to your personality? A post office has links to the whole world: do you have international interests?*

Draw lines across from one column to the other where you can see points of comparison.

Question 2 : Writing Task

Re-read the lists you completed in Question 1. Choose ONE list that seems particularly descriptive of you. *(It will probably be the one where you found the most similarities between yourself and the thing you chose.)* WRITE A PARAGRAPH OF TWENTY LINES in which you compare yourself to the music or book or building you have chosen.

Start your paragraph with the sentence 'I am like ... '. Insert the music or book or building you have chosen, telling your reader *WHY* you are like a rock 'n roll record or book of short stories or a block of flats or whatever it is that you have chosen. *(Remember: Choose only ONE image.)*

[25 marks]

PURPOSES: The purposes of this writing task are:

- to introduce you to the important academic skill of viewing familiar topics in new and surprising ways;
- to give you practice in exploring and writing analogies (comparisons between things) - a very useful creative thinking skill; and
- to introduce yourself to us, your lecturers, in an entertaining and interesting fashion. *(We will introduce ourselves to you, using the same techniques, in the tutorial letter containing the answers to this assignment.)*
Question 3 : Prewriting Exercise

A. Try writing the associations you have with your childhood memories. Place 'childhood memories' in a circle in the middle of a piece of paper. Then draw a short line out and write a word or phrase that comes to mind. (See example 1 below.) Continue stringing together your associations. (See example 2 below.) When you have taken one memory as far as you can, return to the centre and begin another string. (See example 3 below.) Fill the page with as many associations as you can.

Information Box

Read what one writing expert says about this method: 'When some students try free association for the first time, they immediately like this way of getting started on a piece of writing. For them associations come easily, and they find that before they know it they have plenty to write about. Some writers find that free association sparks creativity and works well ... Others do not feel comfortable brainstorming in this way. There is no one way to write or get started writing, and what works well for one writer or one kind of writing may not work well for another. This approach may take some practice if you are a highly anxious writer, and it may be worth doing as a limbering-up exercise.' (Gay, Pamela. 1992. Developing Writers. p 26-27.)

II. Choose one childhood memory from your free association cluster, and freewrite one page about it. (Re-read pp 3 - 8 in Workbook 2 on freewriting.) Write whatever comes to your mind in relation to the childhood memory you have chosen. Do not censor your writing by telling yourself 'This isn't important' or 'This isn't interesting'. Just fill the page. Think about why this incident was important in your life. Why do you think you have remembered it, while you have forgotten so many other incidents? How does it fit into your life story? How did it help to make you what you are today? What lesson do you think stayed with you from the incident, what message did it convey to you about life or people around you? Do not worry about grammar, spelling, or expression. This is a private exercise, aimed only at yourself.
Question 4: Writing Task

Write a twenty-line paragraph about one incident from your childhood that you remember clearly. Describe it in detail. Interpret your recollections, telling why that specific memory is important or significant, how it fits into your life story.

IMPORTANT: Begin this question on a new page. Write no more than 20 lines. Leave the rest of the page empty. Begin question 5 on a new page.

PURPOSES: The purposes of this writing task are:
- to introduce you to the important academic skills of careful and detailed recollection, narration, evaluation, and interpretation;
- to provide you with another opportunity for the important academic activity of self-introspection; and
- to continue your introduction of yourself to us, your lecturers, in a personally meaningful fashion. (We will share some of our memories with you in the tutorial letter containing the answers to this assignment.)
Addendum 2: 1986 Revision Assignment

UNIVERSITY OF SOUTH AFRICA

DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH

PRACTICAL ENGLISH (PENL00-3)

TUTORIAL LETTER NO. 107 OF 1986

Dear Student

N.B. This Tutorial Letter tells you what to do for

ASSIGNMENT 06

(Final date: 12 July)

ASSIGNMENT 06 IS AN 'EDITING' ASSIGNMENT*

* That is, Assignment 06 is an assignment in which you are required to revise and resubmit work you have already done and for which you have received a mark.

1. Assignment 06 is based on your revision of Section 2 (the Essay section) of Assignment 03 (which fell due on 12 April).

2. If you did not submit Assignment 03 for assessment, you cannot do Assignment 06.

3. Assignment 06 offers you an opportunity to improve your marks.

I. What an editing assignment is all about

Sooner or later we all discover that good writing is a difficult business and the outcome of careful preparation, clear thinking and an ability to edit (or correct) our own writing.

This discovery usually occurs when we are required to revise something we have written. We then find that our original piece of writing contains numerous grammatical and stylistic errors. We may also realise that the content and organisation of what we wrote could have been improved - for example, by a more logical arrangement of ideas; by improving the 'flow' of our arguments; by expanding - or contracting - certain parts of what we wrote; by improving sentence structures.

This Assignment (06) is intended to bring home to you the importance of revising your own work.

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11. What you have to do:

1. For Assignment 06 you must revise Section 2*1 (the essay section) of Assignment 03.

*1 Revise Section 2 only, that is your essay on either
The Population Explosion, or
Charm, or
'Politeness is the most acceptable hypocrisy'
Do not submit a revision of Section 1 (Comprehension).

2. Submit your revised/corrected/improved essay*2 TOGETHER WITH your earlier, marked Assignment 03.*3

*2 This means that you cannot change the topic you originally chose. For example, if your choice in Assignment 03 was 'The Population Explosion', you must revise that essay and not now attempt one on 'Charm' or 'Politeness is the most acceptable hypocrisy'.

This also means that you must rewrite the essay including all the improvements/corrections in your new, fair version.

*3 It is crucial that you ALSO submit your complete Assignment 03 with your revised essay.

Your assignment 03 will contain your tutor's comments and suggestions on how to improve your use of English, and on how best to develop your ideas. If we are to assess how much you have improved on what you did for Assignment 03, we must have your complete Assignment 03 (that is, both Sections 1 and 2 as well as the assignment cover).

3. If you do not submit your marked Assignment 03 with your revised essay, we will not be able to mark your work. Your assignment will be returned to you unmarked.

Note that, if you do Assignment 06, two sets of marks will count on your student record: the mark you received for Assignment 03 and the new mark you receive for Assignment 06. If you do not attempt this editing assignment, your mark for Assignment 03 will still count towards your record - but you will have missed a splendid opportunity to learn from your mistakes.

III. How to do this assignment

1. Carefully read through your original essay (Section 2) in Assignment 03.

2. Take note of your tutor's comments on grammar, style and content.

3. Re-write your essay, incorporating the improvements suggested by your tutor and make whatever other changes/corrections you feel are necessary.*4

*4
Your revision should, obviously, include correction of grammatical, idiomatic, punctuation and spelling errors. If you received a low mark for your original essay (that is any mark below 17/30), it probably means that you should look at more than merely grammatical, idiomatic, punctuation and spelling errors.

Make sure that you correct sentence structures where necessary.

(i) Remember to include a main verb in every sentence.

(ii) Do not run two separate sentences together as though they were one sentence, nor try to combine them with a comma.

(iii) Eliminate any dangling modifiers.

(iv) Keep your sentences as simple and direct as possible.

(v) Avoid passive construction wherever you can.

(vi) Guard against long sentences with numerous and confusing sub-clauses.

(vii) Ensure that your essay has proper opening and closing paragraphs and that every paragraph contains a topic sentence and is properly developed. (Note: One-sentence paragraphs are not acceptable.)

(viii) Ensure that you use proper transitional words (that is, words that act as signposts to your reader and so help to ensure a ‘flow’ in the development of your argument/ideas).

(ix) Organize the arrangement/presentation of your ideas/argument in a logical sequence.

(x) Cut out all unnecessary words/phrases.

4. Complete a new assignment cover for Assignment 06 and staple/pin your revised essay and your entire Assignment 03 INSIDE THE NEW ASSIGNMENT COVER.

5. Post your assignment in time to reach the University by 12 July.
Addendum 3: Marking Codes: *Tutorial Letter 101*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SYMBOL</th>
<th>ERROR</th>
<th>EXPLANATION</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>abb</td>
<td>Abbreviation</td>
<td>Do not use abbreviations, or contractions (such as 'can't', 'don't', 'etc.') in formal writing (e.g., a written assignment).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>agr (s/v)</td>
<td>Agreement error</td>
<td>Your verb does not agree with your subject in number. Check whether your subject is singular or plural. A plural subject takes a plural verb. The students read the book. See: <em>The New Word Power</em>, pp 22-25.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>amb</td>
<td>Ambiguity</td>
<td>Your statement could have two meanings. Rephrase. (See: <em>The New Word Power</em>, p 30.)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ap</td>
<td>Apostrophe error</td>
<td>An apostrophe is a comma that hangs above the line. The boy's hands are dirty. An apostrophe is used to indicate possession. Mandela's leadership (the leadership of Mandela). The boys' privileges (the privileges of the boys). An apostrophe is used to indicate when letters are left out. We'll (we will) Can't (can not) I've (I have) It's (it is) Contractions such as these are unacceptable in formal writing. NB: 'its' (without an apostrophe) is the possessive form. The dog chewed its bone. See: <em>The New Word Power</em>, pp 40-41.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>arg</td>
<td>Argument</td>
<td>Your argument / explanation is not methodical / coherent / relevant. A clear and logical line of thought needs to emerge - consult <em>The New Word Power</em>, pp 171-172.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>art</td>
<td>Article error</td>
<td>You have used 'a' instead of 'the', or 'the' instead of 'a', or you have omitted to use 'a' or 'the' where you should have. Alternatively, you have used 'a' or 'the' with a word that should not have an article. See: <em>The New Word Power</em>, pp 41-43.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>awk</td>
<td>Awkward phrasing</td>
<td>Your sentence sounds awkward and clumsy. You need to revise word choice and word order.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-----</td>
<td>----------------</td>
<td>-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>cap</td>
<td>Capital letter</td>
<td>The word should begin with a capital letter, either because it starts off a sentence, or because it is a proper noun.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>c/s</td>
<td>Comma splice</td>
<td>You have joined two ideas (ie two separate sentences) without using a connecting word, or proper punctuation. Either add a connecting word, or change the comma to a semi-colon, or break the comma-spliced sentence into two separate sentences.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>exp</td>
<td>Expression faulty</td>
<td>Your sentence is difficult to understand because of errors too numerous to list.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>frag / inc</td>
<td>Fragmentary sentence</td>
<td>Your sentence does not have a verb, and therefore is only a fragment of a sentence.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Incomplete sentence</td>
<td>You have left out part of the sentence.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>irr</td>
<td>Irrelevant</td>
<td>What you have said has nothing to do with the topic.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>L? / ill</td>
<td>Logic faulty / illogical</td>
<td>Illogical, or your writing does not make sense here.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N.P.</td>
<td>New Paragraph</td>
<td>You have started discussing a new idea. You need a new paragraph.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>para</td>
<td>Paragraph structure</td>
<td>A paragraph consists of a main idea (usually expressed in a topic sentence) and several supporting sentences which explain the main idea, or give examples and/or details concerning the main idea. Single-sentence paragraphs are not acceptable because a single sentence cannot develop or expand the main idea. Your paragraph is too long and needs to be divided where appropriate.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>p</td>
<td>Punctuation</td>
<td>You have mis-used a punctuation mark, or omitted one where it was necessary. See: <em>The New Word Power</em>, pp 233-234.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>sp</td>
<td>Spelling</td>
<td>You have mis-spelt a word. Try to get into the habit of using a dictionary consistently.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Error Type</td>
<td>Description</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>------------</td>
<td>-------------</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| Tense error | Your verb is in the wrong tense. (See: *The New Word Power*, pp 285-292.)  
Note: Use the present and related tenses when discussing a literary work - eg 'Bosman's humour has a strong South African flavour.'  
'In her short stories Nadine Gordimer touches on issues ...' |
| Vocabulary error / Wrong word | You have used the wrong word or you could have used a better one. (Look up the word you have used in the dictionary. You will find that its meaning is either not correct or not appropriate in your sentence.) |
| Wordiness | You have used too many words to say something which could be said far more simply and concisely. (See: *The New Word Power*, pp 315-317.) |
| Word Order incorrect | The words in your sentence are in the wrong place. Your marker will have used arrows to indicate where the word(s) should go.  
(See: *The New Word Power*, pp 318-319 and, depending on the nature of your error, follow up whichever is the appropriate reference, Awkward Phrasing, Indirect Speech, etc. at the close of the entry on Word Order.) |
Addendum 4: Error Awareness Sheet

Reducing Composition Errors

ERROR AWARENESS SHEET (EASE)

Name ___________________________

Course/Section _______________________

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Total Errors

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Which three types of errors have you probably made the most on your last two essays?
Addendum 5: Markers’ Questionnaire

1. Would you like me to make any adaptations to the ‘ESL Composition Profile’?
   YES      NO

2. If your answer to Question 1 was yes, please provide details in the space below.

-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------

Please read the document outlining the five different marking strategies very carefully and then answer questions 3 - 6.

3. Rank strategies A, B, C, D and E from best to worst in the order of their effectiveness as teaching tools.
   BEST      WORST

4. Rank strategies A, B, C, D and E in the order which you believe the student would choose.
   BEST      WORST

5. Do you anticipate any problems with any of the strategies?
   YES      NO

6. If your answer to Question 5 was yes, please provide specific details in the space below.

-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------

- Please give any other comments, misgivings, suggestions or proposed alterations in the space below.

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Addendum 6: Reliability Study 1

Thank you for participating in this research project. Please allocate marks for the following paragraphs so I can determine the inter-rater reliability index. The following five paragraphs were written in response to Question 4: Writing Task. When you evaluate them please take into account the requirements of the specific question. Mark them as you normally would using the marking symbols provided in Tutorial Letter 101. Please provide a brief comment. Please make use of the 'ESL Composition Profile' and award a mark out of 12.5 for Content / Structure and a mark out of 12.5 for Form (Vocabulary / Language Use / Mechanics). The sum of these two marks is out of 25. Write the mark as follows: X (content / structure) + X (form) = X total.

Paragraph 1
Dad crippled
It was in 1978 when my dad be involved in a car accident. This incident was a shock to me because it left my dad in coma. At that time dad tend to drive without a driver's licence. In the accident my dad was not wrong because the victim was fleeing from the police. He where he had stolen R5000.00. So he did not stop on the robson. It is how the accident occurred. This is important to me because it left my dad being a cripple and the person concerned is dead. Again I can is so significant to me because my dad was released from jail within ten days and he paid the fine. He also got his driver's licence after that incident. This is remarkable incident which I will never forget in my life. It came into my life after I realised that I should have been far with my studies.
Comment.................................................................................................................... Mark + =

Paragraph 2
Death of my father
My father passed away when I was still very young. The death of him change the whole situation in my home. The stream that was giving water to my family dried up. His death cost my sisters their education because they had to stop their education and seek work helping my mother. My mother was also forced to seek work. It is then that she started to be a domestic work earning R20 a month. Even today my mother is still working as a domestic worker but I am grateful that I am able to give her R200 every month out of my salary. I have to thank her for investing money so that I could continue my education. If she had not done that may be I would end up being a domestic worker.
Comment.................................................................................................................... Mark + =

Paragraph 3
Although I was still very young, I clearly remember the day my ringfinger got caught in the car door. It was a humid December afternoon and my mother, little sister and me went to pick up my father from work. I was standing on the front seat of the car. My sister got out and slam the door shut - with my finger caught in it. I still hear the crashing of bones and the excruciating pain! At hospital I will never forget the smell of ether and the big syringe - it seemed huge actually - they used to give me a painkiller with. They pinned me down and the doctor neatly stitched up my finger. All I have left of that terrible day, today, is a patch on my forehead. I still hear the voice of my mother calling me, "Son, it's going to be alright". She held my hand in comfort, a reminder of the hospital - so much so that I can't even stand visiting a friend in hospital. As you can imagine this can be quite a bother in everyday life!
Comment.................................................................................................................... Mark + =

Paragraph 4
You may well ask why Dad's affair is important to me and I will reply, "because it turned my childhood upside down". I was about twelve and my brother was about seven. Life was harmonious before then; we all got on well and we were all happy. Then one day it all changed. Dad, who never ever went anywhere on his own, started going out at night, drinking with the boys, once and twice a week. Mum became bitter and angry and I can remember a lot of verbal abuse. My brother and I were blamed for the situation and as I was the eldest, I personally blamed myself. I became insecure and fearful and since Mom was not speaking civilly to Dad, I tried my best to be Mom and talk to him. I could not trust them anymore; I still loved them both very deeply, but they had hurt me. In time they were reconciled and life returned to normal. When I became a Christian and later married Rowland, the fear and insecurity left me and now I am learning to trust again.
Comment.................................................................................................................... Mark + =

Paragraph 5
Going through the past years, one can be able to give a vivid recollection of the scene that really touched his heart. I can clearly recall one incident that nearly got me a heart attack. One afternoon my grandfather told me to fetch the cows. The dark clouds rolled in the sky from north to south. I took my torn raincoat, there I go. Before reaching the main gate, I felt a heavy raindrop on my forehead. Once again I felt a heavy drop of fear on my cheek. I guessed it came straight from my heart. A fear of blessings, I could hear the smell of a fire from the distant horizon. Everything seemed to change from bad to worse. I stopped and wondered why am I living like Ancient slaves. I thought my grandfather did'nt want to see me alive. A word of courage rang in my head. I paved through the tall grasses to reach my destination. Before reaching my destination, I heard my grandfather's voice. As I turned, it was him. He touched my hand and said "Son, now it is time for me to go and have a final rest, so for your bravery, it's a pleasure for me to tell you that all these cows will be sold for your studies? Oh!"
Comment.................................................................................................................... Mark + =

Please rank paragraphs 1, 2, 3, 4, and 5 from best to worst: BEST ____ ____ ____ ____ WORST
Thank you for your assistance. Brenda
Addendum 7: Reliability Study 2

Name: ......................................................................

Thank you for participating in this research project. Please allocate marks for the following paragraphs so I can determine the inter-rater reliability index. The following five paragraphs were written in response to Question 4: Writing Task. When you evaluate them please take into account the requirements of the specific question. Mark them as you normally would using the marking symbols provided in Tutorial Letter 101. Please provide a brief comment. Please make use of the 'ESL Composition Profile' and award a mark out of 12.5 for Content / Structure and a mark out of 12.5 for Form (Vocabulary / Language Use / Mechanics). The sum of these two marks is out of 25. Write the mark as follows: \( X \text{(content/structure)} + X \text{(form)} = X \text{total}. \)

Paragraph 1
When I was still young, one day a certain middle aged man came to my home. The man was well-known to me. He was very poor and never wanted to work. He went to the house where my parents were sitted. After some time he left. My elder sister went into the house where my parents were. When she came out she told me that the very same man I saw brought a R1.00 (one rand) to my parents as lobola for me in favour of his son. That my parents accepted the request and that I will be taken to my in-laws house soon. I cried and wanted to hang myself – because I did not want to stay with a family that does sometimes sleep without food – due to laziness. I took a rope and went to a tree to hang myself. My sister realized I was serious. She ran to the house and screamed, 'Fanny is hanging herself.' My parents came out and rescued me. It was before I tugged the rope.

Comment….................................................................................................................... Mark + =

Paragraph 2
I was ten years old when my mother likes to send me to the shop to bought bread. Then one day came in my mind that I must chit my mother with the change. My mother gave me R2.00 and the bread costed 10c. I was with two of my friend. I realized that I have got too much change, many 5c and 10c. I said to my friend that I have got too much change. I bought them five sweets each including myself by then it cost 1c. Then I bought another extra twenty sweets. It is important in my life because I usually tell the pupils that they must not make monkey tricks to their parent when they send them to buy or pay for something. I've seen that it can encourage people to steal money.

Comment….................................................................................................................... Mark + =

Paragraph 3
When I was a small boy I hated Sunday mornings: it was church mornings. I used to hate going to church – at least that was what I was telling myself at the time. Because I was a small boy (and light as a feather to carry around) it was easy to get me to church. The long sit during the ceremony bored me, so I made it interesting for myself. I used to stare at people (to there discomfort!) and associated them with animals. It was very interesting! People were not the only thing that amazed me in church, I was astonished by the singing also. The singing in the church was the thing I really enjoyed, although I did not know the hymns or psalms. When people sang, I sang the Afrikaans song 'Babjaan klein die berg', to myself! I probably enjoyed church when I was small (because I made my own fun?) although I did not admit it to myself at the time. This childhood memory stayed with me because it was one of the things I enjoyed as a small boy.

Comment….................................................................................................................... Mark + =

Paragraph 4
We were travelling by bus from lowveld to the highveld area. Everybody in the bus was very excited and enjoyment of seeing the bus because the bus was so scarce for that period. As for me it was the first time to have travelling by bus. In the bus I was looking at different people in the bus. I heard the lot of noise, the got a puncture, rolling until the downstairs of the hills. Many people injured. I am the creepy lady from that day. If I walk with feet I can not reach my destination. When the weather is not good, I have feeling first before the day or night. I am live so bad. My is very because feet is where the body balance.

Comment….................................................................................................................... Mark + =

Paragraph 5
The one thing from my childhood that I will never forget is the day I nearly drowned. Our house's drain blocked and workmen dug a huge, deep hole next to our house. This was a big job and at the end of the first day the workmen were not finished. They left the hole to return the next day to continue. During the night we had a thunder storm and the next morning the hole was full of muddy water. Being an enquiring person I found this very interesting and had to investigate. I came too close to the hole and the next moment I fell into the water. The water was cold and dirty and I could not swim. I could not even touch the bottom and I knew that I was going to drown. The only thing I remember was mom dragging me out the water and taking me into the house. I had to bath and put on fresh clothes. Although she was angry with me, I will always be grateful to her for saving my life.

Comment….................................................................................................................... Mark + =

Please rank paragraphs 1, 2, 3, 4, and 5 from best to worst: BEST ____ ____ ____ ____ ____ WORST

Thank you for your assistance. Brenda
Addendum 8: Reliability Study 3

Thank you for participating in this research project. Please allocate marks for the following paragraphs so I can determine the inter-rater reliability index. The following five paragraphs were written in response to Question 4: Writing Task. When you evaluate them please take into account the requirements of the specific question. Mark them as you normally would using the marking symbols provided in Tutorial Letter 101. Please provide a brief comment. Please make use of the ‘ESL Composition Profile’ and award a mark out of 12.5 for Content / Structure and a mark out of 12.5 for Form (Vocabulary / Language Use / Mechanics). The sum of these two marks is out of 25. Write the mark as follows: X (content/structure) + X (form) = X total.

Paragraph 1
I was six years old when my father left home after he quarrelled with my mother. It happened while they were making preparations for me to go to school the following year. My mother tried to bring my father back home but she was unsuccessful. Eventually, my mother decided to go to Johannesburg, leaving my grandmother and I at home. While my grandmother and I were waiting for and longing to hear from my mother about her journey, we received a letter from her in which she wrote that she had found a job in a shop. She said the remuneration was very low, nevertheless, she managed to send me to school. She did everything for me up to matric. I will never forget my hard-working mother.

Comment

Paragraph 2
As a child I never had a happy childhood, nobody was there to encourage me and my parents were never ther to care for me. I lived with my grandmother and my four cousins. My grandmother used to blame me for everything that went wrong inside and outside the home. The memories I am having about my childhood are very important to me, since through those bad circumstances I realised that my situation is not helpless. God still cares and he is still in control and again through those memories I have become a strong and matured woman.

Comment

Paragraph 3
I started school at an early age where I used to dodge with my friends. We were using our pocket money to buy delicious things and enjoy them. We continued for some months without being noticed both teachers - and Parents, since we writing all the works given to Pupils. During school out, we were joining our colleagues to our homes. One day a dark cloud overwhelmed us, when they caught us and we were severely Punished. We were regretted why we were born. Many teachers and other Pupils were surprise to hear the incident. from that day, we attended the school with love and interest, such that today I am a well known Person with higher qualifications.

Comment

Paragraph 4
I once suffered from maleria. This is the childhood memory that I remember well. I do not remember exactly what happened because the incident took place early in 1984. What I remember is that I was sleeping at home and, to my surprise, I woke up a few days later in hospital. The blood pipes were connected all around my body. Pains were aching all over my body, people thought I was near death. This memory is very important because I never thought I would live again. I was thin, I could hardly walk and eat. I even lost a lot of weight. I missed schooling for 5 months. But I was motivated to read in hospital. I passed the final examinations. This was both a nightmare and a lesson to me. I learnt to appreciate the good work done to us by medical people.

Comment

Paragraph 5
It was a hot Sunday afternoon in the summer months that I won a suitcase. There was a ruffle drawn for fund raising by the Youth Club members of our church. On the day of the prize giving, I prepared for the ocassion. The winning numbers were called out and I was one of the winners. I run up to the stage excited. My parents and friends congratulated me. As from that day I learnt something that some events occur when we least expect them. We must be prepared for the unexpected, whether good or bad.

Comment

Please rank paragraphs 1, 2, 3, 4, and 5 from best to worst.

BEST __ __ __ __ __ WORST

Thank you for your assistance. Brenda
Addendum 9: Student Questionnaire

We would like to find out if the way we mark fulfills your expectations and, if necessary, change our marking to suit your needs. We would appreciate it if you would complete the questionnaire below.

WHEN YOU ARE READY TO SUBMIT ASSIGNMENT 04, PULL OUT THESE PAGES. STAPLE THEM INTO YOUR ASSIGNMENT 04 COVER.

FOR OFFICE USE

Student Number: ____________________

GENERAL INFORMATION
PLEASE PLACE A CROSS (X) IN THE APPROPRIATE SQUARE
1. Male ☐ Female ☐
2. Home language: __________________________
3. How many languages (apart from English) can you speak well?
   1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5(or more) ☐

FOR QUESTIONS 4 AND 5 PLACE A CROSS IN ONE BLOCK ONLY.
4. On average how often do you practice writing English in a week?
   5 or more times ☐ 3-4 times ☐ 1-2 times ☐ hardly ever ☐
5. Rate your own writing ability on the following scale:
   EXCELLENT ☐ GOOD ☐ FAIR ☐ WEAK ☐

RESPONSE TO MARKING
PLACE A CROSS IN ONE SQUARE ONLY.
PLEASE BE HONEST!
1. When you get a Practical English assignment back do you -
   * Read through all the teacher's comments and consider the mark carefully? ☐
   * Pay little attention as you are busy with the next assignment? ☐
   * Look at the mark and then put the assignment away? ☐
2. How much of your Practical English assignment do you read when you get it back?
   All of it ☐ Most of it ☐ Some of it ☐ None of it ☐
3. How valuable do you regard the teacher's comments?
   VERY VALUABLE ☐ FAIRY VALUABLE ☐ NOT VALUABLE ☐
4. How valuable do you regard the mark you are given?
   VERY VALUABLE ☐ SLIGHTLY VALUABLE ☐ NOT VALUABLE ☐
5. Please place a cross in the block which BEST DESCRIBES YOUR LECTURER'S ROLE when he or she comments on your writing. The lecturer's main role is that of
   an interested reader ☐
   a judge ☐
   an evaluator ☐
   an editor ☐
   an examiner ☐
6. PLACE A CROSS IN ONLY ONE OF THE TWO SQUARES.

The main responsibility for improving my writing:
- falls on my lecturer ☐
- lies in my own hands ☐

FOR QUESTIONS 7 AND 8 PLEASE COMPLETE THE SENTENCES.

7. The type of comments I find MOST USEFUL are those that

8. The type of comments I find LEAST USEFUL are those that

TYPES OF FEEDBACK
Feedback (comments from the teacher) can concentrate on:
A. Content (ideas, information, messages, subject matter)
B. Organisation (arrangement of ideas)
C. Vocabulary (the words you use)
D. Grammar (sentence structure, tense, word order, etc.)
E. Mechanics (this term includes spelling, punctuation, correct use of capitals, paragraphing and handwriting)

FOR QUESTIONS 9 AND 10 WRITE ONLY ONE LETTER (A, B, C, D, OR E given in the block above) ON THE LINE.

9. Which type of feedback (A, B, C, D, or E given in the block above) do you regard as the MOST USEFUL?

10. Which type of feedback (A, B, C, D, or E given in the block above) do you get MOST OFTEN from your Practical English lecturers?

WAYS OF RESPONDING TO FEEDBACK
There are many different ways that students respond to feedback from their lecturers. Students can:
A. write down brief notes on problem areas that the lecturer has pointed out;
B. simply make a mental note of problem areas;
C. write to the lecturer about problems they can't solve;
D. consult a grammar or reference book on problem areas;
E. consult a friend or relative whom they regard as competent;
F. rewrite trying to correct as many problems as possible.

FOR QUESTION 11 WRITE ONLY ONE LETTER (A, B, C, D, E, OR F given in the block above) ON THE LINE. If you do not respond to feedback in any of these ways please leave the space blank.

11. Which of the ways of responding (A, B, C, D, E, and F given in the block above) do you use MOST OFTEN?
12. Do you think that comments on your writing by other Practical English students (Peer Criticism) would be helpful to you?
   Yes □  No □

13. Would you prefer to put together a collection of your best writing at the end of the year and be given a mark on that (the Portfolio approach) rather than have each assignment awarded a mark?
   Yes □  No □

14. There are computer programs that can identify language and stylistic problems in writing. How would you feel if your essays were marked by a computer?
   Positive □  Negative □

15. Explain briefly what you understand by the term REVISION.

16. Read the following statements carefully. Indicate whether you regard the statements as true (T) or false (F).

   * Writing is a creative process which involves much reformulation and revision  
     True □  False □

   * The most important factor in writing is grammatical correctness.  
     True □  False □

   * Good writing is flexible and takes the audience into account.  
     True □  False □

   * A good teacher makes detailed comments and indicates all errors.  
     True □  False □

MARKING TECHNIQUES
Look at the way your Question 4 of Assignment 01 was marked and then answer questions 17 to 26.

17. What letter was filled in ink at the top of the page on which you wrote Question 4: Writing Task for Assignment 01? Write A, B, C, D, or E on the line below.

18. Did you find the way your assignment was marked helpful?
   Yes □  No □

19. If your answer to 18 was NO, please give details in the space below.

20. Did the way your paragraph was marked make you feel positive and confident that you would be able to improve your writing?
   Yes □  No □

21. Did the way your paragraph was marked help you to improve the content of your revised paragraph?
   Yes □  No □

22. Did the way your paragraph was marked help you to write a grammatically more correct revised paragraph?
   Yes □  No □

23. Did you find any aspect of the marking of Question 4 of Assignment 01 confusing or difficult to understand?
   Yes □  No □
24. If your answer to 23 was YES, please give specific details from your Question 4 in the space below. List the corrections or comment you did not understand. In addition to listing any problems here place a question mark in the margin of your original paragraph (Question 4 from Assignment 01) next to the lecturer's comment which you did not understand.

____________________________________________________________________________
____________________________________________________________________________

25. Do you think that your lecturer fulfilled his or her duty as a teacher in the way your paragraph 04 for Assignment 01 was marked? Make a cross in the appropriate block. Yes ☐ No ☐

26. On a scale of 1 to 3

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<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Useful</td>
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<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Very useful</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Rate the following different marking methods:

A : A marking code (eg. sp = spelling error)
B : Crosses in the margin to indicate errors
C : Giving only a mark (no comments)
D : A taped commentary from the teacher
E : Instructions for self correction

Thank you very much indeed for the time and trouble you have taken in completing this questionnaire.
At school, especially when you are in hospital
and a farm boy, you do not like to be
called a sissy. On Saturday morning I was
playing rugby, when it all happened. It was
cold and the grass was wet. The parents were clearing
and running up and down the side line.
We ran and side stepped like Bonnie Greer.

I caught the ball with nothing between me
and the goal line, but suddenly my
legs fell like jelly. It was my mother I sp
caught me. I kissed me all over. I was
so embarrassed. Everyone on the field turned me...

Then, all of a sudden all the mothers went behind
the posts. But how I know that you always stay with
her little boy, no matter how old you get...

Your writing has potential. Please pay close attention to:

- The expression, spelling, and wrong word errors you have.

**8+7=15**

**8+7=15**

As a “rugby mother” I enjoyed this. Well done with few errors.

8+7=15

10+7=17
Bibliography


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Dowling, F. 1996. 'Cows were not cooperative': The Autobiographical Anecdote as an Effective/Affective Writing Assignment for Distance ESL Students in South Africa. *Scrutiny 2*, 1 (1/2): 19-36.


Fish, S. 1980. *Is There a Text in This Class?* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.


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