Moving Away from Scripted Essays:
Encouraging Students To Think for Themselves

By

LINDSEY MCMANIGAL
B.A. (University of California, Davis) 2006

THESIS

Submitted in partial satisfaction of the requirement for the degree of

MASTER OF ARTS

in

Education

in the

OFFICE OF GRADUATE STUDIES

of the

UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA

DAVIS

Approved:

_____
Kathleen S. Dixon, Chair

_____
Pauline V. Holmes

_____
Steven Z. Athanases

Committee in Charge

2008

Abstract

Name: Lindsey McManigal
Title: Moving Away from Scripted Essays: Encouraging Students To Think for Themselves

Research Questions:
What effects does teaching students different prewriting strategies (free writing and clustering) and giving students practice with organizing (creating and sorting essay elements and color coding) have on students' organization and development in their writing in a timed, in-class setting?
Sub-questions:
• To what extent will focusing on students' writing help improve students' attitude about writing in general and their perception of their own writing?
• To what extent will students use the prewriting and organizational strategies they learned when responding to an on-demand writing prompt?

Research Activities:

This research explores how the use of various prewriting and organizational activities

may enhance students' attitude about writing and their perception of their writing abilities

as well as may improve students' essay organization and development when students are

responding to a timed, on-demand writing prompt. Context: The study took place in an

eleventh-grade English classroom. The class was comprised of 20 male students and 4

female students of various ability levels. The study focused on 6 students, 5 male and 1

female. Two of these students have Individual Education Programs, two of these students

have been GATE-identified, and one of these students has a 504 plan. Students were

chosen from the Advanced to Below Basic ranges as determined by the California STAR

test. Methods and Data: The intervention was implemented in two cycles. The first cycle

lasted only two weeks, while the second cycle, which was started two months later, lasted

about three weeks. Throughout the intervention, several activities were utilized to teach

students prewriting and organizational skills in relation to their writing. These strategies

included free writing, clustering, and an assortment of activities that highlighted the

differences between the various essay elements. Pre- and post-intervention achievement data consisted of students' essay responses to a prompt in a timed 50-minute period. Essays were analyzed in regards to strength of argument, thesis statement, topic sentences, concrete details, commentary, and logic of argument. Students were also given attitude and self-assessment surveys following the pre- and post-intervention achievement data collection. Results: The results of the intervention were highly positive. Seven of the 22 students who completed the intervention raised their scores on their argument, 9 students raised their scores for their thesis statements, 14 raised their scores for their topic sentences, 10 students for their concrete details, 14 students for commentary, and 12 students for logic. Only three students received a lower score on one element of the rubric on the outcome essay than they had received on the baseline essay. Regarding the seven focus students at the center of the study, three students improved their scores on every category for which they could show improvement, one student showed improvement in five of the six categories, another student showed improvement in two categories, while the sixth students' scores remained constant.

Grade: 11

Research Methods:
Observation-Teacher research journal; Quick writes; Student reflections; Student work; Survey-Attitude; Survey-Self-assessment; Teacher-made assessment; Writing assessment

Curriculum Areas:
English Language Arts; Writing

Instructional Approaches:
Student engagement; Writing-Explicit instruction; Writing-On-demand writing; Writing-Organization; Writing-Process writing; Writing-Persuasion

Table of Contents

Context

Our class in the school

The first thing that becomes apparent when looking at my 5th period Junior English class is the overwhelming number of male students. On the first day of school, one of my students aptly termed the class a "dude-fest." Most people do a double-take when walking into the room and ask if there are any female students in the class before noticing one of the few girls. One of my fellow teachers, in whose room I teach this class, complains that she has still not been able to locate all of the girls. At the beginning of the year, our class consisted of 28 boys and 4 girls. Later, we lost a few boys and gained a girl, and were steady for several weeks at 23 boys and 5 girls. A few weeks ago, we had another girl transfer into the class, but sadly she did not stay long; she left the class the same time another girl dropped out of school. As of November, there were 21 boys and 5 girls in the class. In other words, 16 percent of the students in this class are female, and 84 percent of the students are male. While this seems a somewhat large disparity, I have more male students than female students in all of my classes. Of my 109 students, 67 percent are male, and 33 percent are female. The students are very aware of the disparity between the number of girl students and the number of boy students, as 4 of the girls cheered when our new female student walked into the room.

One of the possible reasons for the gender disparity might be the other classes that students are enrolled in. Ten of the students in my class, or 38.5 percent, are enrolled in a Regional Outreach Program (ROP). The district offers a wide variety of ROP classes, and students in my class are enrolled in two different automotive programs, a cabinet-making program, a graphic arts program, and a metal and graphics program. Most of the

students in the ROP programs are male, and my students are no exception. Nine of my ten ROP students are male; only one student who is in my class and enrolled in an ROP class is female. The ROP classes are held during Zero Period at other campuses in the district, or in the afternoon at Drake Eddie High School[1]. This means that all of the students in ROP classes must take an English class in the morning (5th period is the last class before lunch). Only one student in my class attends ROP at another campus during Zero Period. He coincidentally, also falls into another category of three students who have unscheduled 6th and 7th periods, further requiring that they take English in the morning.

Over two-thirds of the boys in my focus class dress in "skater" clothing, wearing skinny jeans and snowboard or skating brand T-shirts and hats. The boys in this class seem especially attached to their hats when compared to the male students in my other classes. These boys seem to view their hats as an essential part of their outfits and as an extension of themselves. Students are not allowed to wear hats during class, but many students will put their hats on whenever they get out of their desks, even if it is only to sharpen their pencil or throw something away. Most of them react just as strongly when I take away their hats as when I take away their iPods or cell phones. Most of the boys in the class also have long hair. Their hair often falls into their face, so that I can see only one of their eyes. Every few minutes one of these students will shake his hair into place. These students tilt their heads down and shake them violently for several seconds before giving their head one final whiplash-inducing sweep so that their hair is swept to the side without having to touch it. It is distracting only to me and almost always makes me have

---

[1] All names and places are pseudonyms

to stifle my laughter. Recently, three male students in the class have opted for short Mohawks. Another student also recently shaved his head bald except for a piece of hair that he left long right above his forehead; he preferred to keep his bangs.

DEHS is on a block schedule. Students have the option of taking seven periods, although only six are required. About sixty percent of DEHS' population opts for a seventh period. Many of my Junior students take a 1st period so that they are finished with their classes by 1:06 on most days (or so that they can take ROP in the afternoon). On Mondays, students have an early-start and early-release day, starting at 8:25 and being released at 2:40. Students attend their 2nd-7th period classes on Monday. On Tuesday and Thursdays, students attend their 2nd, 4th, and 6th period classes, and school begins at 9:30 and is out at 3:25. On Wednesdays and Fridays, students attend their 3rd, 5th, and 7th period classes. Students who have a first period attend the class on every day except Monday from 8:25 to 9:25. I think that students, for the most part, enjoy the block schedule. The only issue that many students have is the lunch time. On block days, 5th period starts at 11:32 and ends at 1:06, and students do not have lunch until after class. Fortunately, students are given a 12-minute period in between 3rd and 5th periods to eat a snack. Despite this provision, many students are starving throughout the entire class period, which makes it a difficult period to teach.

Twenty-four of the students in the class are 11th graders, while one is a 12th grader. This student has previously taken and failed English 3. He did not repeat the class over the summer, so he has been put back in English 3 with 11th graders. The district does not require students to repeat their failed classes over the summer; they may repeat them the following year with younger students (this also accounts for the three 11th

graders in one of my 9th grade classes). The school's district also does not require

students to take English 4; students may opt for a Reading Strategies class to fulfill the

state's requirement of four years of English/ Language Arts. The 12th grader in my class

is concurrently enrolled in a Reading Strategies class and English 3.

In addition to the noticeable gender disparity in the class, there is also a large

ethnic disparity in the class, as well an in the school. Of the 25 students in the class, 24

are identified as Caucasian. One male student is Latino, and he is designated as English

Only (EO). Thus, there are no English Learners (EL) in the class. The dearth of EL

students is not unusual at this high school, as there are only 28 students who are

designated as Limited English Proficient (LEP). These 28 students are enrolled in one of

the school's two ELD classes. All of these students are also concurrently enrolled in an

English class according to their grade level. All of the LEP students this year are also

Spanish speaking. Last year, 30 students were administered the California English

Language Development Test (CELDT) and 66% of the students scored at an

Intermediate, Early Advanced, or Advanced Level, while 23% scored in the Early

Intermediate and 10% scored in the Beginning levels. The school also has 65 students

who have been re-designated as FEP. In addition to the disparity between English

Learners and native English speakers, a disparity is also apparent in the students' ethnic

distribution (see the accompanying graph). Eighty-two percent of the students are

Caucasian. The next largest group of students, by ethnicity, is Hispanic or Latino/a; 10.5

percent identify themselves as such. The disparity becomes even more apparent when

looking at a visual display of the numbers (see below).

Figure 1—Student Ethnic Distribution (School-wide), 2007
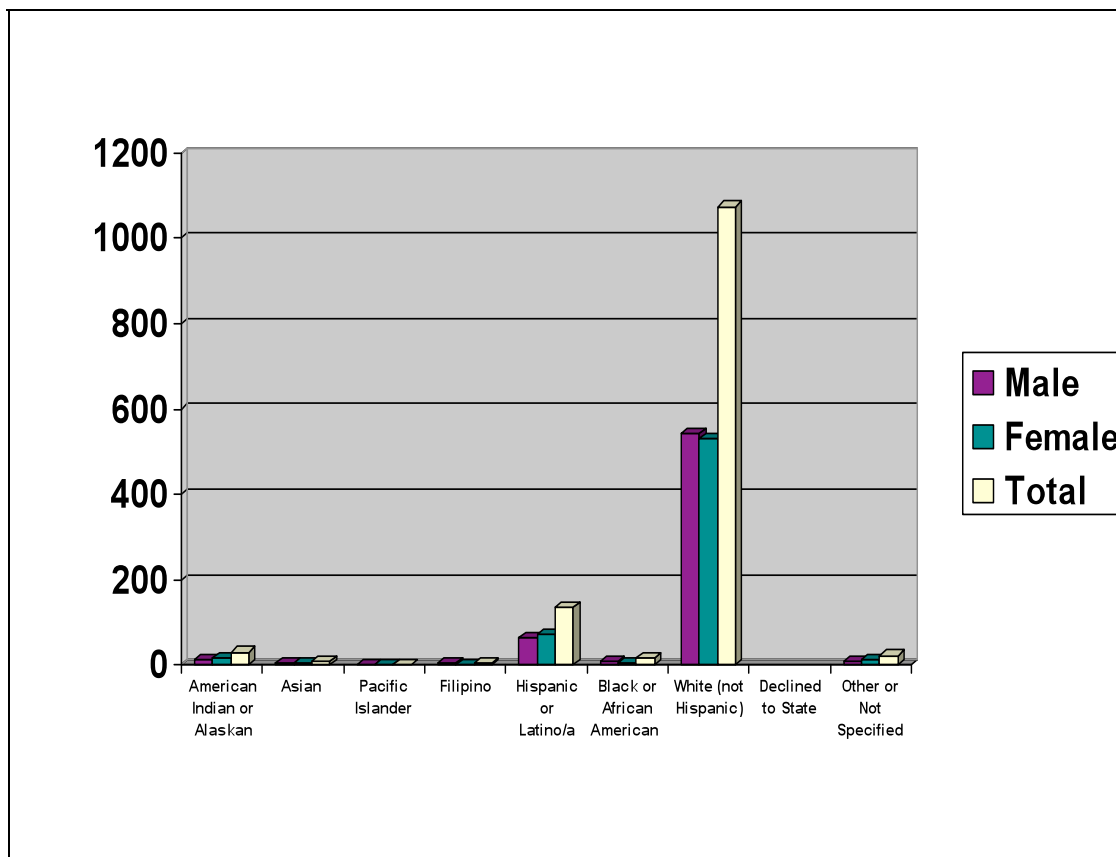
Five of the students in my focus class have disabilities that affect their

performance in a Language Arts classroom setting. Four of the 26 students, or 15 percent

of the class, are in the school's Special Education program. All four students have an

Individualized Education Program (IEP). One of the students has a disability that relates

mostly to his mathematics classes. His IEP states that his learning needs are related to

"mathematical reasoning, mathematical calculations, and visual-motor integration." This

student, however, also struggles with staying organized, and, because of his visual-motor

skills, writing can be difficult for him. This student is discussed in more detail later, as

he is focus student 3. A second student, focus student 1, also has a disability related to his math class, specifically with "applied mathematical reasoning." He has trouble staying organized as well. Some of his strengths, however, are vocabulary and reading comprehension. The final student that has an IEP struggles with "math concepts, staying focused, and completing assignments." This student and focus student 3 are both repeating English 3 and are in the 12th grade. The fourth student that has an IEP has a disability pertaining to "math calculations." This student also has ADHD (Attention Deficit/ Hyperactivity Disorder) and thus becomes "easily distracted, has difficulty completing assignments, and is disorganized." The final student has a 504 plan. She is also Student 4 and her learning needs are discussed below. Altogether 19 percent of the students in this class have special learning needs that need to be accommodated.

Six of the 25 students in the class, or 24 percent, have yet to pass one or both sections of the California High School Exit Exam (CAHSEE). Three of the students have simply not taken the exam yet. Two other students have passed the mathematics portion of the test, but have not passed the Language Arts section. The sixth student has not passed either section of the test. All six of these students are 11th graders; both 12th graders have taken and passed the CAHSEE. School-wide, 59 11th graders have not passed one or both sections. This means that roughly 10 percent of the 11th graders in the school who have not passed the CAHSEE are in my 5th period class.
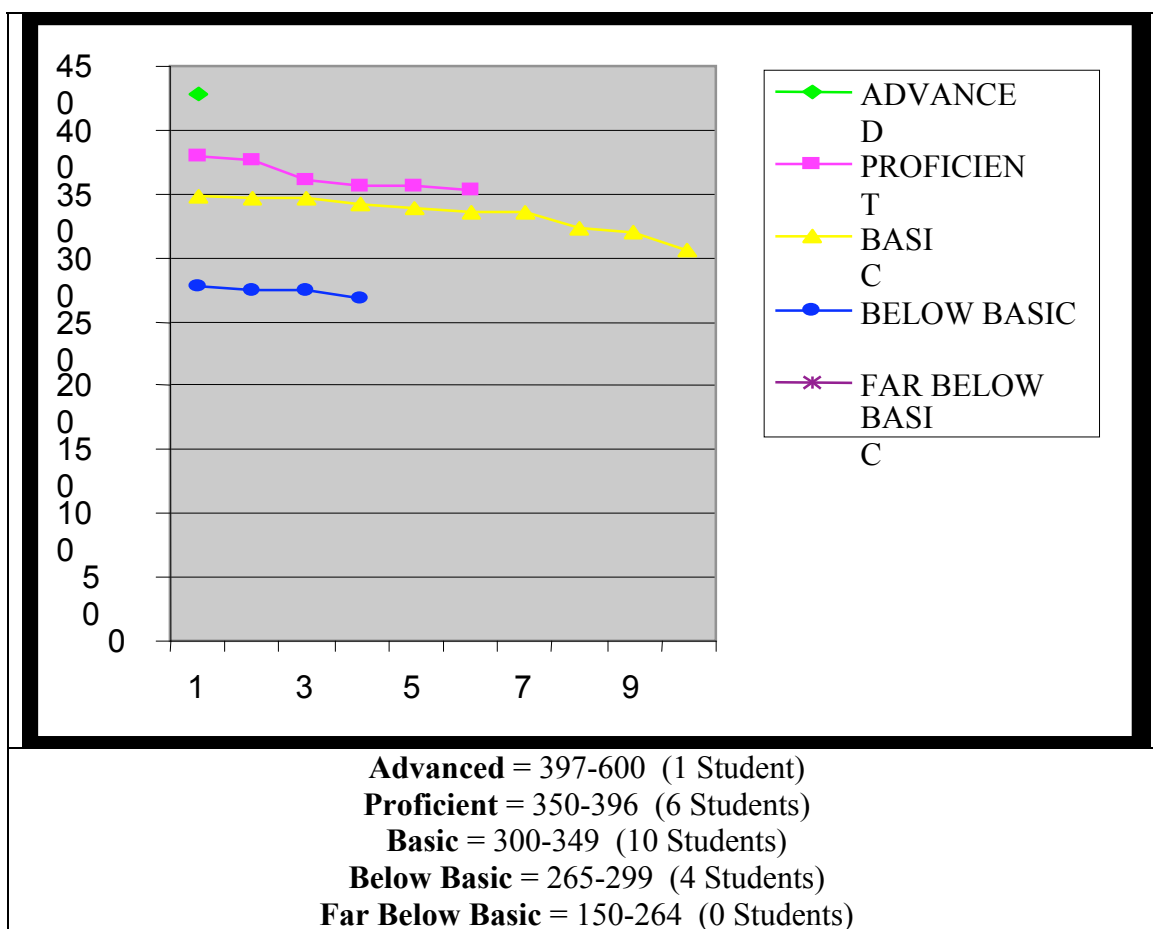
Four of the students in this class, or 15 percent, have identified as eligible for GATE, Gifted and Talented Education. One of these students is my focus student, Student 4, and also has a 504 plan. As will be discussed later, there is a clear disparity between her intelligence and her performance in academic classes. Another student who

is GATE-identified was in Advanced English his freshman and sophomore years. He is thinking about taking AP next year, so I have encouraged him to transfer back into Advanced English for the second semester. The third student who has been GATE-identified is also one of the students who has not taken either portion of the CAHSEE. The fourth student is also my focus student, Student 6.

One test given annually to students is the California Standards Test. Sixty-three percent of 9th graders, 51% of 10th graders, and 49% of 11th graders at the high school scored in the Advanced or Proficient levels. Twenty-two percent of 9th graders, 25% of 10th graders, and 27% of 11th graders tested at the Basic level. Only 15% of 9th graders and 23% of 10th and 11th graders tested in the Below Basic or Far Below Basic levels.

Of the 26 students currently in my class, 21 (or 84 percent) have STAR scores on record with the school for the 2006-2007 school year. The average of STAR scores for the students who took the test is 343, which is in the higher end of the Basic range. Only one student scored in the Advanced level, with a score of 428. Six students scored at the Proficient level; 10 students scored at the Basic level; and four students scored at the Below Basic level. The lowest score in the class was 268, which is only three points above the Far Below Basic level. When looking at the highest and lowest scores, there seems to be a large range of abilities in this class, but when looking at the chart below, most students fall into the Proficient and Basic range, with just a few outliers in the higher and lower ranges.

Figure 2—2006-2007 STAR Scores for Students in Target Class

Advanced = 397-600 (1 Student)
Proficient = 350-396 (6 Students)
Basic = 300-349 (10 Students)
Below Basic = 265-299 (4 Students)
Far Below Basic = 150-264 (0 Students)

For my focus students, I have tried to choose a wide variety of students in the following categories: academic abilities, achievement, interests, and attitude. None of the students that I chose have a "D" in the class, because of the grading scale for the English department. The entire department has a grading scale, which all teachers must use. It is a typical scale with a few exceptions. The "D" range is from 65-69 percent of the total points possible. The "F" range begins at 64 percent. The English faculty decided to adopt this scale several years ago, and they have noticed that fewer students fail than before the implementation of the scale. Many students begin to work harder as

soon as they realize that they have an "F," and with this scale, they need to raise their grade about six percent and then they have a "C" again. This scale has recently come under scrutiny from the principal and the district, and department members were asked to calculate how many students are failing who have grades in the 60-64 percent range. Most teachers had only two or three out of all their students, and I do not have a single student in that range in this class. Again, here are my focus students:

Student 1: Student 1 is an 11th grade Caucasian male. This student is in the school's Special Education program and has an IEP (discussed earlier). He has trouble processing numbers, and his IEP relates specifically to his mathematics classes. This student has made it very clear to me that he does not like me or my class, and that he would enjoy the class if it were taught by his 10th grade teacher. He has been a behavior problem all year, starting on the very first day of class. He is disruptive and likes to argue about anything as long as the entire class can hear him. His mother used to work as a clerk for the school, so he knows most of the faculty, including the counselors very well. Because of this, he thinks he can get me fired, and has threatened to do so twice. Also, when I send him out of class, he simply goes across the hallway and hangs out with the counselors and the clerks. Further adding to his behavior problems, is the fact that his mother has recently become deathly ill and has stopped working for the school. I think that his mother's illness contributes to his behavior, but his mother told me at the very beginning of the year (before we even knew that I had her son for a student) that her son had been a behavioral problem for the past few years.

This student has many strengths and interests outside of English. For example, he is an amazing graphic artist and is enrolled in the corresponding ROP program. He also

has recently started a T-shirt company and sells shirts screened with his designs. I have seen many students in this class, and others around campus, wearing his shirts. His ROP class is obviously his favorite class, and he spends much of his time in English drawing. He usually is not productive in class, but completes all of his work at home. Also, he has decided that because he will not need English, or any other class, in his profession or in the arts college that he has already decided he will attend, everything that we do in class is worthless. This student also races motor cross and was eligible to compete last year in the most prestigious national race for amateurs. He is still upset that he was unable to compete due to a broken collarbone.

He currently has a very high "C+" in the class, but his grade fluctuates between the "B" and "C" range. He received a Basic score on the STAR test, but he received a 94 percent in the Reading Comprehension category. He has passed both sections of the CAHSEE. When asked what his strengths in English are, he wrote that he is "super hot at writing." When I told the class that we would be focusing on writing because most students identified it as a weakness, he complained that he was already good at it and had received the best possible score on an essay that the district uses to judge students' writing. This student clearly has no issues with his attitude about writing, but his perception of his writing is a bit generous. He does generate great ideas about topics, but, like most students in the class, he has difficulty organizing them in a cohesive way.

Student 2: This student is also an 11th grade Caucasian male. He is very quiet and reserved in the class. His best friend is in the class, and they sit by each other, but both are quiet and do not talk to each other during class. This student scored as Proficient on the STAR test. He received scores in the 80% range in both Literary Response and

Analysis and Written Conventions, but received a 60% in the Writing Strategies section. The in-class essay that he wrote is included and discussed later. I think he will benefit most from the quick-writing, so that he has time to generate more ideas before writing. This student currently has a "B+" in the class, but it seems that every assignment either bumps his grade up to an "A-," or down to a "B+." This student's favorite activity is skateboarding, and he once wrote that the worst thing that ever happened to him was when he hyper-extended his ankle and had to watch his friends skate without him.

Student 3: This student is one of the two 12th graders repeating the class. He is also enrolled in Reading Strategies and he has an IEP. This student struggles with staying organized, and, because of his visual-motor skills, writing can be difficult for him. He has passed both sections of the CAHSEE, however, and is on-track to graduate this spring if he passes this class. This student scored in the Basic level on the STAR test, receiving a score of 348, which almost classifies him as Proficient. He received 100 percent in the Written Conventions category, but a 64 percent in Writing Strategies, which could be related to his IEP. This student has an "F" in the class, but it is fairly high. He has an "A" in the test category, and usually receives 100 percents on the vocabulary tests that most of his peers fail terribly. Not coincidently, he also received an 88% on the Vocabulary Development section of the STAR test.

Student 4: This student is an 11th grade Caucasian female. She was the only student in the class to score in the Advanced range on the STAR test, receiving a score of 428. She has been GATE-identified, and has also passed both portions of the CAHSEE. Unfortunately, she has had an "F" in the class since the very beginning of the year. She rarely, if ever, turns in assignments. She rarely completes even the assignments that are

done entirely in class. She does, however, always receive full-credit on the vocabulary tests. I know that she does not study for the tests and she has never completed one of the vocabulary packets that are required. This student is currently failing all of her classes except Woodshop, in which she has an "A+." This class is not the Wood ROP class, but simply an additional elective. She has a 504 plan, which explains that she has trouble keeping up with her classes. The plan also explains that she has been diagnosed with depression, an anxiety disorder, and OCD (Obsessive Compulsive Disorder). These three illnesses are cyclical for her. For example, she often has trouble completing assignments, especially longer ones such as writing assignments, due to her OCD. Once she realizes that she has not turned in an assignment, she becomes anxious and worried about the class, which causes her to be distracted in class, thus missing further assignments and increasing her anxiety. She also becomes depressed about her grades in class. I have found this to be very true. I have spoken to her individually after class about her grade in the class and she seemed to be on the verge of having an anxiety attack. She does want to try, however, as she is the only student in this class who has ever come to my other room to pick up an assignment or speak with me about their grade.

On a more personal note, she also becomes distracted in class because her girlfriend lives far away and they do not get to see each other often. Instead of writing her in-class essay (baseline data) she wrote about her relationship with her girlfriend and about being gay at the high school and in my male-dominated class. I do not believe that more than two of the students in this class know that she is gay, and I know that they would not be supportive. I have already referred two students to the office for using derogatory language when referring to gay people. Both times, other students have

openly questioned why I sent the students to the office because they did not see how it

was hurtful. There are not many openly gay students on campus, and the school does not

have a Gay-Straight Alliance, which I believe further leads to this student's alienation.

Finally, she really enjoys being on the Water polo team at school (it is the team's

inaugural year) but she has recently been disqualified from playing because of her grades.

Student 5: This student is an 11th grader and scored a 353 on the STAR test (3

points above the Basic level). This student is one of the three students in the class that

has an "A." This student works especially hard to maintain his grade. He is also enrolled

in the school's AVID program, which has helped him become more organized in his

classes. He is very concerned with his grade in the class, and often becomes upset with

students who are off-task or disruptive, which, unfortunately, is many of them. He also

does not like to work in groups, and once even refused to work with his group members,

because he thinks that he does most of the work.

Student 6: This student is an 11th grade Caucasian male who has been GATE-

identified. He scored as Proficient on the STAR test, has passed both sections of the

CAHSEE, and has a "C+" in the class. Like Student 2, this student is one of the few who

is reserved and quiet. Surprisingly, he is also one of the few students that participate in

the class. I do not think that he likes to participate, but if I wait long enough without

getting any volunteers, he will usually whisper an answer. He sits directly in the front of

the class, so I hear him and ask him to repeat or elaborate on his responses. He usually

makes very astute observations about the text that we are reading and seems fairly

engaged, but English is his least favorite class. He wrote on a survey that he would enjoy

English more if "essays were not required and you only have to do them if you want to

get extra points." His favorite class is his ROP Cabinetmaking class. I have often spoken to him about this class, because my uncle went to this high school, took the same ROP class, and makes custom cabinets for a living. He is not especially interested in cabinetmaking, and plans on transferring out at the semester, but it is still his favorite class.

Student 7: This student is an 11th grade Latino male. He scored five points above the Below Basic level on the STAR test and has not yet passed the English Language Arts section of the CAHSEE. He used to be a behavioral problem in the class, but I think that as I have got to know him better he feels bad for disrupting the class, and his behavior has improved greatly (talking to his mother may have helped as well). I have spoken to this student individually about his grade, which is currently a high "F." After telling him that he should not have this grade, and asking why he did, he replied, "because I'm stupid." I was trying to tell him that that was not true, when he cut me off and said emphatically, "No, I am!" He is very unsure of himself, especially in regards to his writing. While we were writing our Crucible essay in class, this student would raise his hand for me to check what he had written after every few sentences.

Our English department

The English department at DEHS is very organized and members work together to create curriculum and assessments. Each grade level is given a common final. To ensure that this is successful, each grade level also has its own curricular outline. Although teachers are not required to teach the curriculum in the exact same ways, the outline is very helpful and informative for new teachers like myself. For example, the department has a writing binder for every grade level. The binder includes each type of

essay that students should write throughout the course of the year, what concepts should be taught with each essay, and numerous examples, overheads, and handouts for each essay. Following the binder closely ensures that students learn certain skills in each grade level. Thus, teachers know what Junior English students should have learned in their previous years about formal writing. The department also gives common finals for each grade level. Soon, the district will also implement common finals for each grade level in English.

This year, another teacher and I have all of the regular Junior English students. We will be working closely together, and we have already decided to teach the same units to our students at the same time. Also, the co-chairs of our department are not happy with the current Junior final, so they have asked the other teacher and me to create a new final. This means that we can now have complete control over what we will teach. We are required to teach "The Crucible" and "To Kill A Mockingbird," to have students write four full-process essays and a research paper, and to cover the standards thoroughly. The members of our department, however, have also made the previous Junior curriculum available to us, so that we do not have to create everything from scratch.

A few years ago, the English department was asked to review their policy on grading and finals. Because the English department has the more rigorous grading scale, on which a 65 percent equates to a grade of a "D-," the department was asked to make another option available to students who are not likely to pass the class. Two weeks before the end of the semester students are given a district-provided essay prompt, which they must respond to in 50 minutes. If students are given a "4" on the essay (out of a 6-

point scale) by two teachers in the department, and students receive a 70 percent on the multiple-choice semester final, students are given a "D-" in the class. None of the teachers in the department agree with this policy, but nevertheless, it is abided by. The school's administration believes that it is a "fair" policy because students are not being punished by having to re-take the class when they know the information, and these students will most likely not be going on to college. Finally, only a handful of students pass English by this method each semester, as the multiple-choice final is rigorous, and the final essay is graded in an exacting manner.

Our school

For the 2007-2008 school year, Drake Eddy High School has enrolled 1,388 students, including the 31 students who are concurrently enrolled at DEHS and Outlook High School, the alternative high school connected to the DEHS campus. The class breakdown is as follows: 408 Freshmen, 370 Sophomores, 313 Juniors, and 297 Seniors.

The last year for which an API score is available, the 2005-2006 school year, Drake Eddy High School received an API score of 764, which was an increase of 10 points over the previous year's score. Caucasian students, which account for 82% of the school's population, recorded an average score of 779, 15 points higher than the school's average, and seven points higher than the previous year. The average score for Hispanic and Latino/a students was 638, 126 points below the school's average, but a seven-point increase over the previous year. Not enough students from other ethnic backgrounds were included in the API results to be statistically significant. Students who are classified as Socioeconomically Disadvantaged received an average score of 680, a significant increase of 26 points from the previous year. The average score for these

students, however, is still 84 points lower than the school's average. Finally, students with disabilities received an average score of 570 points, 194 points lower than the school's average. Not enough disabled students were included in the 2004-2005 year to be statistically significant, so whether these students' scores increased or decreased is unknown.

The school did not receive an API score for the school year of 2006-2007. The website for the California Department of Education claims that Drake Eddy High School "failed to test a significant proportion of students who were not exempt from testing in 2007." Not enough students were tested on the science portion of the exam to warrant a score from the state.

For the 2005-2006 school year, Drake Eddy made Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) and increased its API score. For the 2006-2007 school year, Drake Eddy failed to make Adequate Yearly Progress because no API score could be included. The school did, however, pass the other 17 criteria required for AYP.

Our community

DEHS is located in the small city of Pineville which is in the Sierra Nevada Foothills in Drake Eddy County. Pineville has a population of about 10,350. Pineville has a small historic downtown center with various shops and eateries. Students from the nearby communities of Camargo and Prairie Place, further east of Pineville, also attend DEHS. Camargo includes the small community of Fruit Farms, a conglomeration of privately owned fruit stands that are renowned in Northern California for their fruit, wine, and pine trees. Many students from DEHS work at fruit stands in Fruit Farms in the fall months.

All of the students who attend DEHS live in rural communities. Pineville itself is a rural area and very few students actually live in the town. Many students must take the bus from Camargo or Prairie Place. Prairie Place is a very large area; some students who live in "the Prairie" have a commute of 25 minutes, while others have a commute of 45-60 minutes. Because it also snows regularly in Camargo and in Prairie Place, the school is allotted two "Snow Days" per school year. The roads off the freeway in Pineville, Camargo, and Prairie Place can be very dangerous even when it is only raining moderately. Because DEHS is the last high school before reaching the Lake Tahoe area, many students also live in other outlying, rural areas. Many students, even some who live in Prairie Place, live in houses that do not have electricity, but instead run on generators.

The community of Pineville, however small, is very supportive of the school and the students who attend DEHS. Because of donations made by the community, the school was recently able to build an outdoor amphitheater and stage for school and community productions. The inaugural school play at the amphitheater attracted over 500 guests from the school and the community. The school is also connected to the community in other ways. The school's football field and stadium is technically on grounds that are taken care of by community employees. The pool that is located on campus is also Pineville's public pool and is open, year-round, to community members.

A common complaint of students is the lack of activities. A common descriptor used by students to explain Pineville is "boring." Because the school is so close to Tahoe, however, many students have been skiing or snowboarding since they were very young. Many students at the school compete in ski or snowboard competitions all over

the country and place very high in such competitions. Students in my other classes are sponsored by apparel companies or are playing in the X-Games for competitors under 13 years of age. Specifically, the students in my class have mentioned skating, snowboarding, dirt-biking, motor-cross, and other sports as their main activities. The place that Pineville has to offer that many students frequent is the local skate park.

Research Questions

For my inquiry study, I have decided to design my intervention around helping my students improve their on-demand writing. My intervention focuses on teaching students various prewriting and organizational techniques that they can implement when approaching an on-demand writing task. I am hoping that this intervention will help me understand my students' learning better in regards to their writing; specifically, which techniques and strategies will help them more than others. Also, in regards to my own teaching, I feel least secure about teaching writing than any other aspect of English/ Language Arts. I know that I am adept at recognizing a well-written text, but that is very different from teaching students *how* to write a well-written essay. I am hoping that by focusing my intervention on my students' writing, I will force myself into concentrating on my writing instruction. Hopefully, I will learn new effective strategies to implement with my students and become more comfortable teaching students how to write.

I will be concentrating my intervention on answering the following research question: **What effects do teaching students different prewriting strategies (free writing and clustering) and giving students practice in organizing (activities that focus on the differences between essay elements and color coding) have on students' organization and development in their writing in a timed, in-class setting?** I will be

teaching my students several prewriting techniques, such as free writing and clustering. I will also be teaching students organization through several different activities. First, students will complete an essay-element scramble activity in which they are given three essay elements and must determine which is which. Later, students will be given prompts and will be asked to only create certain essay elements. Finally, students will complete a color-coding activity. All five of these strategies will be explained in full detail later.

My research question also has two closely related subquestions. First, **To what extent will focusing on students' writing help improve students' attitude about writing in general and their perception of their own writing?** I am hoping that by giving students many different strategies with which to approach a writing assignment, they will feel more comfortable with their writing abilities and will thus have a better attitude about writing. I think that most of my students hate writing because they are at a loss of where to begin or how to approach a prompt. Hopefully, this intervention will address both their enjoyment of writing and their confidence level. Also, I think that many of my students think they are bad writers because they are not able to get started on their own. I am hoping that with the three different prewriting techniques, students will at least find one that they feel comfortable implementing on their own.

Another question that I have about my students' writing, which is closely related to my main research question, is **To what extent will students use the prewriting and organizational strategies they learned when responding to an on-demand writing prompt?** This question will be answered by my exit data. Not only will I learn whether or not students' organization and development in their writing has improved, but I will

also learn whether or not students feel comfortable enough with the strategies to implement them on their own when approaching an on-demand writing task.

Purpose and Rationale of Research

I have chosen my research question for several reasons. The single biggest reason that I chose this topic is that my students basically asked that we focus on writing. Before deciding on an area to work on with my students, I wanted to give them a survey to find out what they thought they needed extra help with; I wanted students' input before choosing a topic to focus on. I wanted to see what students thought were their strengths and weaknesses before implementing any new strategies or activities. I would like students to see the importance of what we are learning in my class, and I think that this is more likely if we are working on skills that they think they need help with. If I picked a topic that students felt they were strong in, they might not be as invested in what we are learning, and I would like to see them buy-in to the importance of our work in English.

Before giving students the survey on Monday, September 10, 2007, I explained the purpose of the survey and why I wanted such information from them. I explained that I would be completing a Master's degree in Education during this school year and that I had to choose a focus group. I also explained that I had selected their class to focus my attention on, and that I would further decide on an area of English that we were struggling with and stage an intervention to help them improve in that area. I asked them to be as specific as possible because all the information that they provide would be helpful, and I also requested that they give their name (unless they were strongly opposed to doing so). I gave students as much time as they needed in class to complete the survey. Before giving this survey, students had not seemed interested in anything that I

had said. When I was explaining the purpose of the survey, students were actually

listening attentively, most of them for the first time. Students took this survey very

seriously. Immediately after I passed it out, students began working on the survey.

Later, when I told them the results of the survey, every student was listening thoughtfully

to what I was saying.

The Student Aptitude and Interest Survey that I gave students was fairly long and

included questions such as the following:

- What are your favorite and least favorite classes?
- Which are your best and worst classes?
- Why do you think you do well in one subject and not the other?
- What do you like/ dislike about English classes that you have taken in the past?
- What are your strengths and weaknesses in English?
- What do you think would help you improve your weaknesses in English?
- Are there any activities that we have done so far that you have found helpful or not helpful in understanding the curriculum?
- Are there any activities/ strategies that you would find helpful that we are not doing?"

I also included questions about their interests and activities outside of school in order to

get a better idea about my students as individuals.

The following series of charts represent students' responses to a few of the

questions on the survey. Students' answers to these questions forced me to choose

writing as my focus for the intervention. After reading their surveys, I felt that I really

had no choice, but I also felt that this intervention would be well worth the effort and

might even help increase students' engagement and buy-in to the class because they had

suggested the topic.

The first chart represents students' responses to the question "What do you

like/dislike about the English classes you have taken in the past?" Students were allowed

to write as many answers as they wished, so the total does not add up to the number of

students who took the survey: 24.

Table 1—Students' responses to Survey Question: "What do you like/ dislike about English classes that you have taken in the past?"

Students' Responses	What students LIKED about previous English classes	What students DISLIKED about previous English classes
Teacher	1	1
Students	2	
Movies	1	
Creative Activities	1	
Reading	1	3
Reading logs		1
Homework		2
Vocabulary		2
Lectures		1
Finals		1
Essays		10
Too much writing		1
Writing is too specific		1
Work is hard		1
Work is easy	1	
Everything	1	1

The most obvious conclusion that I drew from my students' responses to this

question was that so many of them did not like writing essays. Even though I had noticed

while reading their surveys that many of my students did not like writing, counting up

and looking at the actual number was somewhat startling. Forty-one percent (or ten) of

the students had written that they disliked writing essays. Interestingly, students only

mentioned essay writing as something that they did not like doing. Only one student

wrote that he disliked writing in general.

Another interesting trend I noticed in this data was that only eight out of the 33

responses (or 24.24% of the total responses) were for something that students liked about

their previous English class. I found it disconcerting that so few students could come up with something that they liked about their English classes. Students could have written down any response they wished, but only eight could think of something. This further convinced me to focus my intervention on an aspect of English that my students had chosen for themselves.

The following chart represents students' responses to the question "What are your strengths/ weaknesses in English." Students were allowed to write as many responses as they wished, so the results do not total the number of students.

Table 2—Students' Responses to Survey Question: "What are your strengths and weaknesses in English?"

Students' Responses	What students perceive to be their **STRENGTHS**	What students perceive to be their **WEAKNESSES**
Reading	4	2
Reading Comprehension	1	
Pronouncing Words		1
Summarizing		1
Writing	2	4
Writing Essays	1	6
Talking		2
Studying		1
Tests		2
Remembering		1
Vocabulary	7	2
Vocabulary Worksheets	1	
Nothing	4	
Don't know	2	

In response to this question, 10 of the responses were negative towards writing. For this question, 20 percent of the students claimed that writing was a weakness, with 60 percent of those students specifying essay writing as their weakness. Conversely, two

students (one student perceived both writing and writing essays to be his strength), or seven percent of the students, perceived writing to be one of their strengths. One of these students, however, is Student 1, whose perception of his writing is higher than his actual ability.

Forty of students' responses listed a particular strength or weakness of the student. An additional six responses, however, did not fall nicely into either category. These six students responded either that they did not know what their strengths were or that they did not know what their weaknesses were. This was 13 percent of the total comments, or 25 percent of the 24 students who took the survey. I found these responses especially discouraging because so many students could not name a single strength they thought they had in English. If students could not name anything they thought they were good at, and if everything is a struggle for them, why would they enjoy English? Also, the students who responded that they did not know if they had any strengths seem insecure about their abilities. Possibly focusing on writing will help them to think of this as a strength.

I have included one sample survey that is fairly representative of the responses I received.

Figure 3—Sample Student Aptitude/ Interest Survey

Name (Optional):

Student Aptitude/ Interest Survey

Please respond to the following questions in as much detail as possible.

What are your favorite and least favorite classes? Why? Which classes are you best and worst? Why do you think you do so well in one subject and not the other?

What do you like/ dislike about English classes you have taken in the past?

What are your strengths/ weaknesses in English?

What do you think would help you improve your weaknesses in English?

Are there any activities that we have done so far that you have found helpful/ not helpful in understanding the curriculum?

Are there activities/ strategies that you would find helpful that we are not doing?

I chose to include this student's survey because he made several interesting responses to the questions. For the first question, which asked about his favorite and least favorite classes, he wrote that he "[does] very good in elective classes, because I like to do those things, and my least favorite is all the class I have to take." I thought that this was a very observant comment for him to make, because he is recognizing that he does well in the subjects that he enjoys. Perhaps he does better in his elective classes than in his required classes because he enjoys what he is doing and is willing to put forth some extra effort. Perhaps this student will be willing to put forth extra effort in my class as well, when he realizes that we will be focusing on something that he does not perceive to be one of his strengths.

He is also one of the ten students in my class who has an ROP class. He takes the automotive ROP class, and he listed it as his favorite class because he "[gets] to fool around and work on cars." It sounds as though he enjoys that class because he is able to work with his hands and manipulate objects, which he might not often do in many of his other classes. I am thinking that he might find the clustering method of organizing his thoughts most helpful.

In addition, this student was one of the students who listed essays as his weakness. When asked if there was something that could help him to improve upon his weakness, he wrote, "If I got some sort of cheat sheet on our essays like I got my sophomore year." Because he did not describe the "cheat sheet" in more detail, I asked him later about his response. It turns out that he was referring to the detailed outlines that

students are given for each essay in their freshman year of English 1. For each essay, students are given an outline that progressively becomes less detailed. Essentially, many of the essays are fill-in-the-blank. For the first essay, students are given the entire introduction and conclusion, the first-half of the first body paragraph, and concluding sentences and topic sentences for each of the body paragraphs. Students must simply insert concrete details (usually direct quotations from the text) and commentary explaining their concrete details. While I think that this method helps students write more organized essays, I also think that many students, such as this one, become too dependent on the outlines and do not know how to approach writing an essay from scratch.

My assumption that students would struggle writing essays without a provided outline was confirmed when I gave students an in-class essay to write. I analyzed students' essays with a six-part rubric that I created. The rubric focused on the strength of students' arguments, thesis statements, topic sentences, concrete details, commentary, and logic. The rubric employed a three-point scale, with a score of three being the highest score. After evaluating students' essays, I found that only 50 percent of students received a score of three on their argument, 33 percent of the class scored a three on their thesis statements, 8 percent (or two students) scored a three on their topic sentences or logic, and only 4 percent of students (i.e., one student) received scores of three on their concrete details or commentary. Because the majority of the rubric elements relate to organization in some way, I realized, based on students' essays, that I needed to address organization in my intervention.

While students were writing their essays, I also noticed that students really struggled organizing their thoughts. Sixteen percent of students specified that they had difficulty generating ideas on the topic with such short notice. Because of these students' responses, I decided to focus my intervention on prewriting as well so that students would have strategies to help them produce ideas for their writing without outside help.

Rationale for Strategies

I have chosen several different prewriting activities based on various research literature. First, Zemelman and Daniels (1988) discuss the necessity of prewriting for students, claiming that it is the "most effective activity" for writers to engage in (p. 32). Not only does prewriting "help students gather and organize material for their writing," but it also helps them "become engaged with specific topics" (p. 132). These are two of the goals of my research and intervention: helping students generate sufficient ideas for writing and developing their interest in writing, which would hopefully stem from an increased engagement with what they are writing.

My third goal for my intervention involves students being able to organize their ideas in their writing in a logical way. To accomplish this goal, I have chosen to teach students how to cluster. Rico (1997) argues that "clustering actually generates structure, shaping one thought into a starburst of other thoughts, each somehow related to the whole. That is why clustering so often results in writing that is naturally marked by increased coherence, increased fluency, increased concrete support, and an increased sense of how to expand ideas" (p. 16). So, not only will clustering help students structure and organize their ideas, but it will also help students build upon their original ideas in the process.

Strategies and Timeline for Implementation

After having decided on a research question and focus for my research, I began to worry about creating strategies that would help benefit my students' writing. As I have struggled with feeling comfortable with my teaching abilities in regards to writing, I wanted to experiment with implementing several different strategies not only to better help students, but also to build up my repertoire of teaching strategies. I choose to include free writing and clustering after researching the topic of prewriting. Soon after creating my research questions, the experienced English teacher that I share my 5th period classroom with told me about an activity that she had implemented with her students that was successful. Based on her activity, I developed several activities that will hopefully help improve students' organization in their writing. I then added these activities to my research questions. Here again are my research question and subquestions:

Main Research Question:
　　What effects do teaching students different prewriting strategies (free writing and clustering) and giving students practice with organizing (sorting scrambled essay elements, activities that focus on the differences between essay elements, and color coding) have on students' organization and development in their writing in a timed, in-class setting?

Subquestions:
　　• To what extent will focusing on students' writing help improve students' attitude about writing in general and their perception of their own writing?
　　• To what extent will students use the prewriting and organizational strategies they learned when responding to an on-demand writing prompt?

To ensure that the strategies I had chosen to implement would answer my research questions, I created the following chart that shows how the strategies correlate to the parts of each research question.

Table 3—Connection Between Research Question and Data

Aspect of Research Question	Data the will help answer the question
Use of prewriting strategies	Free writing; clustering
Use of organizational strategies	Clustering; Essay element activities; color-coding activity
Effects of prewriting and organizational techniques on organization in writing	In-class essays
Effects of prewriting and organizational techniques on development in writing	In-class essays
Students' perception of their own writing	Students' reflections on writing with/without new techniques Surveys Observational data
Students' attitude towards writing	Students' reflections on writing with/without new techniques Surveys Observational data
Transfer of skills to on-demand writing	In-class essay (exit data) Survey (i.e., did any of the strategies they have learned help them to write a better essay?)

Before delving into working with students' organization in their writing, we will begin with three prewriting techniques. Because so many of my students wrote that they had trouble generating ideas on which to expand in their in-class essays, I think that this is a good place to start. The first strategy that I will implement with my students involves teaching them to free write before responding to an essay prompt. For free writing students are given a set amount of time just to write about a given topic. Students do not need to organize their thoughts in any way, because they are only asked to write whatever comes into their minds about the topic. When free writing, students do not fix spelling or grammatical mistakes; the purpose is to write as much about the topic as possible in a

fixed amount of time (Zemelman & Daniels, 1988, p.135). Zemelman and Daniels (1988) argue that "the aim of free writing is not to produce 'good' writing, but simply to unlock the gates, to establish a flow" (p.135). Free writing simply allows students to generate ideas about the topic so that they have something to expand upon in their formal response to the prompt.

Because students also need to know how to organize their ideas after they have created them, I will next teach students how to use clustering to help them organize their ideas. We will begin with clustering instead of an outline, as most of my students are familiar with the outline format, but cannot create one on their own, and I think the cluster will be a good intermediary step, as it is "easy and unthreatening" (Rico, 1997, p.16). When clustering, students start with the main topic in a bubble, and put each of their ideas from the free-write in a bubble stemming from the main bubble. Then, from each of the secondary bubbles, students will create new bubbles that have supporting details or examples for their ideas (Zemelman & Daniels, 1988, p.135). The first time we do this activity, I will create the cluster for them, but gradually students will become more responsible for creating their own clusters.

I will also implement several activities during the intervention that hopefully will help students better organize their writing. First, students will participate in an essay-element scramble activity. Students will be given an essay prompt with sample essay elements, such as a controlling idea (CI), a three-part thesis statement (3PTS), and a topic sentence (TS). Students will have to decide, based on the prompt, and their knowledge of the elements, which elements are which. Students will later be given more elements, such as concrete details (CDs), commentary (CM), and background information (BI).

The first time that students participate in this activity, we will work together as a class to put the elements in logical order. Later, students will join with a partner and organize several different groups of essay elements. Students will originally be given the prompts for which the elements will be used, but later, students will need to determine which element is which without the prompt. This will be more difficult, and students, with their partner, will have to describe how they knew which element was which. For example, what does each topic sentence include that made it clear to the students that it was a topic sentence, and not a thesis statement?

After the essay element scramble activity that focuses on controlling ideas, three-part thesis statements, and topic sentences, students will complete activities that use different essay elements. First, students will be given several topics and asked to write a thesis statement, topic sentence, and one concrete detail for each of the topics. Later, students will be given a topic and asked to write a topic sentence, one concrete detail, and corresponding commentary for the topic. Finally, students will be given an essay prompt and will be asked to write a controlling idea, a three-part thesis statement, and three corresponding topic sentences.

The final activity that students will participate in to help improve the organization of their writing also includes the elements of an essay. For this activity, students will be given an entire essay, and will need to identify all of the elements of the essay. Students will color-code the essay according to the element and identify possible missing elements. While this might seem like an elementary activity, I am hoping that this will help students remember where each element should appear while they are writing an essay.

The following table shows when I will be implementing the strategies for my intervention.

Table 4—Intervention Timeline

	Date	Research Plan – Intervention
Week 1	**October 29th (Monday)**	**Clustering: Background Information for American Author Project**
	November 2nd (Friday)	**American Dream (free writing) activity/ clustering as a class; Turn clustering into outline as a class**
Week 2	**November 5th (Monday)**	**New essay: free write; cluster individually**
Week 3	**November 12th (Monday)**	**New essay: free write at home with family member; can use both ideas for cluster/ outline**
Week 4	**November 17th- 21st**	American Author Projects
Week 5	**November 26th (Monday)**	American Author Projects
Week 6	**December 3rd (Monday)**	In-class final essay
Week 7	**December 10th (Monday)**	American Author paper
Week 8	**December 17th (Monday)**	Final Review
	December 19th- 21st	Finals
Weeks 9 & 10	**December 24th- January 4th**	Winter Break
Week 12	**January 7th (Monday)**	First day back from break
	January 9th (Wednesday)	**Review clustering; clustering activity not related to writing**
	January 11th (Friday)	**Have students free write on Great Gatsby topic and cluster their ideas as a class**
Week 13	**January 14th (Monday)**	**For sample essay: Look at CI, 3PTS, and TS statements (order correctly); 1st as a class; next in groups; collect**

		observational data
	January 16th (Wednesday)	For Great Gatsby paper: look at CI, 3PTS, and TS and order correctly; develop other TSs to match 3PTS
	January 18th (Friday)	Back to sample essay: students must highlight all parts of essay; look at order; Students given Gatsby sample paper; must highlight alone
Week 14	January 21st (Monday)	New essay: students given time to free write; cluster or outline; and write essay elements only
	January 23rd (Wednesday)	Timed in-class essay (exit data)

Because such a large number of students in my class, 23 percent, have not yet

passed the English Language Arts portion of the CAHSEE, which is a requirement for

graduation, I plan on letting the parents of these students know what we will be working

on in class to help them pass the exam. I will be sending home a letter to the parents of

these six students, detailing the strategies that we will be working on in class and how I

anticipate these strategies with help their student. Teachers in my department recently

received a shipment of CAHSEE preparation materials which we are supposed to give to

students who have not yet passed the exam. I will be asking parents to encourage their

students to use the preparation materials and to monitor their student's progress in the

booklet. I will conclude this letter by thanking them for participating with me in helping

to prepare their student for the CAHSEE.

While 6 of my students have not yet passed, the other 20 students have, and I

would like to include their parents or family members in this intervention as well. To do

so, I will give students an extra credit opportunity if they engage in an activity related to our class work at home with a family member or an older family friend. I would prefer to make this assignment mandatory, but I am not sure how feasible it would be for every student to complete this activity with a family member due to students' differing circumstances. Students will be asked to free write a topic at home and then create a cluster on the topic. Students who would like to participate in the extra credit option will be asked to free write with a parent, discuss the ideas they both had, and create a cluster based on both of their ideas. They will then be asked to write a brief paragraph discussing if working with a partner helped them to generate more ideas or helped their understanding of the topic or prompt.

While I have no English Language Learners in this classroom, I do have many students with diverse educational needs. Five of the 26 students in the class, or 19 percent, have either an IEP or a 504 plan. For the two students that have trouble staying organized, whether for class or in their writing, I think that the strategies I have decided to use will help them greatly. Clustering will give them a way to visualize how their ideas are connected, and turning their clusters into outlines will give them a step-by-step list to follow while writing. Also, for my visual learners, the color-coding activity will help these students see exactly where each element of their essay should appear in their writing. This intervention may also help students such as the student who mentioned in his survey (included in the "Purpose and Rationale" section), that he likes his auto class because he gets to "fool around with cars." It sounds as though he enjoys that class because he gets to use his hands and manipulate objects, so possibly the essay-element scramble activity will resonate with him because he will get to move the elements (which

are on different scraps of paper) around. Finally, many students in this class have trouble

staying on-task because they are not interested in what we are doing, so I am hoping that

the increased number of group activities and visual assignments will boost their

engagement and involvement with the class.

Timeline for Gathering Data

The following table outlines when I will be collecting data from my students from

which to evaluate both their progress during the intervention and also the effectiveness of

the intervention.

Table 5—Data Gathering Timeline

Student Work/Achievement Data	Timeline for Data
Pre-intervention baseline achievement data: In-class essay	Monday, September 24th, 2007
Post-intervention outcome achievement data: In-class essay	Wednesday, January 23rd, 2008
Attitude Data	
Pre-intervention baseline attitude data: Student Interest and Aptitude Survey, Writing Survey	September 2007
Post-intervention outcome attitude data: Writing Survey	Monday, January 23rd, 2008
In-the-Midst Process Data Documenting the Intervention	
Observational data: Collected when students are working in pairs on the essay-element scramble activity	Monday, January 14th, 2008
Student work 1: Free write that students use to help create cluster and outline from cluster individually	Monday, November 5th, 2007
Student work 2: Look at CI, 3PTS, and TS and order correctly; develop other TSs to match 3PTS	Wednesday, January 16th, 2008
Student work 3: Sample essay (students must highlight all parts of essay); look at order	Friday, January 18th, 2008
Student work 4: New essay: students given time to free write; cluster or outline; and write essay elements only	Monday, January 21st, 2008
Student work 5: New essay: students given time to free write; cluster or outline; and write; students must identify the elements that they included in their essay	Monday, January 21st, 2008

Baseline Achievement Data

My baseline achievement data for the intervention is an in-class essay that I gave students on Monday, September 24th. Twenty-four students were present when this data set was collected. The in-class essay that students responded to, which also qualifies as on-demand writing, required students to agree or disagree with a statement and then support their argument with examples. Students were given 50 minutes to formulate a response to the prompt. Students' responses to the essay prompt gave me an idea of how well students could form an argument in a short period of time, how well students could organize their arguments without help in advance, and how well students could support their argument with examples. The prompt that students were given required students to agree or disagree with the following statement: **Drake Eddy High School should institute off-campus lunch.**

When I initially began to analyze students' responses to the prompt, I was overwhelmed at how to begin the process. Students' essays were so unorganized and seemingly illogical that I wondered how I could score students' essays accurately and consistently with the rubric that my department uses. I decided that I would need to create a new rubric. Also, students' essays were difficult to read because I had to search for their arguments. I began to realize the necessity of deciding on the most important elements of an essay that I wanted students to include in their essays and then score students' essays in relation to those elements. I decided that based on the type of essay that the department wants students to write, I would look specifically at students' arguments, thesis statements, topic sentences, concrete details, and commentary. While reading students' essays, I determined that students could include all of those elements,

but their essays could still be generally unorganized, so I decided to include a category

for my rubric that judged students on the logic and, thus, the organization of their essay.

After I had resolved upon the aspects that my rubric would cover, I created the actual

rubric. The design that I chose for my rubric is modeled off of a rubric created by my

colleague, Katherine Walsh (2008). I had seen her rubric and was impressed by its

simplicity and accessibility. Consequently, my rubric is on a three-point scale, with a

score of three being the highest that a student may receive. A score of three generally

indicates that the student's essay excelled in the rubric category, a score of two shows

that the student's essay is adequate in the rubric category, and a score of one

demonstrates that the student's essay is deficient in the rubric category.

All students included an argument in the introduction of their essay. I counted

students as having an argument if they stated specifically in their introduction paragraph

whether or not the school should implement off-campus lunch. Many students probably

considered this their thesis statement. The Drake Eddy English department, however,

encourages students to write three-part thesis statements that state specifically what

students will discuss in each of their three body paragraphs. The argument that students

included technically is considered by the department to be the Controlling Idea (CI) of

the essay because it is just the topic of the essay. The thesis should state specifically

what will be discussed in each of the body paragraphs. Although 100 percent of students

included an argument in their essay, only half of students remained on-topic for the

entirety of their essay. The chart below shows how students scored on their argument.

Table 6—Essay Rubric: Baseline Scores for Element 1

ARGUMENT (CONTROLLING IDEA) The essay contains an authentic argument. The author's argument is clear.		
3- Includes an authentic argument. The author's argument is clear to the reader. All paragraphs support the argument.	**2**- Includes an authentic argument. The author's argument is clear to the reader, but perhaps not every paragraph supports the argument.	**1**- Author does not include an argument.
12 students (50% of class)	**12 students (50 % of class)**	**0 students**

Sample scores are not included for the argument element of the rubric because the arguments for a score of three and two look the same. The difference between the scores of two and three depends solely on the degree that all of the paragraphs support the argument. If all of the body paragraphs support the argument, the argument would receive a score of three. If, however, some of the body paragraphs do not support the argument, the argument would receive a score of two. Figure 4 (located below) is Focus Student 2's baseline essay. He received a score of three for his argument.

Because many students probably believed that their argument was their thesis statement, 50 percent of the class did not include an actual thesis statement at the end of their introductory paragraph. Even though these arguments could be considered thesis statements, the English department prefers that students write detailed three-part theses in their essays. As shown in the table below, only eight students, or 33 percent of the class, included a detailed three-part thesis at the end of their introductory paragraph, thus

receiving a score of three. Four more students, or 17% of the class, inserted their

argument at the end of the introductory paragraph. Technically, this could be considered

a thesis, so students who did so received a score of two.

Table 7—Essay Rubric: Baseline Scores for Element 2

THESIS STATEMENTS The author has included a specific and detailed thesis.		
3- Provides a specific and detailed three-part thesis statement that occurs at the end of the introductory paragraph.	**2-** Provides a clear thesis, but it is just the argument. It appears at the end of the introductory paragraph. Does not have a specific and detailed three-part thesis.	**1-**Does not include a thesis statement that occurs at the end of the introductory paragraph.
8 students (33% of class)	**4 students (17% of class)**	**12 students (50% of class)**

Here are some example thesis statements with the score that they received.

Score 3:

- *"If the school did [have off-campus lunch], this would cause students to take advantage of the privellege, students may not come back, and students will become more obese than they already are."* (Focus Student 5)

- *"I think we should have off-campus lunch. The state is now instituting the no soda, and low sugar rule, so the school lunches suck. Also half of the students would not even leave because to far to walk and don't have cars to the school would not have to worry about them. There would also be alot less detentions because the kids wouldn't have to ditch to leave."* (Student 14)

The students' theses that I included above were two of the eight students that received a

three on the thesis element of the rubric. These students received a score of three because

they included a three-part thesis statement at the end of their introductory paragraphs.

The second example that I included from Student 14 was actually his entire introductory paragraph. I gave him a score of three, however, because he did list the three supporting points he would be discussing to support his argument even if they were in separate sentences.

Score 2:

- *"I think Drake Eddy should have an off-campus lunch."* (Focus Student 2)

- *"I don't think that everybody should be able to go off campus for lunch."* (Student 20)

I decided that the above statements were the students' thesis statements because they came at the end of the introductory paragraph. These students received a score of two, however, because their theses were not specific. Technically, based on the English department's definitions, these theses were only the students' arguments.

Score 1:

- *"Then their would be less kids getting in trouble for ditching because they would just go at lunch instead."* (Focus Student 6)

- *"I mean just because a kid is fat, doesn't mean you can take the good food away from the skinny kids."* (Focus Student 1)

These two students received a score of one because the statements do not constitute thesis statements; the statements are not indicative of what the rest of the essay will be about. These students, part of the 50 percent of the class who scored a one, did not respond to the prompt in essay format. Thus, what should be their thesis statements are really just sentences concluding one of their main points.

Because only eight students had written a three-part thesis statement, it was almost impossible for students to have topic sentences that corresponded to their thesis

statements. Only two students had topic sentences that did so. Eight other students had

problematic topic sentences that either were not the main idea of the paragraph or did not

support their thesis statement. Finally, over 58 percent of the class, as shown in the chart

below, received a score of one, meaning both that their topic sentences were not the main

ideas of their body paragraphs and also that their topic sentences did not support their

thesis statements.

Table 8—Essay Rubric: Baseline Scores for Element 3

TOPIC SENTENCES **The author has included topic sentences that directly correlate to the thesis and that are the main ideas of their body paragraphs.**		
3- Provides topic sentences that correspond to thesis statements. Topic sentences appear as the first sentence in body paragraphs and are the main ideas of the paragraphs.	**2-** Provides topic sentences that correspond to the thesis statement. Topic sentences may not be the first sentence in body paragraph or may not be the main idea of the paragraph.	**1**-Topic sentences are not the main ideas of the body paragraphs and do not correspond to the thesis statement.
2 students (8% of class)	**8 students (33% of class)**	**14 students (58% of class)**

Score 3:

> *Drake Eddy high school should not allow an off campus lunch because students might take advantage of the privillege. If students were allowed an off campus lunch they might decide to go over to a friend's house instead. Students might go home and just eat lunch there. Drake Eddy High school should not have an off campus lunch cause students could not handle the responsibility.*

Score 1:

> *When Drake Eddy made this rule it was to protect teenagers from themself. Many teens would not do things that are not wise off campus. That means nothing, when teens*

are in group its funny to get in trouble. Getting in trouble is a thrill, its like riding a roller couster. This is why Drake Eddy does what needs to be done, to keep teen in line.

A score of two is not included above because paragraphs that receive a score of two on the surface can appear similar to paragraphs that received a score of three or one. While a "two" topic sentence could look like a "three" (because the topic sentence could be the main idea of the paragraph), this topic sentence could receive a "two" because it does not correspond to the thesis statement. Also, a "two" topic sentence could look like a "one" if the topic sentence is not the main idea of the body paragraph. In this case, the sentence would only receive a "two" if it corresponded to the thesis statement.

As seen in the rubric element regarding topic sentences, I expected students to begin their body paragraphs with their topic sentence. While body paragraphs may normally be organized in other ways and may actually end with the paragraphs' topic sentences, this is not the department's expectation for students.

All students included examples in their essays. Unfortunately, not all of the examples that students provided actually supported their argument in the essay as a whole or in an individual paragraph. As seen in the chart below, only one student included two or three detailed examples in each body paragraph. An additional 54 percent of students provided one or two examples that somewhat supported their argument. Finally, 42 percent of students either did not provide any concrete details or included details that were unrelated to their argument.

Table 9—Essay Rubric: Baseline Scores for Element 4

EXAMPLES (CONCRETE DETAILS) The author has provided two to three relevant examples in each paragraph that support the topic sentence.		
3- Provides two to three relevant and believable examples that support each topic sentence.	2- Provides one or two relevant examples that support each topic sentence. Examples might be far-fetched or unbelievable.	1-Provides no examples to support topic sentence, or provides examples unrelated to topic sentence.
1 student (4% of class)	**13 students (54% of class)**	**10 students (42% of class)**

Because the difference between the scores on this element of the rubric only depended on the number of examples students included in each paragraph and whether or not the examples supported the main idea of the paragraph, it is not clear when looking only at the concrete details why each detail received the score it did. For this reason, no examples are reproduced here. This rubric element will be more fully discussed when I examine whole student samples later in this section.

Only one student provided detailed commentary to explain and analyze the concrete details that she included. Not coincidentally, this was the same student who was the only student in the class to score a three on the Example element of the rubric as well. Also, this student was the only student who wrote notes organizing her thoughts while completing this essay. She wrote five examples in about an inch-sized square in the top left-hand corner of her paper that she later used to support her argument.   Besides this student, only four other students ventured to analyze their concrete details. As seen

below, the vast majority of students, an incredible 79 percent, simply listed examples to support their argument and did not even endeavor to analyze or explain the examples.

Table 10—Essay Rubric: Baseline Scores for Element 5

COMMENTARY		
The author discusses the relevance and importance of the examples in detailed and specific commentary.		
3- Provides commentary explaining each example. Commentary is detailed and original.	**2-** Attempts to provide commentary for most of the examples. Commentary is unoriginal and repetitive.	**1-**Provides no commentary to explain examples.
1 student (4% of class)	**4 students (17% of class)**	**19 students (79% of class)**

Score 3:

Concrete Detail: *"Our parents are always telling us "Save your money so you can go to college." "Don't buy that youll use it once and throw it away."*

Commentary supporting concrete detail: *"But if we have to buy food at school were just doing the same thing as if we bought those shoes or a cd or whatever because we are wasting money on food that is not worth the price."* (Student 13)

Finally, I analyzed whether or not students' arguments were logical. Students were counted as having logical arguments if all of their examples related to their argument and if they wrote in essay format. Only two students fell into this category, receiving a score of three. As seen below, 58 percent of students did not have any essay organization, meaning that their arguments were not presented in a way in which the reader could logically be expected to follow. These students also included many details that were not related to the topic. These details may have been so irrelevant that they detracted from the main argument of their paper.

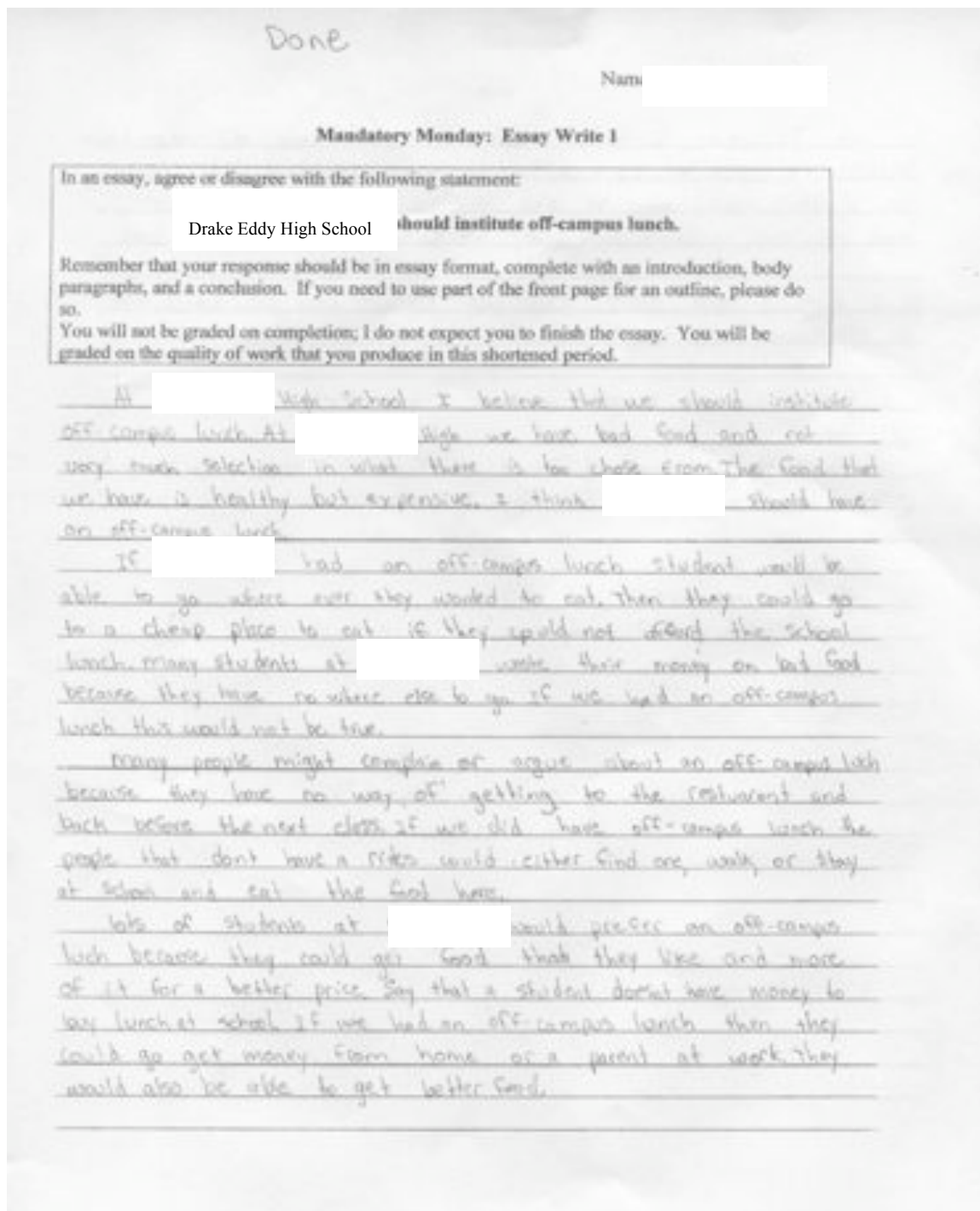**Table 11—Essay Rubric: Baseline Scores for Element 6**

LOGICAL The author has proved the argument of the paper in a logical and well-organized way.		
3- Responses follow essay format. Proves argument in logical and organized way. Includes no irrelevant details.	**2-** Responses follow essay format. Proves argument in logical way. Perhaps includes a few details irrelevant to the topic.	**1-**No essay organization. May be one large paragraph. Many irrelevant details that deter from the main argument of paper.
2 students (8% of class)	**8 students (33% of class)**	**14 students (58% of class)**

The largest problem I noticed with the essays was students' lack of organizational skills. Three elements in which the majority of the class received a score of a one dealt with essay organization. First, 58 percent of students did not include a three-part thesis statement, or even their argument, at the end of their introductory paragraph, which showed me that most of my students, did not even understand the basics about essay writing. The thesis statement is quite possibly the most critical piece of an essay, and 58 percent of students did not include one in their paper. In other words, the blueprints of these students' essays were missing. Second, 50 percent of students did not have topic sentences that were the main ideas of their body paragraphs. So not only did students not have organization in their essays as a whole, as seen by the lack of thesis statements, but students also did not have organization in individual body paragraphs. Also, another reason students may have received a score of a one is because their topic sentences did not relate to their theses, which again means that their paragraphs do not agree with the

main argument of their paper. Finally, 58 percent of students did not write their responses in essay format even though the prompt explicitly told students to do so. Many of these students just wrote down whatever ideas popped into their heads and separated these ideas into discreet paragraphs. These students, however, did not introduce their arguments with an introductory paragraph or summarize their argument in a conclusion. Other students simply wrote one lengthy paragraph. Still other students who received a score of one in the logic category did not stay on topic. Even though they may have included examples to support their argument, these students too often strayed from their main topic and included irrelevant concrete details. After analyzing students' baseline achievement data it was clear that I needed to focus my intervention on helping students improve their organizational skills in regards to their writing.

Below I have included Focus Student 2's sample essay, which is representative of many of the essays that I received.

Figure 4—Focus Student 2's Baseline Essay

> At [   ] I believe that we should have off campus lunch because it would be more affordable, more efficient, and cheaper. The students would also be able to have a better selection of food an would probably save money if [   ] had off campus lunch.
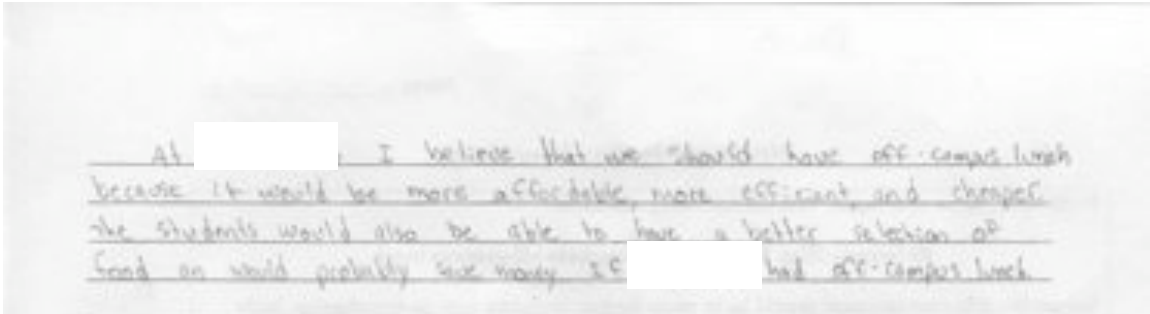
I included Focus Student 2's essay because it is fairly representative of the essay responses that I received from students. Focus Student 2 included his argument in his introduction and received a score of three in that category. This student also included his thesis statement in his introduction. He did not have any other information in his introduction, but I really would not expect to see much else in an introduction that was written in a timed setting, as I would want students to focus on fully developing a cogent argument before flushing out their introduction. What I determined was his thesis is these two sentences: "At [Drake Eddy] High we have bad food and not very much selection in what there is too chose from. The food that we have is healthy but expensive." Technically, Student 2 does not have a three-part thesis statement contained in one sentence, but I could determine that in his three body paragraphs he would be discussing the bad taste, the poor selection, and the cost of the food currently available on campus. Also, the last sentence in the introduction restates his argument and the first sentence in the paragraph, which could be because he wrote the paragraph and did not re-read it later either due to the time constraints or for other reasons. Because his argument could count as his thesis statement, he received a score of two for the thesis element of the rubric.

His body paragraphs do not have topic sentences that are supported by the paragraphs. From his thesis sentence, it appears that he was going to discuss the food's

taste, the expense of buying food at school, and the poor selection of food. His first body paragraph discusses both the food's taste and the poor selection. His second body paragraph discusses arguments that opponents of off-campus lunch might have. His third body paragraph mentions the taste and price of food and how students could get money for food off-campus. Because his topic sentences do not match his thesis statement he received a score of two on this element of the rubric.

This student has examples for each part of his thesis statement in his essay, but they do not occur logically throughout the essay. His second body paragraph is entirely off-topic, or at least something that he possibly could have discussed in his conclusion. I believe that if this student had simply created an outline, and followed it, he would have written a much better in-class essay. Because the majority of his examples are off-topic, he received a one for concrete details. Because of the scarcity of relevant concrete details, this student also received a one for the commentary element. Finally, because his examples occurred somewhat illogically throughout his essay, he received a score of two for this section of the rubric. He also received a two because he did attempt to write in five-paragraph essay format and his essay is easy to comprehend despite the occasional unrelated detail.

Baseline Attitude Data

After students had been given 50 minutes to write their essay, I asked students to write whether or not they had finished their essay at the top of their paper and to answer three questions at the bottom of their paper. The questions were the following:

1. What do you think you did well on in regards to this essay?

2. How did you go about writing this essay? Was there anything that you did (or

thought about) before you began writing that helped you write this essay?

3. What (if anything) did you struggle with in writing this essay?

Out of the 24 students who completed the in-class essay and the subsequent survey, 16 students, or 67 percent of the class, replied that they were done with the essay. One of these students wrote "Done I guess." He sounded unsure of himself, which made me hesitate to include him in the "done" category, but he had written "done," and I did not want to begin analyzing whether students were actually done or whether they only thought they were finished. A second student wrote "dumb," but I took his critique in stride and included him in the "done" category as well. The remaining eight students, or 33 percent of the class, admitted that they were not done and that they would have needed more time to complete their essay.

Before delving into students' answers to the survey questions, I need to mention one issue with the survey results. On each question a portion of the class simply did not bother to write a response. For the third question, which asked if students struggled with anything while writing the essay, 46 percent of the 24 students did not answer the question. I am not sure why students did not bother responding. I think that perhaps students did not even know how to discuss what they were feeling about the essay that they had written. Also, perhaps students did not feel that their comments about their writing were legitimate enough to write down. Or, perhaps students just did not take the assignment seriously or were tired of writing.

In answer to the first question, "What do you think you did well on in regards to this essay?" students replied in the following ways.

Table 12—Sample Student Responses to Question 1 of Baseline Attitude Survey

"What do you think you did well on in regards to this essay?"		
Did not respond to the question	**3 students (13% of class)**	
Nothing	**13 students (54% of class)**	Sample responses: ▪ *"I think that this essay that I wrote is crap "Sorry for the bad word".* (Student's quotations.)
Writing	**5 students (21% of class)**	Sample responses: ▪ *"I think it is okay writing."* ▪ *"I feel good about my writing."*
Accurate	**1 student (4% of class)**	Sample responses: ▪ *"My writing is an accurate description of my opinion."*
Ideas	**2 students (8% of class)**	Sample responses: ▪ *"I think I have good ideas and reasons why we should have off-campus lunch."* ▪ *"The ideas I used that helped support my views.*

What interested me most about students' responses to this question was that over

half of the class, 54 percent, could not think of anything that they had done well on this

essay, which further solidified my resolve to focus on improving students' writing and

hopefully their perception of their writing. Also, another 21 percent simply stated that

they did well at writing. These students also could not state specifically what they

believed they had excelled in; all five of these students gave a general response. This

leads me to believe that some of these students may have felt they needed to write

something in response to the question, so they just wrote that they had done well in

regards to their writing. Only two students wrote that they believed they had good ideas.

One of these students, however, followed up his comment about having good ideas with

"but I don't think I wrote the essay right." This comment was not in response to one of the other questions, but the remainder of his sentence in response to the first question.

In answer to the second question, "How did you go about writing this essay? Was there anything that you did (or thought about) before you began writing that helped you write this essay?" students responded in the following ways.

Table 13—Sample Student Responses to Question 2 of Baseline Attitude Survey

"How did you go about writing this essay? Was there anything that you did (or thought about) before you began writing that helped you write this essay?"		
Did not respond to question	**7 students (29 % of class)**	
Nothing	**11 students (46% of class)**	Sample responses: • *"I just started writing and I didn't really think about it."* • *"The comments and ideas just flowed onto the paper. I didn't really have a thought process."* • *"It was not really a planned thing."* • *"I did not plan it."* • *"I just wrote."*
Thought about the question	**4 students (17% of class)**	Sample responses: • *"I planned by picking three topics and talking about the three topics."* • *"I took three reasons why off campus lunch would be bad. That's how I got my three body paragraphs."* • *"I thought about what could really help support my views about the paragraph."*
Other	**2 students (8% of class)**	Sample responses: • *"I pretty much just guessed and made up some stuff. Well my friends and I were talking about the pizza and breadstick thing at the beginning of the school year, so I just pretty much wrote about those two things."* • *"I read what ---- wrote for the first sentence, and then I just started writing, thats why I went off subject."*

One student who had said that she did nothing before she started writing did have a list of ideas in the top left-hand corner of her essay. It looked as if she had made a list of points to discuss in her essay, but because she wrote that she had not done anything before writing, I counted her in the "nothing" category.

What interested me most about students' responses to this question was that almost half of the class, 46 percent, did not do anything before they began responding to the question, and only four students admitted to thinking about the prompt before they began writing. No wonder such a large percentage of my class had not yet passed the California High School Exit Exam! Students' answers to this question further convinced me of the need to teach students some prewriting strategies so that they would have a repertoire of different ways to approach a writing assignment.

Students also responded to the question: "What (if anything) did you struggle with in writing this essay?" These responses are categorized and displayed below.

**Table 14—Sample Student Responses to Question 3 of Baseline Attitude Survey**

"What (if anything) did you struggle with in writing this essay?"		
Did not respond to question	**11 students (46% of class)**	
Nothing	**9 students (38% of class)**	Sample responses: ▪ *"Nothing. The ideas just came to me."* ▪ *"Wasn't difficult."* ▪ *"The idea was fresh in my mind since I think about lunch all the time."* ▪ *"I did not find it difficult because I've thought about it before."* ▪ *"No it was easy because I've already done this prompt."*
Coming up with the ideas	**4 students (16% of class)**	Sample responses: ▪ *"I think it was very difficult to think of ideas in a short period of time."* ▪ *"It was hard to think of a thing to say."* ▪ *"It was really hard to think about ideas."*

I thought that because students had not written very organized essays they would have enumerated on the many problems they encountered while writing this essay. This was not the case. I was shocked that 38 percent of the class said that they had not struggled at all while writing the essay. This was surprising because it led me to believe that if students said that they did not struggle with anything then they must have thought that they did well on the essay, which I knew was not the case as 54 percent of students had replied that they had done "nothing" well on the essay. The seeming disparity in students' responses puzzled me. Perhaps one reason why students said that they did not struggle with anything was because they believed that simply stating their opinions on the prompt constituted an adequate response.

Only four students actually responded to the question by stating an aspect of the assignment for which they encountered difficulties. Interestingly, all four students cited that generating ideas was difficult in such a short period of time. I was excited by these four students' responses as I planned to start my intervention with prewriting strategies, which would help students think of ideas for their writing. Because students had mentioned "coming up with ideas" as a problem that they encountered, I hoped that students would be interested in the prewriting activities and would find them beneficial and useful.

I have included Focus Student 2's responses to the survey questions below because he wrote interesting comments to the survey that were fairly indicative of the responses of the class as a whole.

Figure 5—Focus Student 2's Attitude Survey Responses
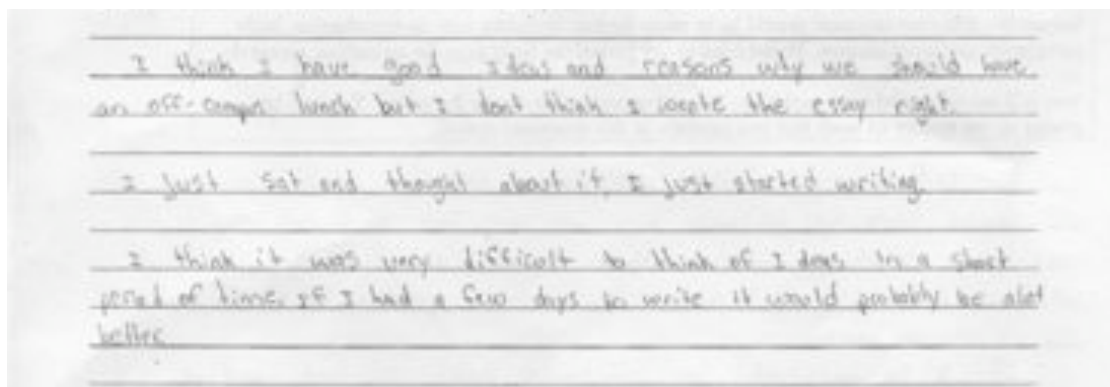
First, students had been instructed to write at the top of the first page whether they were "Done" or "Not done." Student 2 claimed that he was done. In response to the survey questions, he wrote that "[he has] good ideas but [he didn't] think [he] wrote the essay right." When I spoke to him later about this essay he clarified and elaborated on his response, saying that "[he had] good things to talk about, but [he] just wrote without

thinking about it." It seems that he thought that the ideas he discussed were worthy of his essay, but that he did not think of where his ideas should be logically situated within his essay. His response made sense when looking back at his essay and his off-topic second paragraph.

This student also did not do any prewriting or organizational activities before beginning to write. He just "thought" and then "started writing." Also, he says that if he had "a few days" to think about the topic, he would have written a better essay. Many other students made similar comments about needing more time to think about the topic. Most of them, however, said they did not think about the topic before beginning to write. Many students mentioned time specifically, and I think that students thought that thinking fully about the topic before writing would have given them less time to write and they would not have performed well. Students do not realize that thinking and planning before writing actually helps them write better essays and is not a waste of time. Focusing on prewriting strategies, such as the ones previously mentioned, will help students generate sufficient ideas for their writing, and will also help them realize that prewriting is a vital part of writing, one that should not be disregarded. The pre-writing activities will also help students keep their writing organized and on-topic.

The Intervention

The following section delineates all of the activities that I implemented throughout the intervention. The activities are described in chronological order, and they are divided into two categories: prewriting activities and organizational activities.

Implementing the pre-writing activities

I. American Dream free write and clustering activity

After having decided on my intervention strategies and activities, I was excited to begin implementing them. I decided to begin with the free writing technique because it is a pre-writing activity and because I thought it would be an easy and relatively painless activity for my students. The first free-write that we completed as a class was on Monday, November 5, 2007. Students are used to "Monday Mandatories," which are in-class writing assignments that are completed every Monday in their English classes. I have not really implemented these in my classes this year, as they are optional assignments and as I usually have students write every day in my classes, not just on Mondays, but all students are familiar with the assignments as they participated in them during their Freshmen and Sophomore years. I entitled the assignment "Monday Mandatory," thinking that students would then take the assignment seriously. This proved to be a near-fatal mistake for my intervention. As soon as I passed out the assignment, students began complaining about how they hated to write. The following table includes an observational journal entry that I wrote after students completed this activity regarding their reactions to the assignment.

**Figure 6—Teacher Observation Journal Entry 1; Monday, November 5th,
2007**

As soon as I began passing out the activity and students saw the title, "Monday Mandatory," students began complaining. These are only some of the remarks that I heard from students.

◊   *"This is gay."*

◊   *"Monday Mandatories suck!"*

◊   *"Why do we have to do this?"*

◊   *"You've never had us do Monday Mandatories before? Why do we have to start doing this now? This is unfair!"*

And my personal favorite:

◊   *"Is it too late to transfer out of this class?"*

One student, too beside himself to even verbalize his displeasure at the assignment, tilted his head back and let out a groan that lasted for around 10 seconds (or so it seemed to me).

I was so taken aback by their response that I didn't even want to continue with the assignment. They didn't even know what the activity was or what a free write was and they were already complaining! How are they going to react when we start writing these more often and doing my essay activities?

After spending what felt like several minutes trying to regain control over my

class, I finally was able to explain the activity to them. I began by introducing the term

"free write." I had included an explanation at the very beginning of the assignment that I

had a student read as follows:

> Free writing is writing on an assigned topic for a specific amount of time. You write whatever comes into your head about the topic; you do not need to go back and fix grammatical mistakes or even organize writing. The point of free writing is to get as many ideas you have on the topic out of your head and onto the paper. You can organize your thoughts and fix your mistakes later.
>
> The only rule is that you must be writing the entire time. If you can not think of anything to write, I expect to see an entire page of "I don't know what to write. I don't know what to write" until something comes to you.

After answering their questions, which included "We really can write 'I don't know what

to write' over and over again?," students began writing on the topic of the American

Dream. One student began complaining that it was unfair that they had to write while I

stood and watched them. I was so frustrated with what I considered their ridiculous behavior and all of their complaints, that I grabbed a paper with the assignment on it, sat in the desk next to that student, and began responding to the prompt. After I sat in one of the student desks, and they had all turned around to look at me, they realized I was serious and began to settle down and actually begin writing.

After the given time of 10 minutes was over, I told them they could stop writing. I asked if anyone would like to share the topics that they had written about. No one volunteered, so I began calling on students. The first student said that he had written "I don't know what to write" for the entire time. After calling on a few more students, they began mentioning what they had written about. As students were calling out topics, I was writing them on the overhead. As a class, we created a list of topics that students and I wrote about in our free write.

After creating this list, I explained (amid groans) that if students had to write an essay about this topic, they could create an outline from all of their ideas. I told them that they would only need to organize the ideas they wrote about into categories, which could correspond to body paragraphs in an essay. After reassuring them that they would not, in fact, have to write an essay on this topic, we thought about the list and created three categories that our topics fit easily into. Our categories were (1) what my life would look like, (2) what the country would look like, and (3) how you can get the American Dream. On the overhead, I wrote each category in a different color and then we went down the list as a class deciding which category each topic corresponded to and I circled them in the correlating color. The following is the actual transparency of the list we created and how we color-coded the topics

Figure 7—Transparency of Student-created List for Clustering Activity

American Dream:

- wife & family
- cars (1)
- immigrants
- difficult to acheive
- motorcross
- job
- soccer
- few people
- do what you want
- rags to riches
- getting what you want (2)
- $
- books
- freedom
- happiness (1)
- control others
- status
- power

■ • what my life would look like   IDK 2

▲ → country look like

◪ → how you get the Am.

Finally, after color-coding each topic by its category, I explained how we could cluster, or outline, the topics. As a class, we created the following cluster out of our original ideas.

Figure 8—Transparency of American Dream Cluster

I told students they could include our cluster on the back of their free write or they could cluster their own ideas on the back. One student (Focus Student 1) was complaining about how to cluster his ideas, so he called out his ideas, and I clustered these for him on the overhead. On the previous overhead, this is the section of the cluster that focuses on motocross and is not connected to the main "American Dream" cluster (it is the red cluster on the overhead). Interestingly, this was the only student not to simply copy the cluster that we created as a class on the overhead. Focus Student 1's free write is reproduced below.

Figure 9—Focus Student 1's Free Write

Name:
Date:

Mandatory Monday: Free write 1

Free writing is writing on an assigned topic for a specific amount of time. You write whatever comes into your head about the topic; you do not need to go back and fix grammatical mistakes or even organize your writing. The point of free writing is to get as many ideas you have on the topic out of your head and onto the paper. You can organize your thoughts and fix your mistakes later.

The only rule is that you must be writing the entire time. If you can not think of anything to write, I expect to see an entire page of "I don't know what to write. I don't know what to write" until something comes to you.

Today's topic is:

The American Dream

The American Dream is doing nothing all day but racing and hanging out with friends. Not going to school, sleeping in then riding till night. Then hanging out with friends, to me that's the American Dream. This dream is possable but not for me.

After listening to students' myriad complaints, I had thought that most students probably only wrote "I don't know what to write" over and over. Thus, I was surprised by the following results:

Table 15—Results of Free Write

Students who wrote responses to the prompt	Students who wrote responses to the prompt interspersed with "I don't know"	Students who only wrote "I don't know"
15	3	1

Also, many students made interesting remarks about the topic. The following are excerpts from students' writing:

- *"The American dream is that, if you work hard you will be successful. Thats not true people work so hard and have nothing."* After this opening remark, this student (Focus Student 7) wrote "I don't know" for the remainder of the page. His response was counted as "Students who wrote responses to the prompt interspersed with "I don't know."

- *"The American Dream consists of freedom and the chance to live life without a single worry."*

- *"Some people think the american dream is a good job, a nice house, the "perfect house," a nice car, a dog named spot, and good friends. To me the american dream is just being happy."*

- *"**LAME**. Bighouse Good Job. Money. nice car. kids. White picket fence. pet dog. **corrupt**. american Dream is close to impossible. No-one/ nothing is perfect."* The bolded words are words that the student outlined several times so that they would appear bold on her paper.

While I would have thought that most students should have written at least a page in the allotted time, the average length of students' responses was in the ½ to ¾ of a page range. Because the purpose of this activity was only to encourage students to complete an

informal writing assignment from which they could later build upon in a formal writing assignment, I do not think that the number of students' ideas, or how much students expanded upon their ideas, was of significance for this assignment. I just wanted students to realize that writing can actually help students generate ideas; they do not need to have all of their ideas planned out before they begin a writing assignment. I wanted students to begin to think of writing as a somewhat informal activity that they can use to get them started thinking about a topic and that writing and thinking are not mutually exclusive activities.

II. Driving age free write and clustering activity

Because I did not think that the first activity I implemented for my intervention went particularly well, I waited over a week to try the activity again. I also thought that instead of a theoretical topic such as the American Dream, I would try to make the topic something that affected students and that they would be interested in writing about. I figured that because most students in my class had just turned 16, they would be interested in the driving age and the new laws that have been passed in California. Unfortunately, I was mistaken. When I passed out the free write and asked students to write for 10 minutes on the topic of the "driving age in California," students immediately began complaining that they did not care because they already could get their licenses and so it did not affect them. I told them that they should also cluster their ideas from their free write on the outline of a cluster that I had provided on the back of the assignment. Students did not settle down to write, and I could hear some students whispering complaints about the assignment for the entire 10 minutes. I gave students extra time to cluster their ideas, but few students even tried.

When I began looking at their free writes and clusters to see how students were doing with the strategies, I was extremely disappointed. Although students had not written as much as I had expected for the first free write on the American Dream, students had written even less for this assignment. The average response was about 3 sentences long. Only four students out of the 24 students who completed the assignment wrote a response longer than one-half page. However, all but four students attempted to cluster their ideas. Three of those four students wrote "I don't know what to write" for the majority of their free write. One of these students apparently became disinterested in repeating "I don't know what to write" over and over again, so she began describing in detail what she was planning to eat for lunch. Apparently, choosing lunch at Drake Eddy High can put a person in quite a quandary. Of the students who did attempt to cluster their ideas, some students worked harder than it had appeared to me while they were working in class. The following chart represents how detailed students were in creating their clusters.

Table 16—Number of Branches Included by Student for Cluster

Number of clusters with **3 supporting branches** completed	Number of clusters with **2 supporting branches** completed	Number of clusters with **1 supporting branch** completed	Number of clusters with **no supporting branches** completed	Total number of students who attempted the assignment
3	10	7	4	24

While I am not sure how telling it is how many clusters students were able to complete as they based the cluster off of a free write where they did not necessarily need to generate

three separate ideas, it was helpful for me to see that students at least attempted to cluster their ideas.

Below are Focus Student 6's free write and cluster. He attempted to create two supporting branches off of the main cluster.

Figure 10—Focus Student 6's Free Write and Cluster

Name:

Mandatory Monday: Free write 2

Free writing is writing on an assigned topic for a specific amount of time. You write whatever comes into your head about the topic; you do not need to go back and fix grammatical mistakes or even organize your writing. The point of free writing is to get as many ideas you have on the topic out of your head and onto the paper. You can organize your thoughts and fix your mistakes later.

The only rule is that you must be writing the entire time. If you can not think of anything to write, I expect to see an entire page of "I don't know what to write. I don't know what to write" until something comes to you.

Today's topic is:

Driving Age in California

I already have my lisense so it doesnt matter that much but having to be home by 11 is stupid and the whole thing how you cant drive with a passenger under the age of 20 for 1 year is pretty lame as well. The people who are passing these laws were able to drive with a person in their cars the day that they got their license. It doesnt affect them in any way shape or form. Some of the rules I understand, like it you get a speeding ticket or cause an accident in the first 6 months you get your license taken away, But all that is is because of safety.

Cluster

Now use your free write to create a cluster of your ideas about the topic. Your cluster should have at least three main bubbles off of the main bubble, with

Driving Age

accident in first 6

some goal laws

speeding first 6

transportation

should be able to drive with parent for 1 year

figure solution
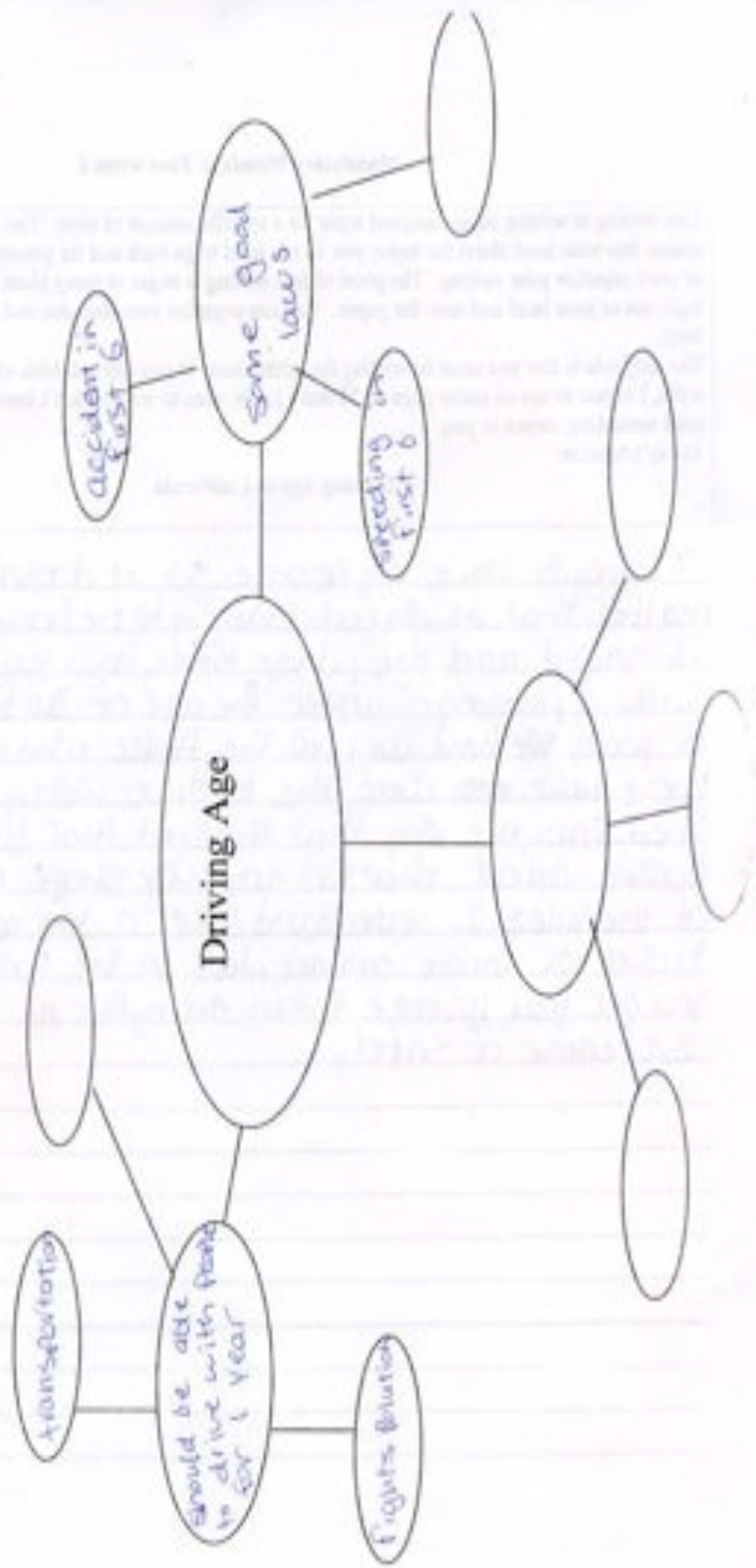
Looking at Focus Student 6's cluster of the ideas he generated in his free write, I was happy that he attempted to organize his thoughts into two main ideas with supporting details. The cluster that focuses on the possible beneficial aspects of the law was taken directly from his free write. The cluster that focuses on why students should be able to drive in a car with others before they have had their licenses for one year was also taken from his free write. The two branches off of this secondary cluster (i.e., the tertiary branches) were not based on his free write. Perhaps this student had used the two main ideas he had generated during his free write and then continued to think about possible supporting details for his arguments while he was clustering.

After this assignment, I was unsure of how to proceed. I could tell by students' expressions in class that they did not understand exactly how to cluster their ideas, or why it might be a beneficial activity and I felt that the assignment had not been sufficient in teaching students how and why they might use the strategy. I knew that students needed much more instruction and practice in clustering, but I also thought that students would benefit if we did an activity that focused only on clustering and did not directly relate to their writing, as students were put off by any activity that began with writing. Around this same time, however, students were working on a required grade-level American Author Project that turned out to be much more time-consuming than I had foreseen. The project entailed students researching their author, reading one short story by their chosen author, creating an Inspiration outline, a PowerPoint, writing a paper connecting the author's work to his or her life, and presenting the PowerPoint to the class. My class ended up spending three additional block periods in the computer lab researching and creating PowerPoints for their projects. I also decided to give students

an extra block period to work on their papers, which were much more difficult for students to write than I had originally expected. Finally, because of the additional time needed to complete the American Author Project, I did not focus on *The Great Gatsby* as much as I needed to, and I got behind in that unit as well. I completely set my intervention aside until after we returned from Winter Break and we still did not finish *The Great Gatsby* until after the break. Fortunately, this turned out to be greatly beneficial to my intervention, as I was able to tie the rest of my intervention into my instruction on the novel.

III. Free write on Gatsby

As I mentioned earlier, I realized that students needed to spend more time clustering before we could move on to other parts of my intervention. Before delving into clustering, however, I wanted to do one last free write as it was the beginning of the semester and it had been a while since we had done the activity. Also, to be honest, I was not looking forward to returning to clustering and I was procrastinating. I still could not think of an activity that was not related to writing that students would be able to handle. I had considered creating an activity that my professor had suggested in which students clustered their own shoes into as many different categories as possible, but I dreaded giving this class that much freedom. I feel that just about every day in this class I am just barely averting chaos from breaking out. I could only imagine the pandemonium that might ensue if students were out of their seats, barefoot, and throwing shoes back and forth at each other. Thus, I gave myself extra time to design an activity and decided on one more free write.

On Friday, January 11th, 2008, the first week back from Winter Break, I gave my 5th period this free write: Consider the title of *The Great Gatsby*. Is Gatsby really "great?" In what ways? In what ways is he not "great?" On this day, 21 students were present. Over the break, I had lost three students from this class: 2 female students and my seventh focus student, who is male. However, we had also received a new female student and a new male student. Now our total class count is 20 boys and 4 girls. I was still a bit apprehensive about starting up my intervention again as I was disappointed in how it had been received by students so far. However, immediately after I passed out the free write and read the prompt to students, they began writing. There was no complaining! My shock at this development is evident in the observation entry I made while students were responding to the prompt.

Figure 11 -- Teacher Observation Journal Entry 2; January 11th, 2008

Wow! As soon as I read the prompt, students actually began writing! There was no complaining! Maybe classes really do become more calm after the first semester is over! Or maybe I finally picked a prompt that asked students to write about something they cared about. Well, maybe that's not true; I don't think many of them care about Gatsby. *Maybe it is just easier for them to generate ideas about this topic. Maybe it's a good idea that the rest of my intervention will focus on* The Great Gatsby.

Wow! I just walked by ------------, and he has almost a full page! I haven't seen him write that much ever! I'm surprised he's working on this; usually he sits and does nothing.

Needless to say, I was surprised by students' responses to the prompt. After I had given students 10 minutes to write, we had a real discussion about their responses. Not many students volunteered, but enough of them did to keep a discussion going. Also, when I began calling on students, no one said "I don't know." They all looked at their response and gave some kind of response.

When looking at students' responses after class, I was surprised by the length of their writing. While for the previous free writes students had only written less than one-half page, the majority of students wrote around a page for this prompt (as seen in Table 17).

Table 17—Length of Students' Free Writes

Number of students who responded in **one full page or more**	Number of students who responded in **one-half page or more**	Number of students who responded in **less than one-half page**	**Total number of students** who completed assignment
6	11	4	20

While I know that the length of students' responses is not indicative of the quality of their responses, I thought that this increase in writing was a great improvement on the previous free writes. Also, the purpose of free writes is simply to encourage students to generate as many ideas on a topic in a specific amount of time, so in this way, this activity was a success. Also, only one student wrote "I don't know." He wrote this about five times before crossing it out to write an actual response to the prompt. Here are some excerpts from students' writing:

- *"Gatsby is a loser and is in no way great and stalks a chick because he thinks she loves him still witch she clearly doesnt."* (Focus Student 1)

- *"You know, it's called Mandatory MONDAY. today is Friday. What the hell?*

- *Gatsby was great because he started with nothing and made it all the way to the top all for Daisy, someone he loved."* (Focus Student 4 who usually does not write on topic).

- *"Gatsby is great in a bad sense of the word. He is great in that way because he managed to be insanely rich and get the girl and throw huge parties every weekend. But he managed all of this the wrong way. He got all of his money*

from doing something illegal." (Focus Student 6)

- *"After reading the majority of the chapters, I realized that the Great Gasby could be a right-on description, but it could also be a misnomer. They are quite a few reasons why Gatsby could be considered "great"... These are all great qualities about Gatsby, however, there are also several instinces in the story when it is proven, he is not so great. For one thing, he clearly lies about his past and how he makes a living (he needed to get that money somewhere!)."*

- *"I think that the Great Gatsby is a good title because Gatsby really is "great." If he can smuggle alcohal past all the police and throw huge parties without the police knowing then he must be great. Not only does he throw these huge parties but he picks all his guest sup in his Rolls Royce and brings them to his mansion."* (Focus Student 2)

As seen by the above excerpts from students' writing, students supported their arguments with concrete details from the text. All but five of the students addressed both parts of the prompt: ways in which he was and was not great. Five students simply argued that he was or was not great and had supporting details to support their position. Every student included an argument in their response and included concrete details as evidence of the legitimacy of their response. I do not think that students thought about including details to support their arguments as they were writing, and I believe that the nature of the prompt led students to state an argument and support it with evidence from the text, but I was still excited to see that every student present in class had completed the assignment with an argument and concrete details. Even the second student quoted above began supporting her argument with details once she began writing about the topic.

IV. Clustering Characters from *The Great Gatsby*

After the success of the previous free write, I was ready to jump back into clustering. Also, even though students expressed dislike for *The Great Gatsby*, it seemed

fairly obvious that they still knew the story and had a lot to say about the characters and their actions in the novel. I also did not want the clustering activity to be in any way related to writing, so I set about thinking of some way that I could integrate clustering into an activity related to *The Great Gatsby*. Suddenly I remembered an activity that I had done with a class that I taught the previous year. Students had to arrange characters into groups based on things that the characters had in common. Could this be clustering? I decided that if students were arranging characters into different groups based on their characteristics that this was indeed clustering. Then, I could show students how they could turn their clusters into a writing assignment and finally show them how closely writing and clustering could be related, as they can use their clusters as a blueprint for their writing.

I also wanted students to be able to work in groups or partners, but I was nervous about giving students so much freedom, as group-work time usually evolved quickly into no-work time. I decided to make the activity into a competition where the prize was extra credit. I thought a competition would work perfectly with this class. Several times, when I have been passing back papers, students begin comparing their scores. I always tell them that their grades are not a competition, but one student interrupted me one time to explain that "*everything* is *always* a competition." Many students even know their friends' School Identification Card numbers so that they can look up their grade in relation to their friends' grade. Thus, I thought that a mini-competition would keep students motivated to complete the activity and would also cut down the side conversations between groups and thus keep everyone on task. Now I was really excited to delve back into clustering.

On Monday, January 14, 2008, I introduced the clustering activity to my 5th period. I explained that students would be working in groups of four to organize the characters in *The Great Gatsby* into as many categories as they could think of. I gave students the following example:

Table 18—Example Cluster

Old Money	New Money	No Money
Daisy and Tom Buchanan	Gatsby	George and Myrtle Wilson
Nick Caraway	West Eggers	Klipspringer
Jordan Baker	Meyer Wolfshiem	
East Eggers		

I told students that even though I separated characters into three different categories, they could separate characters into two or more categories, as many as they wanted. The only rule was that they had to have more than one character in each category. I explained that students needed to be really creative in generating categories because if other teams had organized characters in the same way, that category would not count. The team with the most original and unduplicated categories would win. Students were ready to go, so I put them in groups of four and they began. I had told them originally that I would only give them 10 minutes, but students were working so diligently that I gave them about 20 minutes. After students had created their categories, we went around from group to group and had each group mention one of their categories and explain which characters were in which categories. If other groups had created the same category, they would let the first group know, usually by groaning fairly loudly.

I was surprised by how many categories students had generated and how creative they were. I created the following table to show how many different clusters each group organized the characters into.

Table 19—Number of Clusters Each Group Created

Group 1	Group 2	Group 3	Group 4	Group 5	Group 6
6 categories	3 categories	4 categories	6 categories	6 categories	7 categories

Here are some of the ways in which students clustered the characters:

- Number of lovers
- Cheaters vs. those faithful to their partner
- Military Service
- Location of home
- College educated vs. not college educated
- Married vs. single vs. dating
- Involved in illegal activities vs. legal means of acquiring money
- Who owns a "wrecked" car vs. who does not
- Those who have been in a car accident vs. those who have not
- Who drinks vs. who doesn't
- Those who have rumors spreading about them vs. those who are spreading the rumors
- Those who are using others vs. those who are being used by others
- Weak vs. strong
- Boys vs. girls
- People with docks vs. those without
- Those with last names from A-H vs. I-M vs. N-Z (Alphabetized)
- Number of syllables in first name
- Those who have thrown a party vs. those who have not
- Athletes vs. non-athletes

I was very impressed with the sheer number of categories that students generated. Also, they came up with categories that I had not even thought of. I thought that alphabetizing the names and counting the number of syllables in each character's name was very inventive even though some groups argued that it should not be a valid way of organizing the characters.

Here is one group's paper that shows how they clustered the characters. As you can see, students crossed off the categories that other groups had, so it is a bit difficult to read all of their categories. I think that this shows, however, that students were engaged in the activity and were anxious to have the most categories so that they could win. This group, although they created six different ways in which to categorize the characters, did not have any categories that were not repeated by other groups.

Figure 12—Sample Character Cluster Activity

10   Names

Gatsby Character Activity

Directions: This activity will test how well you and your group members know the characters of The Great Gatsby.

You and your group members will organize the characters into as many groups as possible, showing what characters have in common with each other. For example, I would organize the characters into groups based on their wealth.

Old money	New money	Poor
Daisy and Tom Buchanan	Gatsby	George and Myrtle Wilson
Nick Caraway	West Eggers	Klipspringer
Jordan Baker	Meyer Wolfshiem	
East Eggers		

You and your group must come up with as many ways to categorize your characters as possible. You also need to be creative because if another group has organized the characters in the same way that your group has, that category will not count. The groups with the most original categories will win. You may have more or less rows than the ones I gave you; the charts below were just to get you started.

good cars	bad cars	no cars
Tom	George wilson	Nick
gatsby		wolfshiem
		Klipspringer
		Jordan

East egg	West egg	valley of ashes
Tom	Gatsby	George
Daisy	Klipspringer	Myrtle
Jordan	nick	

married	affairs	no affairs
Tom and Daisy	Myrtle	George
Myrtle and George	Daisy	nick
	Tom	

After determining the winner, which took quite awhile as each group wanted to share each of their categories, I explained that students had basically just clustered the characters by many different criteria. I told students to pick which category they would like to see clustered, and they of course chose the category dealing with the number of lovers. The main cluster bubble was entitled "Number of lovers in *The Great Gatsby*." Three secondary clusters came off the main bubble. These were "two lovers," "one lover," and "no lovers." Finally, we added the tertiary bubbles off of the secondary ones. Off of "two lovers" came Tom, Myrtle, and Daisy. Off of "one lover" came Nick, Jordan, George, and Gatsby, while off of "no lovers" we put Wolfshiem, Owl Eyes, and Klipspringer. I could see the concept of clustering "clicking" for many students as we

drew the cluster on the board. One student asked if it was possible to create clusters for each of the categories that his group had made. I told him that he basically had already created the cluster, it was just placed in a different format. He would only need to create the cluster outline and fill it in with the information that he already had. Two students then asked why I had not required them to just make clusters if that was what they were doing anyway, so I told them that I wanted them to see that they actually cluster many different things all the time, usually without even realizing it. This activity and subsequent discussion really renewed my interest in my intervention and made me want to continue despite the original setbacks I had encountered.

V. Family-School Connection

At this point in the intervention I could have given students an additional clustering activity to cement the strategy for them in a way that also involved their parents or other family members in their education. Because students were actively engaged in *The Great Gatsby* character clustering activity, I could have given students a similar supplementary activity for them to complete with a family member for extra credit. I would have had students choose a film that they and a family member had seen and create as many different categories as possible in which they could organize the characters from the film. Students could have made the activity into a competition with their family member as we had done in class, or students could have simply tried to create as many categories as possible working with their family member.

Implementing the organizational activities

I. The Essay-element scramble

After the success of the clustering activity, I decided to make all of our subsequent activities into competitions so that students would be more motivated to work to the best of their abilities and would stay on-task for the activity. I had now decided to move on to the activities that I had planned to help students with their organizational skills in essay writing. The first activity that I designed gave students a controlling idea, a three-part thesis statement, and three corresponding topic sentences for three different essay topics. Students would not be given the topic of the essay or the essay prompt; they would need to determine, based on what they knew about the three essay elements, which element was which. Unfortunately, somehow I did not scramble the essay elements for the second essay that we unscrambled. Students did not catch on to this immediately though. The graphic organizer that I had created is duplicated (with the answers in red) below.

Figure 13—Essay Element Activity

Ms. McManigal
Name_____

Essay Element Activity

I. Directions: Try to define the following essay terms in your own words. If you can not think of a definition, try to think of an example, or make your best educated guess. When we review the definitions as a class, make sure to correct your definitions if necessary**.**

Controlling Idea (CI):

Three-part Thesis Statement (3PTS):

Topic Sentence (TS):

After looking at the example essay element, write a sentence or two that will help you remember how the three essay elements are related.

II. Directions: In your groups, you will try to determine which of the essay elements are which. You are given the essay's Controlling Idea, Three-part Thesis Statement, and the three Topic Sentences that the author used while writing the essay. You need to identify which element is which, just like we did as a class with the Gatsby essay. Identify the element on the line provided.

1) Identify the Controlling Idea, the Three-part Thesis Statement, and THREE Topic Sentences.

In California, the laws that prohibit people from driving while under the influence, people under the age of 21 from drinking, and making some drugs illegal were created to ensure Californians' safety.
Topic Sentence 1

Californian legislators have created laws that regulate people's drinking and drug use, traffic, and taxes to ensure Californians' well-being.
Three-part thesis statement

Taxes are collected from inhabitants of California so that the state can afford to provide children with education, keep the roads in a good state of repair, and keep prisoners in jail.
Topic Sentence 3

California also has laws that govern driving such as traffic lights and universal signs so that drivers are safe while behind the wheel.
Topic Sentence 2

Laws are often created by government officials to ensure the well-being of the country's inhabitants.
Controlling Idea

2) Identify the Controlling Idea, the Three-part Thesis Statement, and FOUR Topic Sentences.

Adults often have good intentions when they impose restrictions on adolescents.
Controlling Idea

While the adults who have imposed this curfew may have had good intentions, a regular curfew imposed upon one segment of the community is unfair and should be abolished.

Three-part thesis statement

The Placerville adults imposing this curfew have good intentions.
Topic Sentence

A standard curfew imposed upon only one segment of the Placerville community, such as those citizens under the age of eighteen is unfair.
Topic Sentence

The curfew should be abolished because gainfully employed adolescents deserve the same rights as adults.
Topic Sentence

Finally, forcing adolescents to stay home does not necessarily make them safe or honest.
Topic Sentence

How did you determine which element was which? If you had to guess, how did you make an educated guess?

On the day that I had planned to do this activity, Wednesday, January 16, 2008, I arrived at school excited to begin the activity with my 5th period because I had tried the assignment with my other Junior class the day before and it had gone well. My students and I found out that morning, however, that a female student who had been in our class until November had been brutally murdered two nights before. We discussed this for an extended period of time before I started class for the day. I did have students perform the activity that I had planned, but students were extremely subdued and quiet and, at the end of the period, I was left questioning the efficacy of the assignment.

To begin, I had students write down their own definitions for the terms "controlling idea," "three-part thesis statement," and "topic sentence." After students created their own definitions, we wrote definitions together as a class. Then, I explained

that I had given students these elements of an essay in random order and that we would try to figure out which element was which together as a class. I then read all five of the elements and we started with the first one. When students thought they knew what the element was, I would have them explain how they had decided it was the element. After we completed the first one together as a class, I had students form pairs with a student of their choice and try to figure out the second essay scramble. Even though students were in pairs, it was almost absolutely silent in the room. Some pairs were attempting to work on the scramble, some were just staring at the paper, and three of the four female students whom I had allowed to sit together were just staring at the ground. I gave the class about 10 minutes to work on the activity even though it was clear they were not really working on it. Even though I think most of the groups simply wrote in elements randomly, we did go over the elements as a class. I read them all aloud and had students volunteer to explain how they would go about determining which element was which. While I do not think that this activity tested their ability to decipher essay elements on their own, I think it was still beneficial for students to hear how they might do so.

II. Creating three-part thesis statements, topic sentences, and concrete details

After students' responses to the tragedy on Wednesday, I was unsure how students would behave on Friday. I was not sure whether their behavior would return to normal, whether they would seem as if in another universe, or whether they would be defiant. It turned out that their former classmate's death did not have a noticeable effect on most of my students. I feel that my female students appreciated that we discussed what had happened to their friend and sympathized with me for my reaction to her death. I did not really feel that I had a relationship with any of these students before her death,

but I feel that I do now and that they feel more comfortable interacting with me and that they are "on my side," as they no longer roll their eyes at me when I ask them to do something. I have not noticed a change with my male students.

On Friday, January 18, 2008, our class was seemingly back to normal. My students completed an activity in which they were given many topics for which they had to create a possible thesis statement, topic sentence, and one concrete detail to support the topic sentence. For some of the topics, I mentioned a general topic, such as fast food and they chose a specific fast food restaurant to discuss. Here are the topics that students and I created that students could write about:

Figure 14—Transparency of Topics for Essay Element Activity

FOR AT LEAST THREE OF THE FOLLOWING TOPICS, YOU AND YOUR PARTNER NEED TO CREATE (A THESIS) A TOPIC SENTENCE, AND A CONCRETE DETAIL.

BAND:
Slightly Stupid
    Rick James
animal:
  cheetah

presidential
candidate:
  Obama,
  McCain, Huckabee
    H.S.

The Great Gatsby

dating

New England
    Patriots

Chess

Taco Bell

heroin addiction

After reviewing the three essay elements and writing down their definitions on the overhead, I completed the activity with the topic of the New England Patriots so that students would have my model to refer back to when completing the activity for the other topics. Here are the elements that I wrote with the help of my students:

> Thesis Statement: The New England Patriots are the best team football has seen since the late '70s because they went undefeated in the regular season, Brady set a new TD record, and Moss set a new receiving record.

After creating the thesis statement, I had students review what each of my three body paragraphs would likely discuss and I color-coded them as above. We discussed how the topic highlighted in purple would be discussed in my first body paragraph and the topic in green would be discussed in my second body paragraph and so forth. I then asked which topic they would prefer to write the topic sentence for. We chose the first and created the following:

> Topic Sentence: The Patriots are the best team in football because they were undefeated in a 16-game season.
> Concrete Detail (supports topic sentence; can be a quote, fact, statistic, example): The Patriots beat very talented teams, specifically the Colts, the Cowboys, and the Ravens by a combined 43 points.

After completing this with my students, I explained that they would be working with a partner to create thesis statements, topic sentences, and concrete details for as many of the topics as possible. I told them that they had to complete three and that for every topic they did after three they would receive 7 extra credit points.

Because most of the pairs wrote essay elements for four or more of the topics, I analyzed only the first one that students created. The following charts describe my findings.

Table 20—Analysis of Student Thesis Statements

Number of pairs that **included a three-part thesis statement**	Number of pairs that **did not include a three-part thesis statement**	**Total** number of pairs
12	1	13

The only student pair that did not write a three-part thesis statement wrote this:

- *"Taco Bell is much better than Del Taco."*

This could still be considered a thesis statement; it just does not show what they will be discussing in their three body paragraphs, so it is not a three-part thesis statement.

After looking at students' thesis statements, I moved on to their topic sentences and discovered the following:

Table 21—Analysis of Student Topic Sentences

Number of pairs who **included a topic sentence** that corresponded to their thesis statement	Number of pairs whose topic sentence was **not a topic sentence** or did **not correspond to their thesis statement**	**Total** number of pairs
7	6	13

The six students who did not create a topic sentence that corresponded to their thesis statements made a few simple mistakes. Two pairs simply did not write a sentence remotely related to their thesis. These students began trying to discuss as many topics as possible in one sentence. Three pairs included what was essentially a concrete detail as their topic sentence. All three pairs simply included two concrete details instead of a topic sentence and a concrete detail. The final pair basically repeated their thesis statement (complete with their three arguments) as their topic sentence.

Finally, I analyzed students' concrete details. I discovered that every single group included a fact, statistic, or example to support their thesis statement, but some students did not create a concrete detail that corresponded directly with their topic sentence. Three groups, not including the three that already included a concrete detail or the two groups that did not seriously attempt this, included a concrete detail that could support one of their topic sentences, just not the one that they had written down. Essentially, these three pairs included concrete details that supported their thesis statement, but did not directly support their topic sentence.

Examples of students' work is included in the following chart.

Table 22—Student Samples for Essay Element Activity

	Group 1	Group 2	Group 3	Group 4
Thesis Statement	*"Chess is no longer as popular as it once was because many people would rather play checkers, watch T.V., and because people don't understand the game."*	*"Drake Eddy High School doesn't let kids go off campus for lunch because students could get in a car crash, some students wouldn't come back, and some students could be abducted."*	*"Cheetahs are commonly viewed as cats only in a bigger body, but in actuality they are super agile, one of the fastest mammals on earth, and have sensitive ears that can hear a cricket from a mile away."*	*"Taco Bell isn't as good as it used to be because they use fake meat, they have horrible customer service, and they took away the Taco Bell dog.*
Topic Sentence	*"More people today would rather watch T.V. than play chess."*	*"Drake Eddy High School doesn't let kids go off campus at lunch because several students would not come back."*	*"The cheetah can make a 90-degree turn when traveling at top speeds."*	*"They do not use real meat, they give you a combination worse than bad hot dogs."*
Concrete Detail	*"Only 10 percent of people younger than 25 would rather play chess than watch T.V."*	*"90% of students at DEHS say they would ditch if they had the chance."*	*"In under 5 seconds the cheetah can accelerate up to 65 mph."*	*"40% of Americans loved the Taco Bell dog."*

The first two groups wrote three-part thesis statements, corresponding topic sentences, and concrete details that nicely supported their topic sentences. The third group has a nice three-part thesis statement, but the topic sentence is a fact (concrete detail) which seems to support the first part of their thesis statement. Their concrete

detail further supports the first part of their thesis statement. All that this group needed was a general topic sentence before delving into their supporting concrete details. The final group has a three-part thesis statement, and a topic sentence that seems to include a concrete detail, or example, into the topic sentence. Also, their concrete detail does not support their topic sentence which corresponds to the first part of their three-part thesis statement. Instead, the concrete detail would seem to support the third part of their thesis statement. Even though these elements are out of order, it still appears that the group understood the difference between the three elements and could create them easily.

III. Starting body paragraphs: creating topic sentences, concrete details, and commentary

Because I thought the previous activity had gone fairly well and had helped students begin to distinguish the difference between the essay elements, I decided to implement a similar activity using the only element that we had left: commentary. For this activity, which students completed on Wednesday, January 23, 2008, I gave students a list of eight symbols from *The Great Gatsby*: Gatsby and the Buchanan's cars, Gatsby's library, Dr. T.J. Eckleberg's eyes, Gatsby and the Buchanan's houses, the green light, the clock, the Valley of Ashes, and Meyer Wolfshiem's cufflinks. Students were to choose a symbol and write a topic sentence stating what the symbol represented in the novel. Then they were to find a concrete detail, although not necessarily an actual quotation, from the text to support their interpretation of the symbol. Finally, students needed to write 3-4 sentences of commentary explaining the meaning of the symbol. After reviewing the definitions of the three essay elements, I let students choose their partners and get started. While students were working on their mini-paragraphs, I took these observational notes:

Figure 15—Teacher Observation Journal Entry 3; Wednesday, January 23rd, 2008

> *Most students are working pretty hard, probably because I told them they only had 12 minutes to complete the activity. This isn't true; I just didn't want them to waste time.*
> *So far, three students have asked me what commentary is. Do they not see the definition on the overhead? We just went over this!*
> *So far, five students have complained that I want 3-4 sentences of commentary to explain the quote.*
> *Wow, --- (the same student who I noticed working diligently in my 2nd observation entry) just told Focus Student 1 to stop talking to him because he's trying to find a quote! He and his partner really have had to be walked through this assignment step-by-step, but at least they are working and asking for help!*

After students had been working for about 20 minutes, I had students present their mini-paragraphs to the class (students had written them on overhead transparencies). Randomly, after students had presented, I would call on other students to locate the commentary or the concrete detail and explain how they knew what it was.
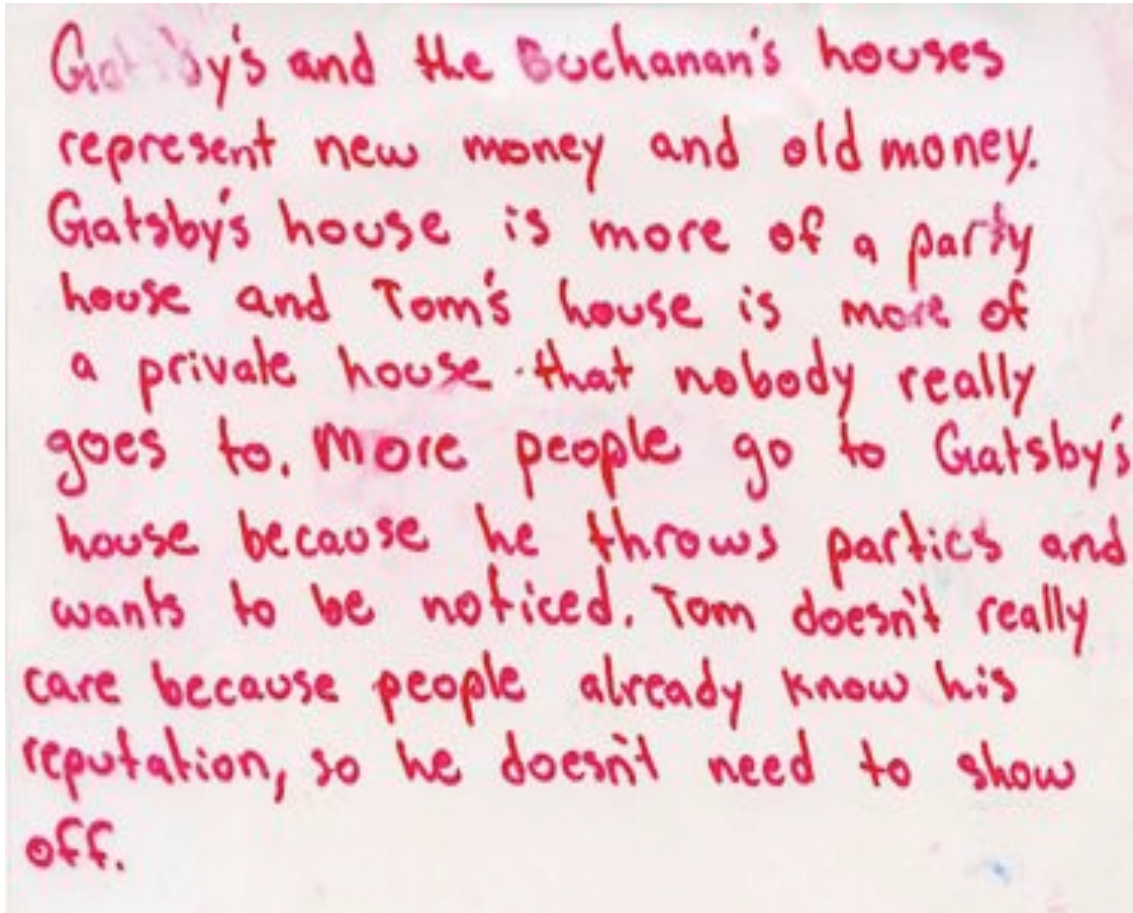
Overall, the activity went really well. Every single group included a topic sentence that addressed the symbol and its meaning. All but one group included a concrete detail, although I think that this group probably thought that saying "Gatsby threw parties" was a concrete detail because it is a fact. Also, all but one group included three sentences of commentary that attempted to discuss the quotation in detail. This group included only one sentence of commentary that was not based at all on their quotation, but an attempt at being humorous. Finally, one group, who asked to use a symbol that was not on the list had a topic sentence that stated their symbol and its meaning and then proceeded to include a seemingly unrelated quotation. Their commentary discussed the quotation in detail, but it did not relate at all to their topic sentence. Below are some examples of students' work.

Figure 16—Student Sample for Essay Element Activity

In the Great Gatsby Dr. T.J. Eklburgs billboard symbolizes god looking over the valley of ashes. When George and michaelis are talking about myrtle, it says "Standing behind him michaelis saw with a shock that he was looking at the eyes of Doctor t.J. Eckleburg which had just emerged pale and enormous from the dissolving night" "God sees everthing, repeated wilson". This shows that wilson believes that god is always watching over the valley of ashes God might be focuing on the valley of ashes because bad things have been happening, such as myrtles death and cheating.

Focus Student 6 and another classmate completed the sample above. The two students completed the assignment fully. They began with a topic sentence that stated the symbol they would be discussing and the symbol's meaning in the novel. Then they attempted to integrate a quotation from the novel to support their topic sentence. Even though they only integrated the quotation with "it says," these students knew that a quotation could not be a complete sentence by itself. These students also forgot to cite the page on which they took the quotation. Finally, these students wrote one sentence of commentary, but the sentence gave two reasons why God may have been looking down on the Valley of Ashes. All in all, I thought that these two students did a nice job creating their topic sentence, finding a concrete detail to support their topic sentence, and including a piece of original commentary to explain their concrete detail. Later I would like to see more commentary from students, but this was the first time that students had completed an activity that required them to create commentary, so I was pleased that the commentary they created at least showed that they understood the concept.

The next example was created by Focus Student 2 and another student in the class.

Figure 17—Student Sample for Symbol Activity

> Gatsby's and the Buchanan's houses represent new money and old money. Gatsby's house is more of a party house and Tom's house is more of a private house that nobody really goes to. More people go to Gatsby's house because he throws parties and wants to be noticed. Tom doesn't really care because people already know his reputation, so he doesn't need to show off.

These students started with a topic sentence that stated the symbol they would

discuss and the symbol's meaning in the novel. Then, students included what they

probably assumed was a concrete detail: "Gatsby's house is more of a party house and

Tom's house is more of a private house that nobody really goes to." These students

probably believed that this was a concrete detail because it is a fact, which was one of the

five definitions I gave the class for a concrete detail. Then, instead of providing

commentary explaining how the houses symbolize their owner's wealth, the students

explain why people attend Gatsby's parties and do not go to Tom's house. Students

could have provided commentary after this explaining that Gatsby is "new money" and

does not mind throwing ostentatious parties to show off his house and compared this to Tom and his "old money" ways. Thus, these students did not really provide commentary explaining their quotation, although they tried to, and there was a disconnect between the concrete detail that students used and the argument that they were trying to make.

IV. Putting it all together!

After the success of the three activities that involved elements of an essay, I decided to put all of our strategies together. On Friday, January 28, 2008, I had students complete a free write on characters who were careless in *The Great Gatsby*. We clustered their thoughts about the characters onto the white board, and then we created an outline of an essay using the ideas students had generated in their free writes.

Because I told students that this would be an option for the formal essay they would write on the novel and that they might be able to use everything they wrote in their essay, students took the free write seriously. Unfortunately, I did not collect them right away so that students could use them for ideas on their essay, and I did not get all of them back from students. However, of the 13 that I was able to collect from students, 10 had written an entire page detailing how characters were careless in the novel. Of the three students who did not write an entire page, one wrote well over ¾ of a page, another wrote just over half, and the third student did write an entire page but he skipped lines, so he probably wrote half of a page. The two students who wrote half a page, however, are students who on the previous free writes had written only a few sentences. One of these students actually only wrote one sentence in a previous free write! This student's free write is reproduced below. Also, for the first time, not a single student wrote "I don't know what to write" anywhere in their response.

Figure 18—Student Sample of "Careless" Free Write
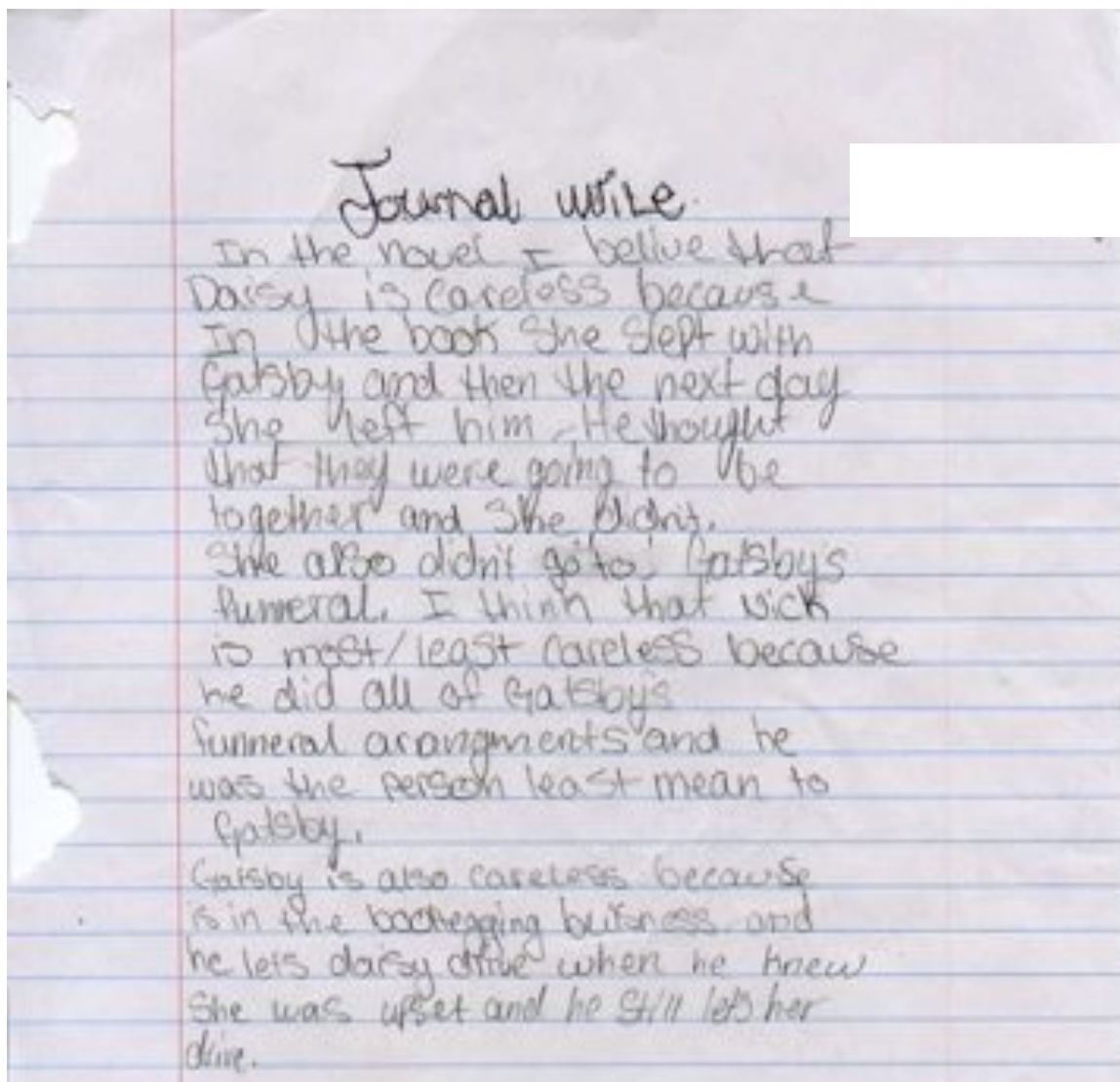
Not only was I impressed that this student had written so much in comparison to

his previous free writes, but he actually included concrete details to support his argument.

He wrote about how three characters in the novel were or were not careless: Daisy, Nick,

and Gatsby. He gave two concrete details to support why Daisy was careless, one

concrete detail to support why Nick was not careless, and two more concrete details to

support why Gatsby could be considered careless. Also, the concrete details that this

student thought of were not the same as other students had generated. This student was

the only student to consider Daisy not attending Gatsby's funeral an act of carelessness, and he was the only student to mention Gatsby's carelessness in letting Daisy drive even when he knew she was upset. Other students in the class had considered the car accident completely Daisy's fault, so I thought it was interesting that this student had another perspective.

After students had completed their free writes (I had given them longer than the usual 10 minutes as most were assiduously writing), I asked them which characters they had written about and wrote the names on the board. Then I asked students for reasons why each character on the board could be considered careless. Here is a transcript of the notes I transcribed on the board from their free writes.

Figure 19—Student-generated Concrete Details From "Careless" Free Write

Myrtle
- she runs out in front of Gatsby's car
- she thinks she is about to confront Tom with his wife, Daisy
- she leaves the dog collar in plain sight
- she kisses Tom with her husband nearby
- she cheats on her husband

Tom
- he tells George where to find Gatsby
- he cheats on his wife
- he does not hide his affairs well
- everyone knew about the affair in Chicago- that's why Daisy and Tom moved
- got in an accident with his previous mistress
- has conversations on the phone with his mistresses- Daisy can hear him

Daisy
- she cheats on her husband
- marries Tom when she's in love with Gatsby
- kisses Gatsby in her and Tom's house
- she drives when she feels nervous
- doesn't attend Gatsby's funeral

▪ shows off her daughter to Gatsby- careless with his feelings ▪ hits Myrtle
Gatsby ▪ throws parties for people he doesn't know (careless with $) ▪ lets Daisy drive when he knows she is upset ▪ takes phone calls about his illegal business ventures with others in the room ▪ introduces Nick to Meyer Wolfshiem ▪ moves to West Egg ▪ wants to confront Tom ▪ has affair with married woman who has a daughter ▪ gets into business with Meyer Wolshiem ▪ illegal business activities- got money illegally
George ▪ does not have facts straight before he kills Gatsby and himself ▪ believes Tom

People who attend Gatsby's parties
▪ go to party where they don't know host
▪ they have accidents
   • guy gets his nose blown off
   • drive drunk

Jordan ▪ cheats at golf ▪ engaged to guy not long after dating Nick

After students could think of no more examples, I told students that they had basically just created outlines of their body paragraphs because the reasons that they had thought of were actually concrete details from the novel that they could use to prove how each character was careless. After explaining this, I told students that we would write an outline of the essay together in class. We started with a controlling idea, created individual thesis statements, topic sentences, and three concrete details to support each topic sentence. I wrote the following on the overhead as students dictated it to me, and they filled in the blanks with the characters and the concrete details that they wanted to

use. We actually started with our thesis statement and worked backwards to the controlling idea because it is still difficult for students to generate these on their own, although they have little trouble recognizing them. Here is outline we wrote together as a class.

Figure 20—*The Great Gatsby* Essay Outline

I. Introduction Paragraph
    a. Hook
    b. Controlling Idea: Authors often give their characters undesirable traits so that readers can learn from the characters mistakes.
    c. Three-part thesis statement: In F. Scott Fitzgerald's The Great Gatsby, he portrays _____, _____, and _____ as being careless.

II. First Body Paragraph
    a. Topic Sentence: _____ is portrayed as careless by many of his/her actions, such as _____, _____, and _____.
    b. Concrete Detail 1: _____
    c. Commentary 1
    d. Concrete Detail 2: _____
    e. Commentary 2
    f. Concrete Detail 3: _____
    g. Commentary 3

III. Second Body Paragraph
    a. Topic Sentence: In addition to _____, _____ is also portrayed as careless by many of his/her actions, such as _____, _____, and _____.
    b. Concrete Detail 1: _____
    c. Commentary 1
    d. Concrete Detail 2: _____
    e. Commentary 2
    f. Concrete Detail 3: _____
    g. Commentary 3

IV. Third Body Paragraph
    a. Topic Sentence: Finally, _____ is portrayed as careless by many of his/her actions, such as _____, _____, and _____.
    b. Concrete Detail 1: _____
    c. Commentary 1
    d. Concrete Detail 2: _____
    e. Commentary 2
    f. Concrete Detail 3: _____
    g. Commentary 3

V. Conclusion
    a. Re-state thesis and arguments
    b. tie back to controlling idea: what we can learn from their undesirable behaviors.

V. Color-coding a sample essay

After the success of the previous activity and how well students were tying the concepts together, I wanted to have one last activity that focused on where specific elements of an essay should occur in the essay. Also, I had given students a choice of essay topics for *The Great Gatsby* essay. Students could either discuss three characters and how they were careless in the novel, or students could discuss the meaning of three symbols in the novel. While students had an outline for the prompt on carelessness, students also had a good start to a body paragraph for the symbol prompt because of the activity mentioned earlier. I decided to give students a sample essay on the symbol prompt for us to color-code the essay elements. We started this activity on Monday, January 28th, but because of the Career Fair, a shortened period, and a major overhead transparency disaster, we actually started over with this activity, and completed it, on Wednesday, January 30, 2008.

After giving each student their own copy of the essay and three colored pencils, I explained that we would be locating each element of an essay that we had learned about over the past several weeks. Before beginning to read the introduction, I reviewed with students the three elements they should expect to find in an introduction and told students to be on the lookout for those elements. Amid the patter of pencil tapping, I read the introduction. I asked students to tell me where each element was and I colored them on my overhead transparency in different colors. We did the same for the first body paragraph, coloring the topic sentence one color, the concrete details a second color, and the commentary a third color. We continued this for the second body paragraph and the

conclusion. Here is the overhead transparency that I color-coded. Students' sample

essays looked the same as mine.

Figure 21—Transparency of Color-coded Essay

The Great Gatsby: Fitzgerald's Critique of 1920s Society

A symbol has been defined as "a person, event, or thing that stands for … some other, usually broader, idea or range of ideas, in addition to maintaining its own literal meaning" (Charters 1788). In other words, a symbol is often an object that stands for itself, but also has a larger meaning or significance. In literature, authors often use symbols to represent a greater idea of their work, such as a theme. F. Scott Fitzgerald, in his masterpiece The Great Gatsby, employed the symbols of character's clothing and the Valley of Ashes to emphasize the themes of class and wealth and of death and decay, respectively.

In the novel The Great Gatsby, Fitzgerald uses several character's clothing or accessories to symbolize their wealth and status. For example, the first time Daisy Buchanan makes an appearance in the novel she is wearing white and is "buoyed up as though upon an anchored balloon" (12). The color white often symbolizes purity and wholesomeness, and often virginity. It is as if Daisy is untouched and untouchable. She even appears to Nick as if she is floating above him, out of everyone's reach. Symbolically, Daisy's appearance in the color white emphasizes how she is out of Gatsby's reach. She is "old money," and thus she is untouchable for someone outside of her class. Also, the color white is often use to show that something is new or better. This further symbolizes how people from East Egg, those with "old money" like Daisy, believe that they are better and above those with "new money." Another example of Fitzgerald's use of clothing to symbolize status is Gatsby's choice of suit color. In the pivotal chapter in the novel, Gatsby is wearing a pink suit. This color emphasizes that Gatsby is not in the same class as the East Eggers. Tom "incredulously" remarked that it was impossible for Gatsby to have gone to Oxford simply on the basis that he wore a pink suit (129). The color of Gatsby's suit symbolizes his status in regards to East Eggers. Gatsby is "new money" and lives on West Egg. He has worked hard to acquire his wealth and makes sure that people recognize

his wealth by wearing flashy clothing. Tom, from East Egg, would never wear such a brightly-colored suit. Tom even recognizes that it is impossible for Gatsby to have attended a school as prestigious as Oxford if he wears such clothing. Although Gatsby and Tom are comparably wealthy, and Gatsby might even have more money than Tom, Gatsby does not have the social status that Tom enjoys because he is "new money." Fitzgerald shows the distinction between the two monies, and thus the two classes, by Gatsby's flashy suit color. Finally, Fitzgerald also uses Meyer Wolfshiem's cuff links to symbolize his status in the novel. Meyer Wolfshiem's cuff links are adorned with the "finest specimens of human molars" (77). Because Wolfshiem does not mention that they are his molars, Fitzgerald probably wanted readers to assume that they belonged to someone else, most likely someone that Wolfshiem harmed in some way, or even killed. Wolfshiem is involved in several illegal ventures, such as gambling, fixing the World Series, and possibly bootlegging. Wearing a human body part as an accessory draws attention to the underground and illegal means in which Wolfshiem acquires money, and further emphasizes that he has the status of a gangster.

Another prominent symbol in the novel is the Valley of Ashes, which represents death and decay of people who live there and society in general. The Valley of Ashes, located between West Egg and New York, is described as full of "men who move dimly and already crumbling through the powdery air" (27). Not only is the landscape of the area bleak and decaying, but the inhabitants are described that way as well. The men are "already crumbling," and it is as if there lives are slowly being extinguished. They are dying slowly, almost ceasing to exist further which each passing day. George Wilson, a car garage owner who lives in the Valley of Ashes, is suffering from the same complaints. He is described as a "blonde, spiritless man, [and] anemic" (29). Wilson appears to be an example of the men that Fitzgerald described who live in the Valley of Ashes; they have no spirit or vitality and are physically weak. Interestingly,

Fitzgerald describes George as anaemic, when anaemia is often characterized by loss of strength and vigor and results in weakness. Further adding to this characterization of Wilson is the fact that he is blonde. This adds to the image of a man who is generally pale and lifeless. Even his hair does not have color. Wilson seems to be "crumbling" and losing his vitality simply from living in the Valley of Ashes. Finally, the entire location seems to represent death, as Myrtle is killed in the Valley of Ashes. Myrtle's death is not only significant because she is a major character in the novel, but also because it leads to the death of two more characters, including the title character, Gatsby. Besides from the literal death of the character Myrtle, the event also symbolizes the death and decay of society's moral values. Daisy Buchanan hit a fellow human being with her car, likely killing her immediately and did not even have the courage to stop her car and admit what she had done. Instead, she and her husband left town and let Gatsby take the blame for Myrtle's death. This highlights Daisy and Tom's lack of moral sense and even the lack of morals of their entire community: wealthy socialites from East Egg. Perhaps Fitzgerald is commenting on the corrupted values of people who hide behind their money, status, and power.

Fitzgerald uses symbols in his novel The Great Gatsby to highlight and draw attention to the major themes in his work, as many authors do. Specifically, Fitzgerald used character's clothing and the Valley of Ashes to show character's status and their moral character. By using these symbols, Fitzgerald provided invaluable commentary on an age of American society in which wealth and status often took precedence over values and strength of character. Even today, The Great Gatsby forces people to look deeper at themselves and police their actions so that they do not let wealth transform them into immoral human beings.

C.D.
CM
C.D.
CM
Thesis

re-state thesis
· significance of your paper

Intro.
Body PPs
conclusion

Finally, after completing the color-coding, I emphasized how much commentary there was in relation to the concrete detail. We especially focused on the first body paragraph, for which one concrete detail less than a line in length, had seven lines of corresponding commentary. I think that this activity helped cement for students that concrete details are not meant to take up the majority of a body paragraph; the commentary should actually be the longest part of an essay because that is where students really explain their ideas.

Outcome Achievement Data

After completing the essay color-coding activity, and thus my intervention, I was excited to collect the outcome data from students and see if they had improved and in which areas students showed the most growth. I gave students a prompt for which they were to respond in a 50-minute period of time on Friday, February 1, 2008. Twenty-two students were present the day this data was collected; two students were absent. Because I had collected the baseline data from my students on a Monday, on which class periods are only 50 minutes in length, and I wanted to ensure that my baseline data and my outcome data were as comparable as possible, I gave students the prompt for the outcome data at the very beginning of the block period on Friday. Before passing out the prompt, I told students that the topic was one that was currently being considered by the Drake Eddy English Department and that if they took the assignment seriously, I might be able to discuss some of their comments at the next department meeting. Needless to say, students were eager to see the prompt. After passing out the prompt, I read it aloud to students, and then told them they had 50 minutes to respond to the prompt in essay format (which was also stated on the prompt). The prompt for the outcome data, just

like for the baseline data, required students to agree or disagree with a somewhat

controversial statement and argue their side in an essay. For the outcome data, the

prompt was: **Four years of English should not be required to graduate from Drake**

Eddy High School.

When beginning to analyze students' responses to the prompt (my outcome data),

I started by ascertaining whether or not each student had included an argument in their

essay, which is the first aspect of the rubric that I used to score students' essays. I found

the following results:

Table 23—Essay Rubric: Outcome Scores for Element 1

ARGUMENT (CONTROLLING IDEA) The essay contains an authentic argument. The author's argument is clear.		
3- Includes an authentic argument. The author's argument is clear to the reader. All paragraphs support the argument.	**2**- Includes an authentic argument. The author's argument is clear to the reader, but perhaps not every paragraph supports the argument.	**1**- Author does not include an argument.
19 students (86 percent of class)	**3 students (14 percent of class)**	**0 students**

I was pleased that all students included an argument in their essay. Essentially,

for this essay, an argument consisted of students stating whether or not they agreed or

disagreed with the statement. Every student did this; no papers were written without a

clear argument. Three students, or 14 percent of the class, however, did not stick to their

argument throughout their paper. These three students stated an argument in the

introduction of their paper, but they undermined their arguments in the body of their

essays when they included details and examples that actually supported the counter-argument. I believe that these three students thought that they were addressing the possible doubts of the reader, which, unfortunately, was not needed in this essay. Despite this problem, it was still clear to me which side of the argument these students were supporting in their essays. Nineteen students, or 86 percent of the class, included a clear argument in their introductory paragraphs and supported their argument in their subsequent paragraphs.

Next, I looked at students' thesis statements. Because I had focused on improving students' organizational skills in their writing, I decided that I wanted students to include a three-part thesis statement. Even though this is fairly formulaic, which is what I had been trying to avoid, I also believe that this thesis format shows that students have somewhat planned out their essays in advance of writing it. The three-part thesis shows that students have a clear idea of what they will argue in their essay. Here are my findings with student illustrations of each score:

Table 24—Essay Rubric: Outcome Scores for Element 2

THESIS STATEMENTS		
The author has included a specific and detailed thesis.		
3- Provides a specific and detailed three-part thesis statement that occurs at the end of the introductory paragraph.	**2-** Provides a clear thesis, but it is just the argument. It appears at the end of the introductory paragraph. Does not have a specific and detailed three-part thesis.	**1-**Does not include a thesis statement that occurs at the end of the introductory paragraph.
16 students (73% of class)	**1 student (4% of class)**	**5 students (23% of class)**

Score 3:

- *"Making only three years of english would bring grades up in DEHS, make kids come to school more, and most of not having an english class would give you more room to do something you want to do."* (Student 15)

- *"I belief if you don't have to take 4 years than the student will be able to possably make up credits, take another class of their liking, or be able to have an unscheduled class."* (Focus Student 1)

Score 2:

- *"And although English is a staple in the curriculum, most people do not think that four years should be required to graduate a public high school."* (Focus Student 4)

Score 1:

- *"I believe math is more important."* (Student 16)

- *"I want to work in the fabrication industry and in that industry there is no use of History or English."* (Student 26)

As seen from the examples, students who received a score of 3 included detailed three-part thesis statements. Focus Student 4, who received a score of 2, basically restated her argument at the end of her introduction paragraph. While this could be considered her thesis, I was looking specifically for detailed theses that could be considered a blue-print for the students' essays. It is still clear to the reader, however, exactly what she will be arguing in her essay. Finally, the students who received a score of 1 on the thesis statement did not end their introduction paragraphs with a thesis statement. Student 16, while originally stating his argument that four years of English should not be required, seemed to deviate off-topic into an argument for additional mathematics classes to be required. I did not consider his opinion about another topic a thesis arguing against four years of English. Student 26 also received a score of 1 because his last sentence in his introductory paragraph was not a thesis statement.

Perhaps his desire to work in the fabrication industry could have been a concrete detail in a paragraph discussing why English should not be required for four years so that students can take other classes that support their after school plans.

After looking at students' thesis statements, I continued to examine their essay organization, specifically, whether or not students' topic sentences matched their proposed thesis statements. Also, to earn a score of 3, the first sentence in students' body paragraphs also had to be the main idea of the paragraph. As seen in the table below, 10 students, or 45 percent of students in the class, scored a 3 on this portion of the rubric. An additional nine students, or 41 percent of the class, scored a 2, which meant there may have been some disconnect between their thesis statements and their topic sentences or between their topic sentences and the details included in their body paragraphs. Finally, three students, or 14 percent of the class, included topic sentences that were not the main ideas of their body paragraphs and did not correspond to their thesis statement.

Table 25—Essay Rubric: Outcome Scores for Element 3

TOPIC SENTENCES The author has included topic sentences that directly correlate to the thesis and that are the main ideas of their body paragraphs.		
3- Provides topic sentences that correspond to thesis statements. Topic sentences appear as the first sentence in body paragraphs and are the main ideas of the paragraphs.	**2-** Provides topic sentences that correspond to the thesis statement. Topic sentences may not be the first sentence in body paragraph or may not be the main idea of the paragraph.	**1-**Topic sentences are not the main ideas of the body paragraphs and do not correspond to the thesis statement.
10 students (45% of class)	**9 students (41% of class)**	**3 students (14% of class)**

The results for this element of the rubric were especially encouraging to me because it meant that students were writing well-organized essays that stayed on-topic. Essays were well-organized because their body paragraphs actually supported their thesis statements, and students' essays were mostly on-topic because nearly everything in their body paragraphs related directly to their thesis statements. This means that students were choosing to omit the irrelevant details that detract from the central focus of their essays.

Next, I looked at the concrete details students used to support their arguments in their topic sentences. When we had reviewed the concept of concrete details during the intervention, I had defined concrete details as a quotation, example, statistic, fact, or detail. Students scored a three on the rubric if they included two or three plausible concrete details in each body paragraph. Students scored a two if their body paragraphs had one or two fairly plausible concrete details. The main difference between a score of a 3 and a score of a 2 was how well students developed their examples. Students received a score of 1 if they provided no concrete details or if they provided concrete details unrelated to their paragraph. The following chart shows students' scores for this rubric element.

Table 26—Essay Rubric: Outcome Scores for Element 3

EXAMPLES (CONCRETE DETAILS) The author has provided two to three relevant examples in each paragraph that support the topic sentence.		
3- Provides two to three relevant and believable examples that support each topic sentence.	**2-** Provides one or two relevant examples that support each topic sentence. Examples might be far-fetched or unbelievable.	**1-**Provides no examples to support topic sentence, or provides examples unrelated to topic sentence.
7 students (32% of class)	**14 students (64% of class)**	**1 student (4% of class)**

Encouragingly, all but one student in the class included concrete details in their essays to support their argument, and this student, Focus Student 3, did not write any body paragraphs, so he could not have included any concrete details. Here are some examples of concrete details that received scores of three and two, so that the difference between the scores is more apparent:

Score 3:

- *"Most people do not have the money to go through college without help so many people are busy looking for scholarships, grants, and loans."* (Student 13)

- *"As seniors, most students prefer spending their last year in high school taking electives."* (Focus Student 4)

Score 2:

- *"In a statistic "5%" of student graduate late because of 4th year English."* (Student 19)

- *"An unnamed student quoted "'I want to do drugs but I just don't have the time with one extra english class!'"* (Focus Student 6)

The difference between the above scores was the believability of students' examples. The two students who received a score of three utilized examples that were believable, while the students who received scores of two gave statistics or quotations that they had created. Several students became fairly outlandish in their creation of supporting statistics and quotations. I found this to be one of the most interesting results of the outcome data that I collected. I wondered why so many students had created fake concrete details for this essay until I realized that I had let students do so for one of the activities we completed in the middle of my intervention. Specifically, when students had been asked to write a thesis statement, a topic sentence, and a concrete detail about topics such as cheetahs, the New England Patriots, and Taco Bell, I had told students that they could create false statistics to prove their point. I had decided this at the time because I had created the activity to help illustrate the difference between the three essay elements to students, not to have students research interesting facts about cheetahs. I realized that perhaps students thought that it was acceptable to insert false concrete details in this in-class essay as well. While I am a bit concerned that students may think that they can create concrete details as they please, I am also impressed that students made the connection between the two assignments. Even though students' details were not accurate, it is clear that students recognized that they needed to insert concrete details in these places. Also, as a class, students used all five of the possible concrete details in their essays, which showed me that all students have a solid understanding of what constitutes a concrete detail and where it should appear in an essay and in a body paragraph. So, even though 64 percent of students used false concrete details, I was still

impressed that all students who wrote a body paragraph used concrete details to support their arguments.

After examining students' use of concrete details, I was interested to see how students would explain and build upon those examples with commentary. I think that writing detailed and original commentary is the hardest part of an essay to teach because there is no set formula to teach students the concept. Commentary is also a part of essay writing that most students struggle with because they have to think about their concrete details in sufficient depth. Because of these challenges, I was interested to see how students integrated commentary into their body paragraphs. The following table illustrates my findings.

Table 27—Essay Rubric: Outcome Scores for Element 5

COMMENTARY The author discusses the relevance and importance of the examples in detailed and specific commentary.		
3- Provides commentary explaining each example. Commentary is detailed and original.	**2**- Attempts to provide commentary for most of the examples. Commentary is unoriginal and repetitive.	**1**-Provides no commentary to explain examples.
3 students (13% of class)	**16 students (73% of class)**	**3 students (14% of class)**

I found that three students, or 13 percent, of the class provided detailed and original commentary, and that an additional 16 students, or 73 percent of the class, at least attempted to provide commentary for their concrete details. Because I do believe that commentary is a difficult concept for students to grasp and include in their writing, I was pleased that the great majority of students, 86 percent, either excelled at writing

commentary or at least tried to write commentary for their concrete details. Three

students, or 14 percent of the class, did not include commentary for their concrete details.

These three students simply followed their concrete details with more concrete details

instead of explaining them. To show the difference between commentary that was given

a score of three and a score of two, I have included some examples below.

Score 3:

Concrete Detail: *""Most people do not have the money to go through college without help so many people are busy looking for scholarships, grants, and loans."*

Commentary supporting concrete detail: *"If we are writing, studying, and reading for yet another year of English we won't have as much time to look and research so that we can find scholarships or money to pay for our college education. If we are not able to find money to pay for our education because we are doing homework for another English class we might not be able to go to college at all and miss a good life changing opportunity."* (Student 13)

Score 2:

Concrete Detail: *"Survey says "54% of students required only to take 3 years of english receive a 'B' or lower in the college english course."*

Commentary supporting concrete detail: *"If students were required to take 4 years they could have more time to learn the material they need to pass the college level classes."* (Focus Student 6)

The main difference between the two students and the commentary that they

wrote was the extent of their explanation for their concrete details. Student 13, who

received a score of three, wrote two sentences fully explaining how a fourth year of

English might be detrimental to a student's chance to find money to attend college.

Focus student 6, who received a score of two, still provided commentary for his concrete

detail. Instead of building upon his concrete detail, however, this student simply

explained his statistic. To receive a score of three this student would have referred back

to the grade that students who did not take a fourth year of English received in college

classes and explained a possible reason for this. Because writing detailed commentary is a higher-order skill that is difficult to master, I am pleased that so many students received a score of two or three on this element of the rubric. I consider these results a great success.

Finally, the last aspect of students' essays that I analyzed was whether or not students' essays were organized in a logical manner. Logical essays follow the five-paragraph essay format and do not include details that are irrelevant or detract from the main argument. The following chart represents my analysis of students' work.

Table 28—Essay Rubric: Outcome Scores for Element 6

LOGICAL The author has proved the argument of the paper in a logical and well-organized way.		
3- Responses follow essay format. Proves argument in logical and organized way. Includes no irrelevant details.	**2-** Responses follow essay format. Proves argument in logical way. Perhaps includes a few details irrelevant to the topic.	**1-**No essay organization. May be one large paragraph. Many irrelevant details that deter from the main argument of paper.
11 students (50% of class)	**8 students (36% of class)**	**3 students (14% of class)**

I found that half of the class followed the essay format in their responses and did not include any details that were irrelevant to their topic. An additional 36 percent of the class wrote their responses in essay format. These students may have included a detail or two that was irrelevant to their argument, but it was not enough to detract the reader from the author's main focus. Three students failed to organize their essay in any cohesive way. Coincidently, these were the same three students who received a score of one on

their topic sentences because they did not have topic sentences that correlated to their

theses. One of these students simply wrote a response in a page-long paragraph. Another

separated his ideas into paragraphs, but the essay had no cohesive focus and the

paragraphs were often not related to the topic. Finally, the third student who received a

score of one was Focus Student 3. He only completed an argument and a thesis statement

during the 50-minute period.

Comparison of Baseline and Outcome Achievement Data

After scoring and analyzing students' outcome data, I wanted to compare the

improvements that students made in their scores. In every element of the rubric, the

percentage of students who received a score of three increased and the percentage of

students who received a score of one decreased, as seen in the chart below.

Table 29—Comparison of Score Percentages of Baseline and Outcome Achievement Data

	Score 3 (high)		Score 2		Score 1 (low)	
	PRE	POST	PRE	POST	PRE	POST
Argument	50%	86%	50%	14%	0%	0%
Thesis Statement	33%	73%	17%	4%	50%	23%
Topic Sentences	8%	45%	33%	41%	58%	14%
Concrete Details	4%	32%	54%	64%	42%	4%
Commentary	4%	13%	17%	73%	79%	14%
Logic	8%	50%	3%	36%	58%	14%

Looking at the above chart, I knew that students had improved tremendously.

Unfortunately, I was still not able to see individual students' improvements, so I created

the following table that shows every students' score on each of the rubric elements for the baseline and outcome data. Three students who were in the class when the baseline data was collected were given N/A scores for all elements of the outcome data either because they were no longer in the class when the essay was administered. Two students who were not present on the day the outcome data was collected were also given scores of N/A for these elements. Finally, three students who were not present when the baseline data were collected, two because they had not yet been transferred into the class and one because he was absent, were given scores of N/A for the baseline data, but their outcome data are included.

If students' scores improved, the scores for that element are highlighted in purple. If students' scores on that element did not change, the scores for that element are highlighted in green. Finally, if students scored lower on the outcome data than they had on the baseline data, the scores for that element are highlighted in yellow. Students who did not have both baseline and also outcome data were not highlighted but left white.

Table 30—Comparison of Baseline and Outcome Rubric Scores by Element and Student

STUDENT	ARGUMENT		THESIS STATEMENTS		TOPIC SENTENCES		CONCRETE DETAILS		COMMENTARY		LOGICAL	
	PRE	POST	PRE	POST	PRE	POST	PRE	POST	PRE	POST	PRE	POST
Focus Student 1	2	3	1	3	1	3	1	3	1	2	1	3
Focus Student 2	3	3	2	3	2	3	1	2	1	2	2	3
Focus Student 3	3	3	3	3	1 (N/A)	1 (N/A)	1 (N/A)	1 (N/A)	1 (N/A)	1 (N/A)	1 (N/A)	1 (N/A)
Focus Student 4	2	3	1	2	1	2	1	3	1	2	1	3
Focus Student 5	3	3	3	3	3	2	2	3	1	2	3	3
Focus Student 6	2	3	1	3	2	3	2	2	1	2	1	3
Focus Student 7	2	N/A	2	N/A	1	N/A	1	N/A	1	N/A	1	N/A
Student 8	3	3	3	3	3	3	2	2	2	3	3	2
Student 9	2	3	2	3	2	3	1	2	1	2	2	3
Student 10	2	3	1	3	1	3	2	2	1	2	1	2
Student 11	3	3	3	3	2	2	2	2	1	2	2	3
Student 12	3	3	3	3	1	2	2	2	1	2	2	2

Student 13	3	3	3	3	2	3	3	3	3	3	3	3
Student 14	3	N/A	3	N/A	2	N/A	2	N/A	1	N/A	2	N/A
Student 15	1	3	1	3	1	2	1	2	2	2	1	3
Student 16	3	3	1	1	1	2	2	2	1	1	1	1
Student 17	2	2	1	1	1	1	1	2	1	2	2	1
Student 18	N/A	3	N/A	3	N/A	3	N/A	3	N/A	3	N/A	3
Student 19	2	3	1	3	1	3	1	2	1	2	1	2
Student 20	3	3	2	3	2	3	1	2	1	2	2	3
Student 21	N/A	3	N/A	3	N/A	2	N/A	3	N/A	2	N/A	2
Student 22	3	3	1	3	1	2	2	2	1	2	1	2
Student 23	3	N/A	2	N/A	1	N/A	2	N/A	1	N/A	2	N/A
Student 24	2	N/A	1	N/A	2	N/A	2	N/A	2	N/A	1	N/A
Student 25	N/A	3	N/A	1	N/A	1	N/A	2	N/A	1	N/A	2
Student 26	2	2	1	1	1	2	2	3	2	2	1	2
Student 27	2	N/A	1	N/A	1	N/A	2	N/A	1	N/A	1	N/A

As seen by the 67 purple sections, students made many strides in different focus areas of the intervention. Although many students scored the same on 44 different elements of the rubric for their baseline and outcome data, only three students had a score decrease in an area of the rubric.

In regards to students' arguments, no students received a lower score on their outcome essay than on their baseline essay. On the baseline essay, 50 percent of the class scored a three and the other 50 percent of the class scored a two. On the outcome essay, 63 percent of students received the same score that they did on the baseline essay. Thirty-two percent of the class, or six students, increased their score by one point from the baseline to the outcome essay. Finally, one student increased his score on this element of the rubric by two points. This data is represented in the chart below. I believe that the reason why 63 percent of the class received the same score on the outcome essay that they received on the baseline essay was because students scored fairly high on their arguments on the baseline essay. Fifty percent of students had already scored a three and so there was no way for them to show improvement in this category.

Table 31—Score Improvement for Rubric Element 1

ARGUMENT (CONTROLLING IDEA) Number of students whose score on this element...			
Decreased by 1 point	Stayed the same	Increased by 1 point	Increased by 2 points
0 students (0% of class)	12 students (63% of class)	6 students (32% of class)	1 student (5% of class)

For the baseline essays, 50 percent of students received a score of two (17%) or three (33%) on their thesis statements. The remaining 50 percent of the class received a score of one. Six of those students who had received a one on their baseline essay boosted their score from a one to a three on their outcome essay. Three more students increased their score by one point. Ten students, or 52 percent of the class, received the same score on their baseline thesis statement that they had received on their outcome thesis statement. Just as with students' arguments, I believe that the reason why 52 percent of the class did not improve on their scores can be explained by the fact that 50 percent of them had already scored well and did not have much room to improve according to the rubric. Students' improvement in scores regarding their thesis statements is displayed below.

Table 32—Score Improvement for Rubric Element 2

THESIS STATEMENTS Number of students whose score on this element...			
Decreased by 1 point	**Stayed the same**	**Increased by 1 point**	**Increased by 2 points**
0 students (0% of class)	10 students (52% of class)	3 students (16% of class)	6 students (32% of class)

Regarding topic sentences, 58 percent of the class increased their score from their baseline essay to their outcome essay by one point. Coincidently, this is the same percentage of students who had scored a one on this element on the baseline essay. As seen below, 16 percent of students increased their score by two points. Twenty-one percent of the class received the same score on both essays. Finally, one student, Focus

Student 5, received a score on his outcome essay that was lower than the score he received on his baseline essay. This will be discussed in great detail in the section on focus students.

Table 33—Score Improvement for Rubric Element 3

TOPIC SENTENCES Number of students whose score on this element…			
Decreased by 1 point	Stayed the same	Increased by 1 point	Increased by 2 points
1 student (5% of class)	4 students (21% of class)	11 students (58% of class)	3 students (16% of class)

As depicted in the following chart, 53 percent of students increased their score on their concrete details by either one or two points. The remaining students received the same score on both essays on their concrete details.

Table 34—Score Improvement for Rubric Element 4

EXAMPLES (CONCRETE DETAILS) Number of students whose score on this element…			
Decreased by 1 point	Stayed the same	Increased by 1 point	Increased by 2 points
0 students (0% of class)	9 students (47% of class)	8 students (42% of class)	2 students (11% of class)

Students made dramatic strides in their commentary scores from the baseline essay to the outcome essay. Seventy-four percent of students raised their scores on their

commentary by one point. The remaining students received the same score on their commentary on both of their essays.

Table 35—Score Improvement for Rubric Element 5

COMMENTARY			
Number of students whose score on this element...			
Decreased by 1 point	Stayed the same	Increased by 1 point	Increased by 2 points
0 students (0% of class)	5 students (26% of class)	14 students (74% of class)	0 students (0% of class)

Finally, 63 percent of students improved their score on the logic element of the rubric by one or two points. Eight students increased their score by one point, while four students increased their score by two points. Interestingly, 2 students, or 11 percent of the class, received a lower score on their outcome essay than they had received on this element for their baseline essay. One of these students received a lower score, a score of one, because he did not write in essay format. For his baseline essay, this student had at least attempted to organize his thoughts into paragraphs, but his outcome essay was one large paragraph with no structure or logical development. The second student whose score decreased on this element of the rubric did not present his paragraphs in a logical way. His thesis had stated the specific order in which he would present his arguments, but he deviated from this order in his essay.

Table 36—Score Improvement for Rubric Element 6

LOGICAL Number of students whose score on this element…			
Decreased by 1 point	**Stayed the same**	**Increased by 1 point**	**Increased by 2 points**
2 students (11% of class)	**5 students (26% of class)**	**8 students (42% of class)**	**4 students (21% of class)**

While I found the progress of the entire class to be exciting, I was especially impressed by the progress made by one student who I had not chosen as a focus student. On his baseline essay, he received a score of three on his argument, a two on his use of concrete details, and ones on every other element. His essay, which is really just one long paragraph, is shown below.

Figure 22—Sample Student Baseline Essay

Name: ▮▮▮▮▮▮▮

Mandatory Monday: Essay Write 1

In an essay, agree or disagree with the following statement:

▮▮▮▮▮▮▮ should institute off-campus lunch.

Remember that your response should be in essay format, complete with an introduction, body paragraphs, and a conclusion. If you need to use part of the front page for an outline, please do so.

You will not be graded on completion; I do not expect you to finish the essay. You will be graded on the quality of work that you produce in this shortened period.
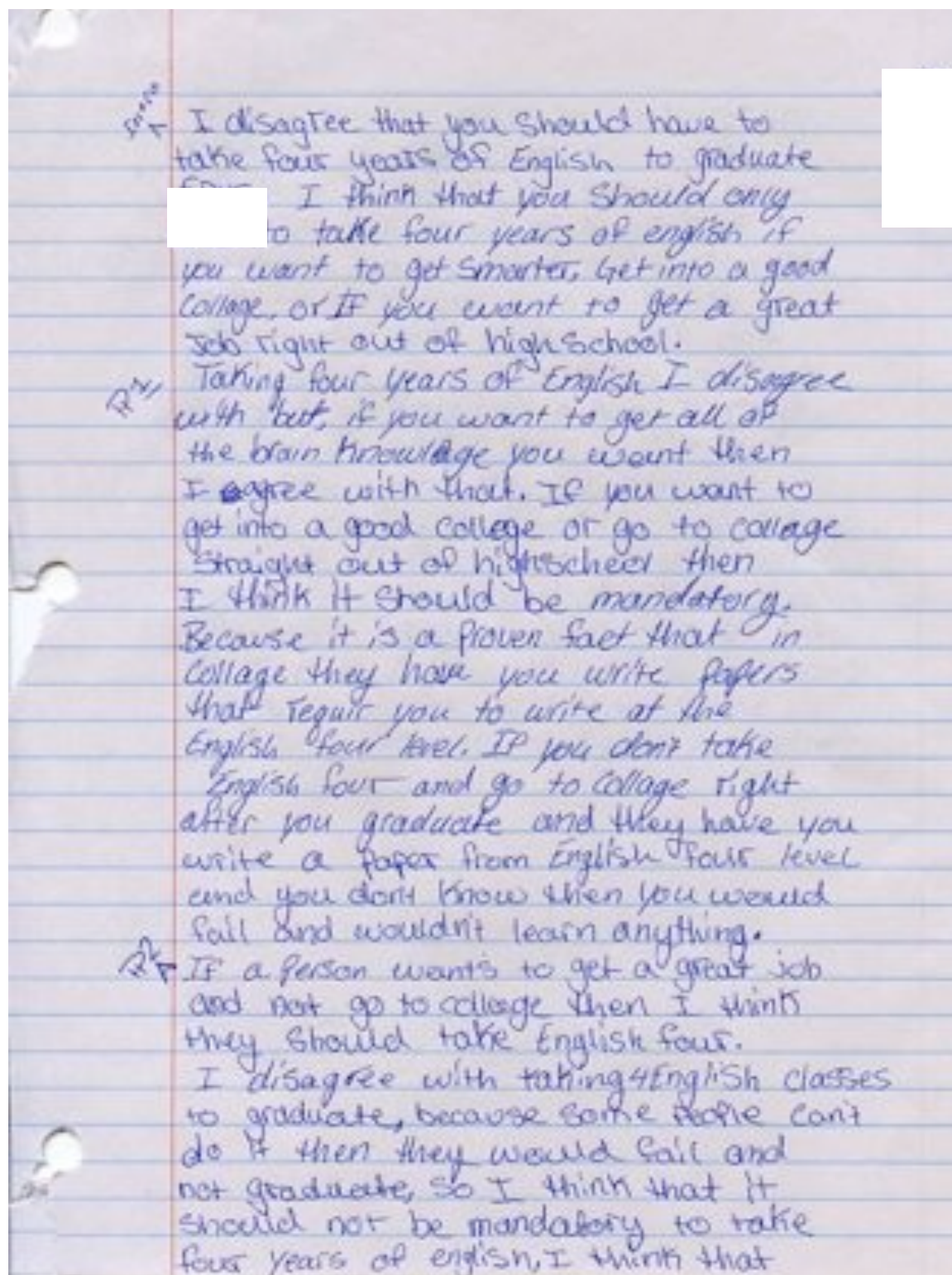
I think we should have off campus lunch, Because we need to eat real food not Just the food that the school suplys. If people are involved in any Athletic sports and need Like more protien or energy bars then they should be able to go and get what they need. I think we should ha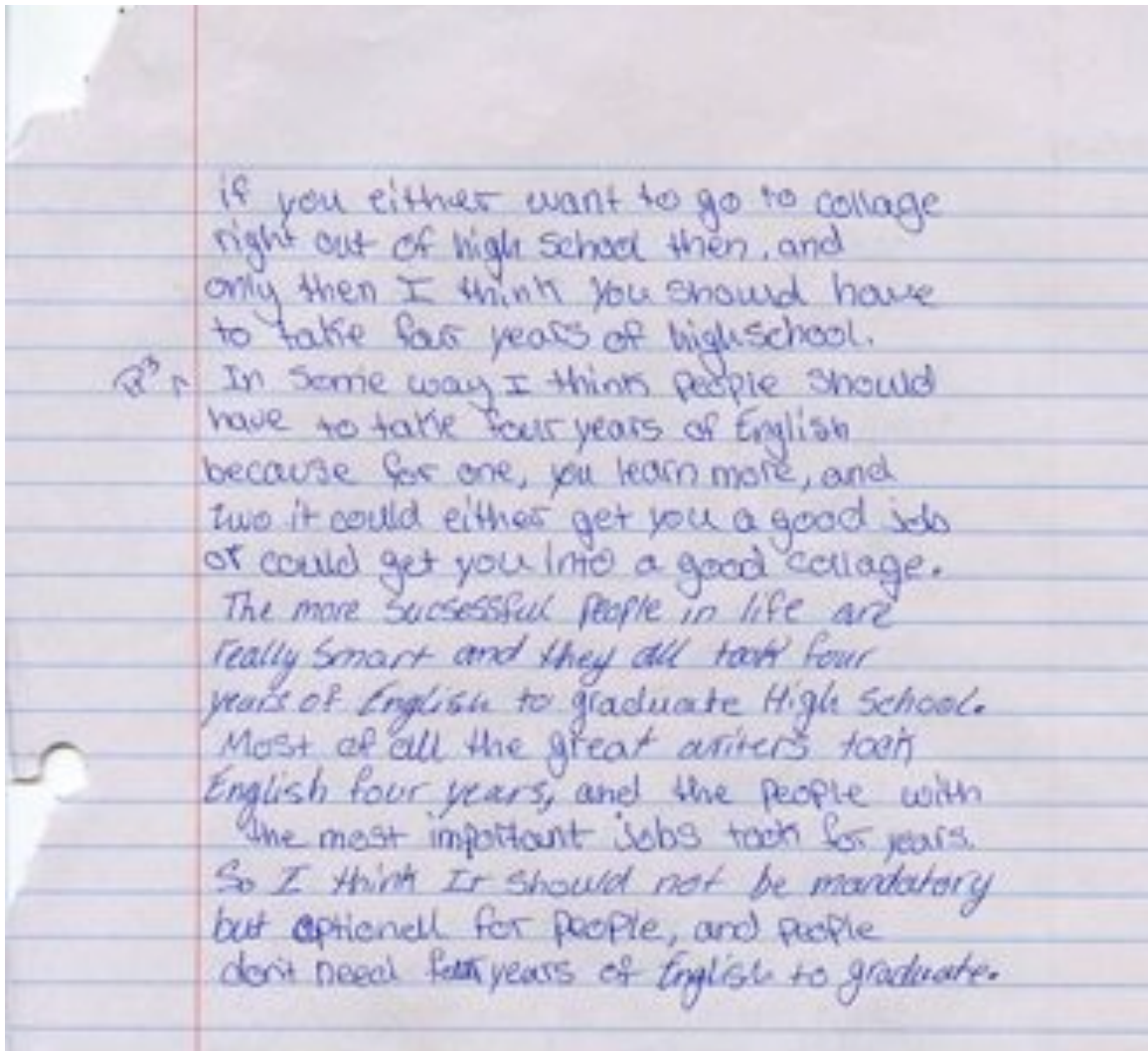ve off Campus Lunch because Sometimes if you don't get to the food fast enough then it runs out and you don't eat that much anyways. If the Kids are in Sports and the food runs out then they could get really light headed and pass out on the field. And that could happen over and over again maybe not to the Same Kid but it could Keep happening to the Kids that are involved in sports or activities.

This student received a three on his argument because he clearly stated his position at the beginning of his response. He also received a two for examples because he had two reasons why students should be able to go off campus for lunch regarding athletes: athletes need different food than the school provides and there might not be enough time for athletes to get the food they need with the long lines on campus. This student had the beginnings of a detailed paragraph in response to the prompt, but not an essay. He thus received ones in each of the other categories.

During the intervention, I noticed a great change come over this student. I discussed him in the teacher observation journal (Figures 11 and 15) above. I noticed that he was taking an interest in the activities that we were completing as a class and that he was speaking up when other students, including his friends, were distracting him. At the beginning of the year, this student was a great behavioral problem, but during the later weeks of my intervention, I noticed that he was no longer an issue at all. Actually, he helped the groups that he was working in stay on-task. I think that this change in behavior helped him concentrate on what we were working on in class and this could be a critical reason for his improvement. On his outcome essay, this student received scores of three on his argument and thesis statement and scores of two on every other category. His essay is shown below.

Figure 23—Sample Student Outcome Essay

I disagree that you should have to take four years of English to graduate [   ]. I think that you should only [   ] to take four years of english if you want to get smarter, get into a good collage, or if you want to get a great job right out of high school.

Taking four years of English I disagree with but, if you want to get all of the brain knowledge you want then I agree with that. If you want to get into a good college or go to collage straight out of highschool then I think it should be mandatory. Because it is a proven fact that in collage they have you write papers that requir you to write at the English four level. If you dont take English four and go to collage right after you graduate and they have you write a paper from English four level and you dont know then you would fail and wouldn't learn anything.

If a person wants to get a great job and not go to college then I think they should take English four.

I disagree with taking 4 english classes to graduate, because some people can't do it then they would fail and not graduate, so I think that it should not be mandatory to take four years of english, I think that

> if you either want to go to collage
> right out of high school then, and
> only then I think you should have
> to take four years of highschool.
> In some way I think people should
> have to take four years of English
> because for one, you learn more, and
> two it could either get you a good job
> or could get you into a good collage.
> The more sucsessful people in life are
> really smart and they all took four
> years of English to graduate High School.
> Most of all the great writers took
> English four years, and the people with
> the most important jobs took for years.
> So I think It should not be mandatory
> but optionell for people, and people
> don't need four years of English to graduate.

The first change that became apparent to me about this student's writing was that

he actually wrote an essay and not a long paragraph. He began his response with an

introduction which included a three-part thesis statement. This student attempted to use

his three-part thesis statement as a basis for his topic sentences, but he tried to include too

many details in his topic sentences and it was difficult to determine what his body

paragraphs were going to cover based solely on his topic sentences. Thus, he received a

two in this category. This student also included examples in each of his paragraphs that

were relevant to the topic and attempted to provide commentary to explain the concrete

details. For example, in his first body paragraph, he has a concrete detail discussing how

colleges require students to write at the English 4 level. Then, his commentary explains how if students do not take English 4 in high school, they will be unable to write their essays at the level required in college and might fail their college classes. Because he included concrete details and explained their significance, this student received a score of two in both of these categories. Finally, this student received a score of two on the element of the rubric that examined students' logical presentation of ideas. Clearly, this student simply improved by writing his essay in essay format. This student received a two and not a three because it was sometimes difficult to grasp the focus of his body paragraphs and he could have presented his ideas in a clearer fashion. All together, however, I was amazed by the great progress that this student made in only a few weeks.

Discussion of Outcome Achievement Data with Regard to Focus Students

Before beginning my discussion of the focus students' improvements, here are these students' actual scores. If students' scores improved, the scores for that element are highlighted in purple. If students' scores on that element did not change, the scores for that element are highlighted in green. Finally, if students scored lower on the outcome data than they had on the baseline data, the scores for that element are highlighted in yellow.

Table 37—Comparison of Baseline and Outcome Rubric Scores by Element and Student

Focus Student	ARGUMENT		THESIS STATEMENT		TOPIC SENTENCES		CONCRETE DETAILS		COMMENTARY		LOGICAL	
	PRE	POST	PRE	POST	PRE	POST	PRE	POST	PRE	POST	PRE	POST
1	2	3	1	3	1	3	**1**	**3**	1	2	1	3
2	3	3	2	3	2	3	1	2	1	2	2	3
3	3	3	3	3	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
4	2	3	1	2	1	2	1	3	1	2	1	3
5	3	3	3	3	3	2	2	3	1	2	3	3
6	2	3	1	3	2	3	2	2	1	2	1	3

Two of the focus students improved in every element of the rubric. Focus Student 1 increased his score on every element of the rubric by at least one point. He increased his score by two points on the thesis statement, topic sentences, concrete details, and logic sections. Thus, on the essay that is considered outcome data, Focus Student 1 received a three, the top score, in five of the six rubric elements. Focus Student 1's baseline essay was not organized in any recognizable fashion. It seemed as if he had just written down whatever thoughts popped into his head in whichever order he had thought of them. Also, at the beginning of his essay he had discussed how he really did not care about the essay topic because it no longer affected him; he has ROP after lunch and can leave campus for lunch on a daily basis. It seemed as if he was arguing the validity of the prompt instead of simply responding to it in an essay. For his outcome essay, however, Focus Student 1 wrote a cohesive response that was in essay format. He neither included irrelevant details nor any tangents in his essay. The only element of the rubric that Focus Student 1 received a two on was commentary, which is often the most difficult element of

writing an essay for students to grasp. Still, this student attempted to provide commentary for each of his concrete details.

Focus Student 4 also improved her score on all of the rubric elements. As was discussed earlier, Focus Student 4 rarely turns in any work, especially written work. Also, on her baseline essay, while she began to respond to the prompt, her response quickly devolved into a discussion of personal issues that she was dealing with at the time the essay was administered. She scored a one on every element except for the argument, for which she scored a two. For the outcome data, however, she received scores of two on the thesis statements, topic sentences, and commentary elements. She received scores of three on the three remaining rubric elements. What was most surprising about this student's improvement, however, was that she immediately began writing when I passed out the prompt. I had expected her to glance at the prompt briefly before drawing over her notebook as she usually does when she is given a writing assignment. I would have considered even a response to the prompt that was not in essay format or organized in any cohesive way to be an improvement for this student who struggles with writing. I was pleased when I realized that she had written over two full pages in response to the prompt and was excited to read what she had written. After I read her essay, I was almost in shock. I had considered dropping her as a focus student because I realized that I was not receiving any work from her and I was worried I would be unable to track her progress. Now I am glad that I chose her originally, and I find myself even more interested in her progress in my class after the intervention.

Two other focus students, Focus Students 2 and 6, improved their scores in every category of the rubric except one. For Focus Student 2, however, it was impossible for

him to improve upon his score of three on his argument for the baseline essay. So this student could also be considered as having improved upon each of his scores from his baseline essay, except for the one element he could not improve upon. This student increased his each of the other five scores by one point each. He received a score of three on four of the six elements for his outcome essay. Only for the concrete details and commentary elements did he receive a score of two. It is worth mentioning, however, that he did include two concrete details for each of his body paragraphs in his outcome essay.

Focus Student 6 also improved upon each of the scores he received on the baseline essay except for one element: concrete details. He received a score of two on his concrete details for both essays. Unfortunately, his use of concrete details improved greatly, but not enough to warrant a score of three on the rubric. In his baseline essay, Focus Student 6 used about two concrete details in each body paragraph. All of the concrete details that he included in that essay were examples. In his outcome essay, however, this student began experimenting with other types of concrete details. In his outcome essay, he included a quotation from a student and a magazine and used a statistic. One of the main reasons why I did not give this student a score of three on his use of concrete details on his outcome data was that his concrete details were not accurate. He had made them up for the essay. While I understand that he was writing in a timed setting where he could not compile research and look for statistics, the rubric that I created stipulates that his quotations must be "believable." Unfortunately, his were not. Still, I was impressed that this student experimented with using different types of concrete details. Also, he clearly understands where and how concrete details should be

used in an essay. I have included this student's baseline and outcome essays below for comparison. I saw a vast improvement in this student's writing that I feel is not justly represented in his outcome essay scores.

Figure 24—Focus Student 6's Baseline Essay

Not Done

Name: _____

Mandatory Monday: Essay Write 1

In an essay, agree or disagree with the following statement:

o High School should institute off-campus lunch.

Remember that your response should be in essay format, complete with an introduction, body paragraphs, and a conclusion. If you need to use part of the front page for an outline, please do so.

You will not be graded on completion; I do not expect you to finish the essay. You will be graded on the quality of work that you produce in this shortened period.

_____ high School should institute off-campus lunch or maybe even Just offer better food. Kids go off campus to eat lunch all the time because the food is better and they have a greater variety. If the school Just gave the kids off campus lunch then the school would have more money for books and other materials because they wouldn't be spending as much on food. Then their would be less kids getting in trouble for ditching because they would Just go at lunch instead.

If the school offered off campus lunch the school would have more money, its as simple as that. But then again the school makes money off of lunch too because everyone has to eat. So as a compromise maybe they could switch off days of who is allowed to leave. On monday, wednesday and friday Juniors and seniors can leave at lunch because they are upper classmen. Then on tuesdays and thursdays Sophomores and freshman would be able to leave.

Another thing to think about is that if the school let kids go off campus during lunch is there would be less people wanting to ditch. The kids would know that they could Just leave at lunch so they wouldn't want to risk getting introuble. There will always be those random kids who Just want to ditch Just So they can say the did though.

> One other reason that kids should be able to leave at lunch is so they could see how the real world is during a normal week day. All Highschoolers are going to grow up sometime, then they are going to go get jobs. letting kids out at lunch would show them that not everyone just gets to sit around and talk at lunch. They live and run errands...
>
>   I really can't think about anything to write about Im not going to lie.

Focus Student 6 often was sidetracked while writing his body paragraphs. He also quit writing his essay before he was finished, seemingly because he was frustrated with his inability to generate ideas as he stopped writing in the middle of a body paragraph.

Figure 25—Focus Student 6's Outcome Essay

At _____ High School all Students are required to take 4 Years of english to graduate. This is a good concept and will be benificial to the Students throughout their highschool career and the rest of their life. Four years of english Should be required because it allows for more study time, looks better on college resumes, and gives Seniors something to do.

Four Years of english should be required at _____ because it allows for more study time in the classroom with a teacher. Students that only have 3 years of english would have to have all the information that 4 Year students know but they would only have 3 Years to learn it. This would mean that they would have less time to learn it but way more homework. Survey says "54% of Students required only to take 3 Years of english recieve a 'B' or lower in the college english course". If students were required to take 4 Years they could have more time to learn the material they need to pass the College level classes.

Four Years of english not only allows for more study time but looks imensly better on a college transcript. Colleges like to have students who are not only determined

2

But go the extra mile in their schools. If a school only requires 3 years of english instead of 4 it lowers a students possibilities of getting into the school of their choice because other students would be more qualified. A survey from Kyle weekly says "Students only taking 3 years of english only make up 2% of college population". This shows that more students would not be let into schools and would become homeless and alone unless they took a fourth year of english.

The third and final reason that a fourth year of english should be required is that it gives students something to do. Senior are required to take at least 5 classes by the school. If they take out a year of english the students would either have to chose another elective or be let out early and go downtown and do drugs. A unamed student Quoted "I want to do drugs but I just don't have the time with one extra english class". Having a fourth year of english keeps this student away from drugs and off the streets. If he didnt have this class he would possibly be behind starbucks "shooting up".

> A fourth year of english should be
> required because it allows for more study
> time, looks impessive on College resumes, and
> keeps kids of the street. Not only am I for
> this Idea but I strongly encourage that
> Schools everywhere do the same. teenagers
> need a way to keep them out of trouble
> and this could be an easy answer.
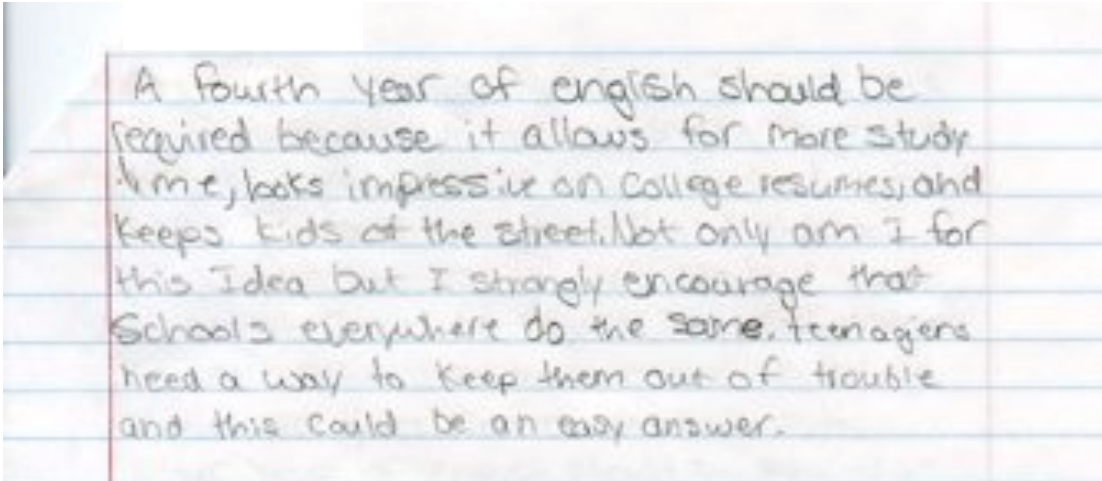
Focus Student 5 showed improvement in two areas of the rubric, specifically in his use of concrete details and commentary. This student had received a score of three on his baseline essay for three elements of the rubric: argument, thesis statement, and logic. He received the same score for each of these elements on his outcome essay. For the final essay element, topic sentences, his score decreased by one point from the baseline to the outcome essay. For his baseline essay, Student 5 had written a three-part thesis statement and then based his topic sentences directly off of his thesis statement; his topic sentences corresponded nearly exactly to his thesis statement. For his outcome essay, however, Student 5 stopped writing topic sentences that correlated with his thesis statement. Also, what were supposed to be his topic sentences (i.e., the first sentence in each of his body paragraphs) was not the main idea of the paragraph. For example, here are the thesis statement and the topic sentences this student wrote in his baseline and outcome essays:

BASELINE ESSAY:

> **Thesis Statement:** *"If the school did, this would cause students to take advantage of the privellege, students may not come back, and students will become more obese than they already are."*

Topic Sentences:

- *"Drake Eddy High School should not allow an off campus lunch because students might take advantage of the privellege."*
- *"Secondly if students are allowed to have an off campus lunch they might not even come back to school."*
- *"Finally students should not be allowed an off campus lunch because that would mean they could also eat what ever they want."*

> These topic sentences relate directly to his thesis statement and are true topic sentences, or the main ideas of his body paragraphs.

OUTCOME ESSAY:

Thesis Statement: *"Four years of English should be required at Drake Eddy High School because universities require it, english will not be the primary language as more people come to the U.S., and most students lack the grammar skills that english teaches you."*

Topic Sentences:

- *"Most students who go to college can tell you that college is not easy."*
- *"Where will people be in the next four years?"*
- *"Think back to the last essay you wrote."*

> These topic sentences do not correspond exactly to this student's three-part thesis statement. Also, these sentences can not possibly be the main ideas of his body paragraphs if he is going to prove his thesis statement, which he does. For his outcome essay, this student began using examples to begin his body paragraphs instead of topic sentences. He does use these examples to segue into the arguments of each paragraph.

Finally, Focus Student 3 did not improve on any elements on which the essays were graded. This student has never completed a large writing assignment and it is difficult for him to even write a few sentences in one half-hour. For the baseline essay, this student wrote one sentence that included his argument and was a three-part thesis statement. For the outcome essay, this student wrote two sentences. The first sentence was a three-part thesis statement, while the second sentence was a re-statement of his argument. This student received scores of three for both the argument and thesis

statement elements on both the baseline and outcome essays, but he received scores of

one for every other element because he only wrote those two elements in both essays.

One improvement that I did notice, however, was the length of this student's response.

For his baseline essay, this student wrote just over two lines, while for the outcome essay,

he wrote nine lines. His baseline and outcome essays are included below.

Figure 26—Focus Student 3's Baseline Essay

Figure 27—Focus Student 3's Outcome Essay

> Four years of english should not be required to graduate from _____ because most students might not get the material in a British literature or Contemporary literature class and might end up failing so they won't get to walk on stage with the rest of their class and will have to take summer school to get their diplomas. Only three years of english should be required to graduate from _____ with the optional fourth year for those that want it.

Outcome Attitude Data and Comparisons to Baseline Attitude Data

After examining the great improvements students made on the outcome

achievement essay, I was interested to see what students thought about their writing and

to see if students' views about their writing had improved. One issue that I had worried

about was the number of students who had not responded to the questions on the baseline

attitude survey. I wondered if just as many students would not respond to the questions

and I would not receive results as accurate to students' viewpoints as possible. To

address this potential problem, I gave students the survey questions on the essay prompt

that I gave to students. When they were finished writing their essay, students were to

complete the questions, instead of simply answering the questions on the lines following

their essay. This way, when students forgot to answer the questions and tried to turn in

their prompts I was able to remind students that they needed to answer the questions. I

noticed a significant improvement. No student left any answer blank. Because each

student responded to each question, I feel that my outcome attitude data is an accurate representation of students' actual feelings about their essays.

The survey that I gave to students had the four questions that I had given to students on the baseline attitude survey along with two other questions that I added to gauge students' perceptions of the intervention. Here are the questions I asked students:

1. Are you done responding to the prompt?

2. What do you think you did well on in regards to this essay?

3. How did you go about writing this essay? Was there anything that you did (or thought about) before you began writing that helped you write this essay?

4. What (if anything) did you struggle with in writing this essay?

5. Was there anything that we have done in class recently that you think may have helped you respond better to an in-class writing assignment?

6. Is there anything that we could have done in class that you think may have helped you respond better to an in-class writing assignment?

Of the 22 students who responded, 20 students, or 91 percent of the class, claimed that they were "done" with their essay. Only two students said that they were not done. One of these students simply did not have time to write his conclusion. This student, whose baseline and outcome essays are Figures 22 and 23, respectively, did not even separate his response into different paragraphs on his baseline essay, so I think that simply not finishing his conclusion still shows improvement. The other student who was not finished with his essay at the end of the 50-minute period was stopped in the middle of his second body paragraph. He was not in the class at the time the baseline essay was given to students, so I can not judge his progress.

The second question of the survey was "What do you think you did well in regards to this essay?" Forty-five percent of the class, or 10 students, specified a

paragraph on which they believed they had done well. Two students, or nine percent of the class, answered that they had done well on writing; another two students mentioned their ideas as a strength, and another two students believed their strength to be "proving their point well." One student claimed she had done nothing well, and five students wrote responses that could not be categorized. The chart below shows the results numerically and gives sample student responses for each category.

Table 38—Sample Student Responses to Question 1 of Outcome Attitude Survey

"What do you think you did well on in regards to this essay?"		
Nothing	**1 student (5% of class)**	Sample responses: • *"No I really don't think I did well."*
Stated a specific paragraph	**10 students (45% of class)**	Sample responses: • *"I believe my best paragraph is my introduction because it sounded the best."* • *"The second one is best because it was finished."* • *"My intro was probably best because it stayed on [topic]."*
Writing	**2 students (9% of class)**	Sample responses: • *"I think once I found the words appropriate for my essay I did ok."* • *"Writing."*
Proved point well	**2 students (9% of class)**	Sample responses: • *"I think that I got the point through to the reader better than my other essays."* • *"I think I proved my point."*
Ideas	**2 students (9% of class)**	Sample responses: • *"Counter arguments, I came up with some good ones."* • *"I think I had a lot of good ideas."*
Other	**5 students (23% of class)**	Sample responses: • *"I really fill like the subject touch my heart so I was passionate about it."* • *"I think I wrote more then I have all year."* • *"It was truthful."* • *"My thought process was well thought out."* • *"It was most descriptive."*

The greatest change I noticed in regards to this question compared to the responses for the baseline data was so many fewer students answered "nothing" to the question. Thirteen students, or 54 percent of the class, had responded "nothing" on the baseline survey. On the outcome survey, however, only one student said that they had not done well on any aspect of the writing assignment. Also, the four students on the

baseline survey who had written a response that was not "nothing," all claimed that they had good ideas. On the outcome survey, it was interesting to me that students listed so many other things that they had done well on. Ten students cited a particular paragraph that they believed to be their strength. Students also mentioned their writing, ideas, how well they proved their point, their thought process, and the length of their response to be their strengths. I think that this range of responses shows that students are beginning to really think about their writing. On the baseline survey, only four students wrote a real response to this question, and each of the four students wrote that they had trouble generating ideas, perhaps because it was the first issue that they thought of. Students' answers to this question on the outcome survey, however, really show that students thought about the question and their writing before responding to the question. Examining your own work critically is a major step towards improving as a writer, and I was excited to see my students take this step.

In answer to the second question— "How did you go about writing this essay? Was there anything that you did (or thought about) before you began writing that helped you write this essay?"—students had only three responses. As seen in the chart below, forty-one percent of the class, or nine students, said that they did not do anything before beginning to write; fifty percent of the class, or 11 students, simply said they "thought" before beginning to write; and only nine percent of the class, 2 students, said that they organized their thoughts into an outline.

Table 39—Sample Student Responses to Question 2 of Outcome Attitude Survey

"How did you go about writing this essay? Was there anything that you did (or thought about) before you began writing that helped you write this essay?"		
Nothing	**9 students (41 % of class)**	Sample responses: ▪ *"I just wrote. I just put down what came to mind."* ▪ *"I wrote it. I didn't do any pre-essay thinking."*
Thought about the question/ ideas	**11 students (50% of class)**	Sample responses: ▪ *"[I thought] about both sides of the argument."* ▪ *"I took some time thinking about my current year and built off of that."* ▪ *"I just thought of reason why we shouldn't have English and started writing."* ▪ *"Thought of reasons why not to drop it and wrote about them."* ▪ *"I thought about which side would be easier to back up."* ▪ *"I thought about how to write this essay and how to answer the question correctly."*
Created an outline	**2 students (9% of class)**	Sample responses: ▪ *"I wrote down main ideas (body P's) and worked from their."* ▪ *"I made a small outline to help organize my ideas."*

The first difference I noticed in students' responses to this question from the baseline to the outcome survey was that two fewer students responded that they did nothing before beginning to write. For the baseline essay, 11 students claimed that they did nothing, while for the outcome essay, nine students said that they did nothing. I find this hard to believe because 73 percent of these students received a score of three on their theses, meaning that they had a detailed and specific three-part thesis at the end of their introduction paragraph. Clearly these students had planned out their essay or at least thought about their response before beginning to write.

Also, there was a large increase in the number of students that thought a bit about the prompt or their ideas before beginning to write. For the baseline essay, only four students admitted to thinking about the prompt beforehand.   For the outcome essay, 11 students, one-half of the students who completed the essay, claimed that they had thought about the prompt or their ideas before beginning to write. I thought that this was a meaningful improvement because students can not be expected to produce their best work if they are not even thinking about the prompt or planning their response in any way.

Two students (nine percent of the class) declared that they had written an outline of their ideas before they had begun writing. Even though I would have liked to have seen more students planning out their ideas in advance of their writing, no students had attempted an outline on the baseline essay. All together, 59 percent of the class admitted to thinking about their response in advance or creating an outline. So these students were engaging in some form of prewriting before beginning to write. Lastly, no students mentioned that they had looked off of another student's paper as a way to get started writing as one student had admitted to doing in the baseline survey.

Next, students responded to the question "What (if anything) did you struggle with in writing this essay?" Two students (9 percent of the class) said that they did not struggle with any aspect of the essay. The remaining 20 students had a vast array of responses which are detailed in the chart below.

Table 40—Sample Student Responses to Question 3 of Outcome Attitude Survey

"What (if anything) did you struggle with in writing this essay?"		
Nothing	**2 students (9% of class)**	Sample responses: ▪ *"Nothing. I really didn't have a problem with anything."*
Coming up with ideas	**7 students (32% of class)**	Sample responses: ▪ *"Coming up with relevant examples."* ▪ *"Finding 3 things that would support my statements."* ▪ *"Finding reasons."*
The conclusion	**2 students (9% of class)**	Sample responses: ▪ *"I sort of ran out of steam."* ▪ *"I struggled with writing the end because I didn't want my essay to be short but I didn't know what else to say."*
Getting started	**2 students (9% of class)**	Sample responses: ▪ *"I struggled starting my essay."* ▪ *"Getting started."*
Writing	**4 students (18% of class)**	Sample responses: ▪ *"Trying to put thoughts into print, how to write what I thought."* ▪ *"I always struggle on writing the write words to express my opinion."*
Other	**5 students (23% of class)**	Sample responses: ▪ *"The thesis was the hardest, because I couldn't think of three that fast."* ▪ *"Having it timed and not knowing what we had to write about beforehand."* ▪ *"Making the choice of agreeing or disagreeing. I crumpled up my first paper. Tried writing negatively didn't work."* ▪ *"Not knowing where different body paragraphs come in."* ▪ *"Why I had to write on such a remeadiel topic."*

For the baseline survey, 11 students did not respond to the previous question, nine said "nothing," and four students stated that they struggled generating ideas. As is noticeable on the chart above, however, students were able to describe numerous aspects of this essay that they struggled with, which I believe shows that students are thinking more critically about their own writing and not simply stating the first idea that came to their mind.

On the outcome survey, 32 percent of the class, or seven students, said that they still struggled generating ideas. I think that this is a legitimate response because writing an essay in a timed setting is stressful for most people, especially students who believe that they are poor writers.

Two students (nine percent of the class) said that they struggled writing their conclusion. I found this interesting because the only elements of an essay that I did not address in my intervention were the elements found in a conclusion paragraph. I wonder if I had implemented activities to help students with their conclusions whether or not these students would have responded in the same way.

One student, who was quoted in the "other" section of the chart said that it was difficult for him to complete his thesis statement because he could not think of three reasons so quickly. I found his statement telling because it showed me that he knew that he needed to have a three-part thesis statement in his introduction. Even though he struggled to think of his third idea, he did write a specific three-part thesis statement. He told me later that he actually left a blank space in his thesis and wrote his first two body paragraphs before deciding on the third part of his thesis. On his survey, in answer to the first question asking what he thought he did well in regards to the essay, this student said

that his third body paragraph was the best part of his essay because "it's the most truthful and I think everyone would agree." I found it interesting that this student, who does not enjoy writing and was one of my most vehement complainers when it came to free writes, did not give up on his essay. He could have justified writing only two body paragraphs by claiming that he could not think of any ideas for a third, but he took the time to think of a third part for his thesis and wrote the additional paragraph. Also, the extra time he spent thinking about the paragraph paid off, as he believed it was the best part of his essay. Hopefully this student realizes that it is the most "truthful" part of his essay because he spent more time working out his ideas for the paragraph and it is an accurate depiction of his opinion.

The first three questions were exactly the same questions that I had asked students to respond to after writing their baseline essay. The following two questions only appeared on the outcome survey. The first new question is "Was there anything that we have done in class recently that you think may have helped you respond better to an in-class writing assignment?" I made this question a bit vague because I did not want to lead students into naming one of the activities that we completed for my intervention. I did want to ask students specifically which activity they found the most beneficial, but I also did not want to force them to choose between the activities if they found none of them helpful. I hoped that making this question open-ended would give me a more accurate indication of which activities students honestly believed helped them. The following chart documents students' responses.

Table 41—Sample Student Responses to Question 4 of Outcome Attitude Survey

"Was there anything that we have done in class recently that you think may have helped you respond better to an in-class writing assignment?"		
No	**7 students (32% of class)**	
I don't know	**2 students (9% of class)**	
Thesis Statement Activities	**5 students (23% of class)**	Sample responses: • *"Going over the thesis helped."* • *"Yes. When I had to practice writing thesis statements and things."* • *"Learning about separate parts like the three part thesis broke it down so it wasn't overwhelming."*
Essay Structure Activities	**4 students (18% of class)**	Sample responses: • *"The parts of an essay assignment were really helpful, they help me organize mine quicker."* • *"Working of essay structure."* • *"Yes, all of the writing assignments with the great gatsby."*
Concrete Detail Activities	**2 students (9% of class)**	Sample responses: • *"You helped me by teaching me about concrete details."* • *"The concrete detail helped a bit."*
Color-coding Activity	**1 student (4.5% of class)**	Sample responses: • *"I think doing that example essay helped me with my response."*
Vocabulary	**1 student (4.5% of class)**	

Seven students, or 32 percent of the class, said that nothing that we had done recently had helped them respond to the timed essay, and two students, or nine percent of the class, responded "I don't know." I honestly thought that these numbers would be higher. I did not really expect students to name the specific activities that I had implemented throughout the intervention. It is not that I did not believe the activities benefited students, I was simply skeptical that students would name the activities on the spot.

Needless to say, I was shocked when 54.5 percent of the class, 12 students, mentioned an activity from the intervention specifically. Five students mentioned the activities in which we had practiced thesis statements as being beneficial, four students mentioned activities dealing with essay structure, two students mentioned the activities dealing with concrete details, and one student said he benefited from the essay color-coding activity. I think that five students referred to thesis statement activities because all but one of the essay element activities involved the use of thesis statements (the symbol activity only required a topic sentence). Also, I was pleased that this method of breaking down the essay into its parts helped students to see the parts of the essay and did not confuse them. Originally, I had wondered if these types of activities would serve to confuse students more or if it might help them because they could look at each part of the essay separately and not have to deal with the entire essay at once.

Perhaps one reason why only one student mentioned the color-coding activity was because we only did the activity once. I also realized that no students mentioned anything about commentary for which we also only completed one activity. Perhaps the dearth of activities dealing with commentary also explains why only three students

received a score of three on their commentary on the outcome essay and why no students improved two points from their baseline to outcome essay.

The next question that I added to the outcome survey was "Is there anything that we could have done in class that you think may have helped you respond better to an in-class writing prompt?" I added this question because I wanted to see that if students had thought the activities we had done were beneficial, were there other similar activities that they think they would benefit from as well. Also, students in this class have responded positively when I have asked for their feedback and then I changed my curriculum plans based on their responses. I wanted to give students another opportunity for this exchange to take place. Students' responses are shown below.

Table 42—Sample Student Responses to Question 5 of Outcome Attitude Survey

"Is there anything that we could have done in class that you think may have helped you respond better to an in-class writing prompt?"		
No	**9 students (41% of class)**	
I don't know	**6 students (27% of class)**	
Other	**7 students (32% of class)**	Sample responses: ▪ *"What we've been doing has helped. Maybe more of it?"* ▪ *"Talked about the prompt first."* ▪ *"Alloted 10 more mins."* ▪ *"Working on essays that do not have to do with books."* ▪ *"Keep doing what we are doing now."* ▪ *"Yeah, not do it."*

I was somewhat disappointed by students' responses to this question. Forty-one percent of the class simply said "no," and another 27 percent said "I don't know." Only 32 percent of the class actually had suggestions and most of these suggestions were not legitimate. Two students suggested that we continue with the types of activities that we have been doing, one suggested being given more time, and my personal favorite was the suggestion to just stop doing such writing activities altogether. One suggestion that I did find interesting was that we should focus on writing that did not have to do with students' reading. Actually, the only time when students are asked to write full-process essays is when they are responding to literature, so if there are students who enjoy writing but not reading, writing literary response becomes a burdensome task as well. I think that it would be interesting to focus students' writing on topics besides literature. Perhaps students would not dread writing assignments so much if they did not always have to write about literature. Also, the same concepts could be taught and students could still be held to the same requirements.

Discussion

Conclusions

So, how does all the data presented above inform my research question? Did practice and instruction in prewriting and organization-based activities help students write more organized and thoughtful essays? Overall, the results of my study were resoundingly positive. The question at the center of my study is **What effects do teaching students different prewriting strategies (free writing and clustering) and giving students practice in organizing (activities that focus on the differences between essay elements and color coding) have on students' organization and**

development in their writing in a timed, in-class setting? The first part of the question, how prewriting strategies affect students' development of their essays, is partially answered by students' scores on their concrete details and commentary because students develop their ideas through the use of concrete details. With commentary, students further relate their concrete details to their argument which further develops their ideas. Ninety-six percent of students received a score of two or three on their use of concrete details on their outcome essay. Fifty-three percent of students boosted their score by one point or more on the outcome essay. In regards to commentary, 86 percent of students received a score of two or higher on their outcome essays and 74 percent of students received a higher score on their outcome essay than they had received on their baseline essay. Unfortunately, there is no evidence of a direct correlation between students' improved scores on these two essay elements and the use of prewriting techniques. I do believe that the prewriting and clustering activities provided students with different ways to generate ideas, but I can not prove that this alone accounts for the improvement in students' scores. Also, because we spent so much time working on essay structure and examining the different elements of an essay, these activities could account for the increased scores. Possibly, as one student wrote on his survey, students were confused about what concrete details actually were, and since learning their function in an essay through the essay element activities, they were able to improve upon their baseline essay scores. Thus, it really is not possible to pinpoint the prewriting activities or the organizational activities as the cause for students' improvement.

　　　　While it is not possible to determine which activities helped students in regards to their use of concrete details and commentary, the link between the other essay elements

and the organizational activities that students participated in is clearer. The organizational activities, such as the essay element activities and color-coding, were the only activities in the intervention that could have helped students to improve upon the other rubric elements, and students showed great improvement in all of those remaining elements. I think that looking at each part of an essay helped students grasp the concepts individually and then it was easier for students to synthesize the individual essay parts into an essay than if students had to look at the essay as a whole.

It is possible that the intervention had very little effect on students' progress in on-demand essay writing. Students simply could have been feeling poorly the day that they wrote the baseline essay, or they may not have taken the baseline essay as seriously as they did the outcome essay. Also, I noticed that students' engagement with the assignment differed according to the essay topic. Students were not very interested in writing about the driving age because most of them already had their driver's licenses or were getting them so soon that they would not be affected by any law changes. Thus I heard numerous complaints about this essay topic because of students' disinterest. When I read the prompt concerning students' fourth year of English, however, students immediately expressed interest in the topic. The essay prompt for the outcome essay interested students because it is something that will affect them greatly next year. Also, I prefaced the prompt by telling students that it was a subject that was currently being discussed by the school's English Department, and students may have been affected by the immediacy and relevancy of the topic to their future lives. Because students' interest was higher in the topic for the outcome essay, it is feasible that many students may have

put forth increased effort on the outcome essay that they did not show on the baseline essay.

Even though students may have identified more with the topic of the outcome essay than with the topic for the baseline essay, I do not think that this can fully explain the dramatic improvement that students' showed. It may have piqued students' interest and made them try harder, but this alone can not explain all of the results. For example, Focus Student 6 showed improvement in his use of concrete details (discussed in detail earlier) and began experimenting with different types of concrete details in his writing. This change in his use of concrete details can not at all be explained by his interest in the prompt. This student's improvement is clearly a result of one or more of the organizational activities implemented throughout the intervention.

The first subquestion that I hoped to answer in my research was **To what extent will focusing on students' writing help improve students' attitude about writing in general and their perception of their own writing?** I do not believe that the data that I collected from students can completely answer this subquestion. The questions on the outcome attitude survey that students completed did not specifically ask students about their attitude in regards to writing in general. The survey did ask, however, how students felt about the writing that they had just completed (i.e., the outcome essay). All but one student in the class was able to pinpoint one aspect of their essay on which they believed they had done well. For the baseline essay only eight students mentioned something they believed they had done well in regards to the essay. Also, five of those eight students answered the question in a vague way, saying only that they had done well in "writing" their essay. Only two students responded to this question in that way on the outcome

attitude survey. I believe that the changes in response to this question indicate that students are beginning to recognize what they are doing well in regards to their writing and are moving towards describing their writing strengths specifically and away from describing their strengths in generalities. Ten students on the outcome attitude survey mentioned a specific paragraph from their essay as their strength. This focus suggests that students are beginning to evaluate their writing on their own and are making judgments about their own strengths and weaknesses. Also, because all but one student mentioned a strength of their essay, students' perception of their own writing is improving as well. Students are no longer discussing only the weaknesses of their writing, but are beginning to recognize their strengths as well. This change will help students to have a more balanced and accurate view of themselves as writers.

Finally, the second and final subquestion that I sought to answer in my research was **To what extent will students use the prewriting and organizational strategies they learned when responding to an on-demand writing prompt?** While I was both pleased and surprised by the answers I received to my previous research questions, I was at first discouraged at the results to this part of my study as only two students implemented the prewriting strategies that were an integral part of my research and intervention. Actually, those two students wrote an outline for their essay, which was not a part of my intervention even though it is closely related to clustering. I later realized, however, that the subquestion asks whether students used the prewriting and organizational strategies that were the focus of the intervention when writing their essays. I have decided that answering this second component of the question is more difficult as students might have responded that they organized their thoughts in a cluster before

beginning to write, but it is highly unlikely that they could have given a name to any of the organizational activities that we completed. I never referred to the organizational activities that we completed in class as "essay element activities," so students would not have a specific name with which to refer to these activities. I believe that students did have to use the information that they learned about organizing the essay elements in order to write a complete essay that properly included all of the needed elements and in order to improve upon their previous essay's scores.

Finally, even though this does not directly answer the question, seven more students claimed that they "thought" about the question before responding to it than they had when writing the baseline essay. I believe that by "thinking" about the prompt, students were actually engaged in gathering their thoughts, evaluating their arguments, and deciding exactly what to write. In this way, students were actually completing some aspects of the prewriting that we had covered in class. They were "free thinking" by thinking of ideas to write about even though they may not have written them down. Also, students did organize their thoughts, as 73 percent of the class had a detailed three-part thesis statement at the end of their introduction paragraph. From this success with the three-part thesis, one can infer that students had done some clustering in their heads because these students had to determine their three main points and some evidence to support their points. Thus, even though students did not mention that they had used the prewriting or organizational strategies that we had covered in class, I do believe that students did use some of them, or were at least influenced by them, while they were writing their outcome essays.

Supporting English Language Learners and a Diversity of Students

Even though there were no English Language Learners in my focus class, the intervention that I implemented would have supported these students in ways similar to how it supported my students in the school's Special Education Program. First, the activities that were completed by students as part of the intervention broke down the writing process step by step. Students were first taught how to generate ideas through free writing, how to organize their ideas through clustering, and then how to create each element of an essay through various activities. This method of emphasizing only one part of the writing process, or focusing only on one or two elements of an essay, helped students who have trouble organizing their writing. Specifically, Focus Student 3 has an IEP for such a disability, and even though he did not complete an essay for either the baseline or outcome data collections, he did write significantly more for the outcome essay than he had written for the baseline essay. Also, breaking the essay into its parts probably helped other students who have trouble focusing on an essay as a whole, such as Focus Student 4, who has OCD and has trouble concentrating on long assignments. Finally, this method probably helped all students to fully focus their attention on each essay element as it was discussed in class. Instead of completing an assignment that dealt with all parts of the essay, this intervention was designed to focus on only two or three essay elements in one lesson. Also, even though two or three elements were being discussed or worked with in the class period, students were already familiar with the majority of the elements being used. In other words, I tried to introduce only one new element per lesson. For example, when students completed the symbol activity that introduced them to commentary, students also had to create a topic sentence and a

concrete detail. Students had worked with topic sentences multiple times before this activity, and the previous activity had focused on concrete details. In this way, students were only being introduced to the concept of commentary. This scaffolding of new information worked well because students did not have to synthesize an abundance of information in each class period. I spread out the information and gave students several chances to work with each element before collecting the outcome data.

For students who have difficulty writing, which is many students in my class, I always made sure to check in on each student or group while they were completing assignments throughout the intervention. In this way, I could focus my attention on students who were struggling more than others and give them extra support. Closely monitoring students also enabled me to see how each student was responding to and comprehending the material. Students who fully understood the material could then be placed in a group with students who were still struggling to grasp the material and could be helped in this way as well.

This intervention was also beneficial for students who are visual learners, such as the student whose survey was discussed earlier (see the Purpose and Rationale section). First, students were shown a new way of organizing their ideas into a format conducive to essay writing. Most students in the class were already familiar with the outline format, which typically is more useful to students who are linguistic. Visual learners, however, did not have a way of organizing their thoughts in a way that appealed to them as learners. That is, until I introduced students to clustering. Clustering provided students with yet another way to see how their ideas can be connected and interconnected to one another. Clustering also has a less rigid structure than other organizational formats, such

as outlining, which could eventually encourage students to manipulate the structure of their essay based on their ideas instead of simply trying to complete the three body paragraph outline.

Additionally, this intervention targeted students with various educational needs because each lesson was scaffolded carefully to ensure that students could later complete the activities on their own. For example, before having students complete the essay element activities on their own, we always created a model for students to follow together as a class. Specifically, when students completed the activity in which they were given several topics and had to create a thesis statement, topic sentence, and concrete detail, as a class we created the three essay elements on the topic of the New England Patriots. After the class completed the sample, it was left on the overhead for students to refer back to while continuing to create their essay elements for the other topics. This model helped students who were unsure of how to continue, or who were unable to remember how each element was related to the others. Students were able simply to refer to the overhead projector for reminders.

Finally, in order to ensure that I addressed the needs of all of my students, I tried to choose a great range of focus students. I decided that if I looked closely at students who had learning needs for which they needed my additional help and support, I would create a better intervention that best met the needs of all of my students. I was forced to focus on their learning needs because they were my focus students and I also understand their strengths and weaknesses more fully after analyzing their work in such depth.

Family-School Connection

After completing all phases of my intervention, collecting the outcome essay and attitude survey, and analyzing both the essays and surveys in great detail, I was ready to share my results with my students. When I first sat down and spread out the baseline and outcome essays in front of me, I was absolutely overwhelmed; it seemed like a formidable and infinite task. But after beginning to score students outcome essays on the same rubric that I used to score their baseline essays, I could already see the improvements that students were making and I wanted to share with them their progress. Indeed, I have regularly given my students updates on the progress of my research, often at their request. Several times I had told students that I had been awed at their progress and that it had been exciting for me to look back at many students' baseline essays and compare them to their more fully developed and organized counterparts (i.e., the students' outcome essays). Students were always interested in these discussions, but I was not satisfied. I really wanted students to be able to see their progress and to be as proud of themselves as I was.

Soon I realized that possibly students would only begin to realize the strides that they had made in such a short period of time if they were able to see the color-coded rubrics that I had kept for each of them. I decided to present my findings to students and give them back their baseline essays and outcome essays. Attached to the essays would be the rubric that I had used to score the essays. Students could see the score they received on the baseline essay (circled in purple highlighter) and compare it to the score they received on the outcome essay (circle in green highlighter). This visual would surely help students to see the progress they had made. For several students who had

made exceptional progress throughout the intervention, I attached notes expressing why I was impressed by their work. I encouraged students to take their essays and rubrics home and show them to their parents or family members. It is not often that students can present to their parents concrete examples of how they have improved in a certain area of a subject. Even letter grades do not often mark a students' progress in particular areas as they are the summary of an entire class's work. I hoped that this would also encourage conversation between students and their family members about their work in our class and would make them feel proud of all that they had accomplished. I wanted to recognize students for their hard work, but I also wanted to ensure that parents were given the opportunity to see the effort and improvement that students had made in my class.

Implications for Teaching

After reviewing my findings from the research study and looking over my entire project, I am taking several lessons away from this experience that will impact my future teaching. First, I have seen how beneficial it can be both for individual students and for a class as a whole when students are involved in their own learning and when their input is valued. I do not believe that my intervention would have been nearly so successful if I had not involved students in deciding our topic from the very beginning of my research. At the beginning of the year, I had several discipline issues in the class and every day was a constant struggle to keep students quiet, on-task, and attentive for even a few minutes at a time. The very first time that all of the students listened assiduously to what I was saying was when I was telling them the topic I had chosen for my research: them. Later, when I told the class that I had changed my emphasis from discussion to writing based on

their comments on a survey they had taken, students showed surprise and skepticism. Whenever I would discuss the process of writing with the class, students seemed to listen attentively. I think that students appreciated that I had changed the focus of my research based on their feedback and were somewhat interested in the intervention because of it. I also think that this has led to some students showing greater respect for me as their teacher and more interest in writing activities because they feel that I am doing these activities especially for them. I have continued to ask students for their feedback at the end of each instructional unit and after we try new activities or projects. I believe that this has created somewhat of a community in my classroom where students believe that their opinions are valued and are important. After seeing the change that this can bring about in a difficult classroom, I will continue to ask for students' feedback regularly and often.

Another aspect of my intervention that will benefit my future teaching regards encouraging students to work successfully in groups. I always struggled to keep this class working on-task while working in small groups. Students usually became distracted very easily and got little, if anything, accomplished. After seeing how well it has worked to institute some friendly competitions, however, I am no longer as apprehensive when I put students into groups. Competition encourages students to work cooperatively with their group members, to stay on-task, and to complete the assignment to the best of their ability. From now on, whenever I have tried unsuccessfully to have students work in groups, I will try to create a competition out of the activity that promotes working cooperatively on the assignment. I believe that this approach worked so well in my focus class because many of the male students in the class are highly competitive, but it might

be a nice change from the norm in other classes as well if group activities were turned into games.

One thing that I will take away from my research, and that I will probably implement in every class that I teach from now on, is the use of teaching essay elements separately when teaching students about essay structure, instead of trying to teach students the entire structure of an essay at once. Previously I wondered if this strategy would only serve to confuse students as to how the elements of an essay fit together to form a cohesive whole. After completing my research, however, I have found that such confusion is not at all the case. Separating an essay, or any complex concept, into its essential parts gives students a chance to examine each part individually and learn what differentiates one part from another. For the ninth-grade English classes that I have taught this year, I have gone about teaching them the concept of an essay as one large whole, and I wonder if they have any understanding of the individual parts from which an essay is made. I will definitely be using similar activities with those classes even this year to teach them the individual parts of an essay and how they can be joined together to create a cohesive essay.

While the previous implications for future teaching concern my teaching in general, I have also discovered implications for my continued teaching of the students in my focus class. After seeing students improve in every category for which I examined their essays, I am interested in continuing to improve students' abilities to create detailed and original commentary. This is the category in which students' scores lagged behind the others. Even though students showed improvement by attempting to add commentary to their essays, I would like to continue students' progress in this area. Commentary is

one aspect of students' essays that can be personally insightful and in which students' ideas can stand out from others. I would like to continue working on commentary with my students so that they feel confident in their abilities to write commentary. I will use activities that focus solely on creating meaningful commentary, so that students do not become burdened when writing an essay. Later, when they have improved upon their commentary, hopefully their skills will translate to their essays as their other skills transferred to their in-class outcome essays.

Reflections

Looking back on my experiences as a first-year teacher and a new teacher researcher, I am still surprised that I was able to teach and complete the program simultaneously. There were so many times when I worried that I would drop out of the program because it would become too difficult to juggle both responsibilities and succeed at both. I have realized, however, that being a good teacher includes being a teacher researcher and that I can not be a successful teacher without analyzing my students, whether it be analyzing them as individuals to determine what will increase their engagement in my class or analyzing their work to determine what support I can provide them to increase their learning and achievement. I am confident that completing the program has helped me to become a better teacher who is more attuned to my students' needs and who is confident in researching ways in which to help my students and who is comfortable enough to implement new strategies that might benefit my students.

I am most proud of my accomplishments because I chose areas which I felt were not my strengths in which to complete my research. First, I chose my most difficult class to teach as my focus class. I wanted to focus on this class because it was unique in so

many ways, but there were many times throughout my intervention when I doubted the practicality of my decision. I worried whether or not the success of my project depended on their behavior for the day. Also, sometimes it would have been easy to forget about this class because of their behavior and to focus on another one of my classes instead. Now, after completing my research study, though, I am more confident in my abilities because I was able to complete my research, and it was a success, in such an originally challenging environment.

My research study has also been a rewarding experience because I chose an area of English Language Arts in which I feel least confident in my teaching abilities: writing. Even though I wanted to improve upon my abilities as a teacher of writing, I was not sure that I wanted it to be the focus of my study. Actually, when I received the survey from my students from which I concluded that it would be most beneficial for my students for me to focus on writing, I was very disappointed. I had completed a smaller-scale research project the previous year in writing, and I was really looking forward to changing my focus to discussion. I was mostly nervous about creating innovative strategies to teach students aspects of writing; I had absolutely no ideas, and I certainly had no creative ideas. Thus, I was forced to research for ideas and to rely on fellow teachers' ideas as well. Actually, some of the activities that I enjoyed the most were ones that I based off an activity that I had observed a fellow teacher at my school implementing with her class. So, focusing on an aspect that I felt inexperienced with helped me to realize that I can improve upon my teaching and be a successful teacher in an area that I am not yet experienced with. This research study has helped me to have

greater confidence in my teaching abilities and has made me feel more like a professional

educator.

References

De La Paz, S., & Graham, S. (1997). Strategy instruction in planning: Effects on the writing performance and behavior of students with learning difficulties. *Exceptional Children*, 63 (2), 167-181.

Elbow, P. (1981). *Writing with power: Techniques for mastering the writing process.* New York, NY: Oxford University Press.

Flower, L., & Hayes, J. R. (1988). The cognition of discovery: Defining a rhetorical problem. In G. Tate, & E.P.J. Gorbett (Eds.), *The writing teacher's sourcebook* (pp. 92-102). New York, NY: Oxford University Press.

Munson, M. (1988). Beginning and ending. In S. Stang, & R. Wiltenburg (Eds.), *Collective wisdom: A sourcebook of lessons for writing teachers* (pp. 282-285). New York, NY: Random House.

Rico, G. L. (1997). Clustering: A prewriting process. In Olson, C. B. (Ed.). *Practical ideas for teaching writing as a process at the high school and college levels*. Sacramento, CA: California Department of Education.

Walsh, K. A. (2008). *Preparing more versatile writers: Instructing writing through different writing genres*. Unpublished master's thesis, University of California, Davis.

Zemelman, S., & Daniels, H. (1988). *A community of writers: Teaching writing in the junior and senior high school.* Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.

Appendix A: Annotated Bibliography of Research Literature

I. Zemelman, S., & Daniels, H. (1988). *A community of writers: Teaching writing in the junior and senior high school.* Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.

Summary: I have looked specifically at one chapter in this book entitled "Prewriting." This chapter details several prewriting strategies to implement with students. First, the authors discuss three prewriting processes that students engage in by themselves: free writing, visualizing, and clustering. They also discuss processes that students can use in groups, such as brainstorming, problem solving, and concept mapping. They explain each of these strategies, as well as others, in detail with examples.

Critique and Application: I have found this chapter extremely helpful in designing my intervention. First, I have decided to use two of their strategies exactly in the way they describe them: free writing and clustering. I think that for my students, who need help generating ideas and organizing their thoughts, these two strategies will be very helpful. Free writing will help students to create many different ideas in a short amount of time, while clustering will give students another way to look at their information. Clustering will help them organize their information logically, and it may even help them think of new ideas. Zemelman and Daniels also discuss the merits of having students brainstorm together and work in groups to problem solve. By brainstorming with other students, students will have a wealth of ideas to choose from before they begin writing. They also claim that by working in groups, students are able to participate more than in a whole class setting, and they must take more responsibility for what they are doing because the teacher can not help them at all times (p. 141). I will be using this strategy when students participate in the essay-element activity. I plan to have students work only in pairs so that each student really must participate; even in a small group some[i] students can get

away with not participating. Also, I want students to be in pairs for this activity because it will force them to explain their decision-making process to another person. Perhaps, while explaining their choice, students will either come to a better understanding of the element, or will realize that their choice was incorrect and they will be able to correct it themselves. Finally, the authors also mention how working in small groups fosters competition (p. 142). I think that this will be especially true in my class and might even encourage students who would not normally participate to do so in order to "win" the game.

II. Rico, G. L. (1997). Clustering: A prewriting process. In Olson, C. B. (Ed.). *Practical ideas for teaching writing as a process at the high school and college levels*. Sacramento, California: California Department of Education.

Summary: In this article, Rico summarizes what clustering is, how to teach students to use clustering, and the effects of clustering on students' writing. She describes clustering as "a nonlinear brainstorming process that generates ideas, images, and feelings around a stimulus word until a pattern becomes discernable" (p. 14). One student who used the clustering method commented that "when we cluster on paper, we can visually look at our ideas and choose which ones we want to use. The thoughts in our mind are all piled together, and we see only one or two at a time. On paper, through clustering, we can see all our thoughts as a whole" (p. 15). In other words, students may feel overwhelmed by the amount of thoughts bouncing around in their heads. Clustering gives students a method by which to record their thoughts and ideas and later evaluate them. Finally, Rico argues that clustering has multiple effects on students' writing, claiming that "clustering actually generates structure, shaping one thought into a starburst of other thoughts, each somehow related to the whole. That is why clustering so often results in

writing that is naturally marked by increased coherence, increased fluency, increased concrete support, and an increased sense of how to expand ideas" (p. 16). In effect, through clustering, students' ideas become more detailed and organized.

Critique and Application: While Rico mainly describes clustering as a brainstorming tool that can increase students' organization, I am hoping to use the technique mainly for organizational purposes. I do think that as students organize their ideas into the cluster format they might generate more ideas about the topic, but I want students to use this to see how their ideas are related. As with the student mentioned above, I think this technique will provide my students with a method for looking at their ideas in an organized manner so that they do not become overwhelmed with their ideas. Also, Rico claimed that students continue to add ideas to their cluster until a "pattern becomes discernable." This implies that when students cluster, the structure of the strategy does most of the work for students, and the organization of their ideas becomes clearer. Hopefully, this visual strategy will help my students as well.

III. Flower, L., & Hayes, J. R. (1988). The cognition of discovery: Defining a rhetorical problem. In G. Tate and E. P. J. Corbett (Eds.). *The writing teacher's sourcebook* (2nd ed) (pp. 92-102). New York: Oxford University Press.

Summary: This article discusses the processes that good writers use and how good writers differ from poor writers when approaching a writing task. The authors claim that "writers don't find meanings, they make them" (p. 92), and that "even though a teacher gives 20 students the same assignment, the writers themselves create the problems that they solve" (p. 93). Thus, writers must create their own question from a writing prompt and respond to that question, not the prompt. The authors found that an "expert writer simply [spent] more time than the novice in thinking about and commenting on the

rhetorical problem, as opposed to spending that time generating text" (p. 100). Thus, the experienced writer spent more time generating ideas, while the inexperienced writer spent more time writing statements about the topic.

Critique and Application: This article applies to my research because my students spent very little time, if any, thinking about the prompt, coming up with ideas, and deciding which ideas were valid. They simply began writing. I think that many of my students did not want to waste time by coming up with ideas, thinking that they would be better off simply filling their pages with whatever idea popped into their heads at the moment. Because students feel this way, I will need to spend time convincing them that prewriting is a worthwhile and necessary step that must be included in their writing processes. Also, I think by spending so much time on prewriting techniques in class, it might become a habit for them and they might internalize the process.

IV. De La Paz, S., & Graham, S. (1997). Strategy instruction in planning: Effects on the writing performance and behavior of students with learning difficulties. *Exceptional Children*, 63 (2), 167-181.

Summary: This article discusses the ways in which students who have learning disabilities or who struggle with writing approach writing tasks. Students with disabilities, as well as students who are inexperienced writers, often do not evaluate what they write, but simply write what comes into their head and move on. De La Paz and Graham (1997) also claim that "these students convert writing tasks into telling what they know about the topic, retrieving any relevant information from memory, and writing it down" (p. 168). Instead of analyzing the information or creating an argument to support their view, these students write what they know about the topic. These researchers found that after implementing a writing strategy with students that required them to generate

more ideas about the topic before writing and to evaluate their ideas as they continued

writing, students' papers "became longer, [the] number of reasons supporting the premise

increased, ideas counter to the premise were addressed, text was coherently ordered, and

overall quality improved" (p. 178).   Not only did students' writing improve in the data

collected immediately after the treatment, but students were also able to maintain the

strategies that they learned and continue to use them when writing.

Critique and Application: Although this study was conducted with fifth grade

students who have learning disabilities, the main aspects of the study apply to my

intervention. First, I have five students with learning disabilities, and many other of my

students exhibit writing behaviors that the authors of the study claim that students with

limited writing experience typically exhibit, so I think that my intervention will be

helpful for all of my students, not just the five with learning disabilities. The study

centered on giving students strategies with which to approach a writing assignment, so

that students' examples and ideas would be more detailed and so that students would

structure an argument instead of just writing what they know about the subject, in effect,

summarizing. The focus of this study is very similar to my intervention. I want my

students to have methods that they can employ on their own to help them generate more

ideas, and I also want my students to be able to organize their essays on their own.

Another aspect of the study that I found interesting was that the researchers did not focus

on helping students improve their organization, but the strategy ended up benefiting that

area of their writing anyway. I am now wondering if my intervention will have

additional benefits to students' writing as well.