

English Education Mentoring

Training ESOL Instructors and Tutors for Online Conferencing

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Introduction

Individualized conferencing, a situation where instructors and tutors work individually with students, is one traditional way in which students whose first language is not English (ESOL) can receive help as they learn and practice their English speaking and writing skills. With face-to-face conferencing, for instance, ESOL students experience the individualized attention that they need given their varying educational, cultural, and language learning backgrounds. To some degree, as professional discussions have demonstrated, instructors and tutors need different skills and attitudes when assisting ESOL students from those they use with native speakers of English. For example, Judith Powers, in a much cited and often reprinted article, explains that because an instructor/tutor and ESOL student may not have a shared background or experiences in writing English, collaborative strategies that many have found successful with native speaking students do not always work (97).[1] Indeed, ESOL writers tend to be working with unfamiliar language, audience, and written genres and forms. Therefore, Powers suggests such “differences in the educational, rhetorical, and cultural contexts” of ESOL writers make the collaborative stance common to contemporary tutoring and teaching practices less useful than the role of “informant” who provides “direct” help (98–99). She notes that her own writing center staff required an “attitude adjustment” on the part of the tutors in that “ESL writers bring different contexts to conferences than native speakers do, that they are, therefore, likely to need different kinds of assistance from us, and that successful assistance to ESL writers may involve more intervention in their writing processes than we consider appropriate with native-speaking writers” (100–101).

Powers’ thinking seems to have resonated with writing and writing center professionals, who subsequently have debated the nature of “intervention” when it comes to assisting ESOL students. For example, Susan R. Blau, John Hall, and Tracy Strauss employ linguistic analysis of an ESOL student’s tutorial session to discuss “three recurring rhetorical strategies that led to insights about the nature of the tutor/client relationship” (22): questions, echoing, and qualifiers. They argue for intervention in the form of directive teaching when it clearly is necessary or when the tutor clearly knows the “answer” to a problem. In such a case, the authors think, indirection wastes “already too-short time they had to spend with their clients” (38). On the other hand, Jane Cogie, Kim Strain, and Sharon Lorinskas argue that the role of cultural informant to ESOL

writers, as outlined by Powers, could lead tutors—such as their own staff—“to feel that too often this role, at least when sentence-level errors were concerned, tended to translate into the tutor editing and the student observing” (7). To address such concerns, the authors added to their tutors’ repertoire these strategies: use of a learner’s dictionary, minimal marking, error logs, and self-editing checklist—all of which were intended to promote self-editing practices (9).[2]

As these discussions of traditional face-to-face ESOL conferencing suggest, no approach to individual instruction is without its supporters and critics, a situation that seems crucial to developing critical theory and practice. Similarly, ESOL conferencing that occurs in online settings through either asynchronous or synchronous modalities shares this requirement for critical discernment. Indeed, critical discernment seems particularly important in regard to whether the differences that apply to assisting ESOL students in traditional face-to-face settings require additional adjustments in instructional practice when the conference moves to online settings.

Online instruction often has been called a hybrid form of communication, somewhere between talking and text (see, for example, Faigley; Kimball “Cybertext”), and thus familiar on some level to any instructor who has engaged in both spoken instruction and written commentary or other communication.[3] Yet, according to Beth L. Hewett and Christa Ehmann:

. . . few straightforward transitions exist between traditional (face-to-face) and online contexts because, we believe, there is something fundamentally different about teaching and learning in the virtual medium. Even our most seasoned face-to-face instructors found themselves needing to develop new repertoires of strategies and skills—among these becoming familiar with the technological media, navigating text-based modes of communication, learning asynchronous and synchronous modalities, establishing rapport in a virtual medium, and translating primarily oral teaching strategies into a text-based environment. But these repertoires did not come easily to our instructors. (xiii)

In “Cybertext/Cyberspeech: Writing Centers and Online Magic,” Sara Kimball appears to agree, explaining that there are essential differences between teaching online and simply writing to a student: “In working online, we are not, however, simply talking in text. Instead, we are working in a medium that people perceive and react to both as text and as conversation” (31). Although her general purpose may be to improve what professionals know about face-to-face instructional interactions, Kimball writes: “We should try to understand the nature of online exchanges, respecting and interrogating the medium in which we work, trying not to be distracted by unexamined assumptions we bring from our experiences as speakers or writers, trying, instead, to learn from them” (45). At a minimum, online program directors must address likely concerns regarding whether their staff (and, by extension, their students/tutees) can achieve the atmosphere that makes them effective and comfortable in a traditional instructional setting without eye contact and actual voices.

Relatively little has been written about ESOL conferencing when the instruction occurs online. A few examples from tutor-specific literature help to demonstrate this gap. For example, in James A. Inman’s and Donna N. Sewell’s *Taking Flight with OWLs: Examining Electronic Writing Center Work*, Andy Curtis and Tim Roskams offer the only discussion pertinent to ESOL tutoring online. They report on an affective study they conducted in Hong Kong regarding a combined writing center/networked writing lab. The students involved expressed varying levels of satisfaction, disappointment, and “demotivation” from the peer feedback they received and the sometimes overwhelming

amount of information they received in the synchronous modality (39). The authors find that both tutors and peer respondents could benefit from training and preparation when working with ESOL students in online settings—a situation that we think also includes instructors who conference online—and they position their study as one that begins to address “a significant gap in scholarship about electronic writing center work” (29, 39). Eric Hobson’s (Ed.) *Wiring the Writing Center*, while certainly an important look at the state of online writing centers in 1998, is a good example of how online ESOL tutoring practices have been underrepresented. Generally, the subject is addressed by a few words in a chapter, hinting at ESOL strategies rather than illuminating them; for example, Barbara Monroe suggests that tutors may naturally treat ESOL students with somewhat “more deference and less humor” (18). Kimball (“WAC”) simply points out that ESOL students are addressed on her writing center’s website as among other “special needs” students (67), while Neal Lerner (127, 135) and Ellen Mohr (156–57) briefly consider how skill-specific software might have some benefit for ESOL students.

In *The Allyn and Bacon Guide to Peer Tutoring*, a tutoring guide that is focused on helping tutors to develop overall skills, Paula Gillespie and Lerner address online and ESOL tutoring in separate chapters. They provide some helpful suggestions that debunk common misconceptions about working with ESOL students, as well as a brief, “early thinking” chapter regarding online tutoring that engages the strengths of “best practices” of face-to-face tutoring in the online setting. But, in what seems to be a pattern common both to professional literature and training manuals, there is no mutual discussion of online ESOL tutoring that more specifically might help those who conference with ESOL students through online technology. Similarly, in Ben Rafoth’s *A Tutor’s Guide: Helping Writers One to One*, there are two separate articles regarding online (Cooper, Bui, and Riker) and ESOL tutoring (Ritter). Although Jennifer J. Ritter does address online tutoring of ESOL students briefly by advising tutors to write questions that reveal their (mis)understanding of the text and models for correcting the language problems (107–108), she somewhat reflexively points readers back to George Cooper, Kara Bui, and Linda Riker’s chapter for more assistance. Even a recent text developed to assist ESOL tutors, Shanti Bruce and Ben Rafoth’s *ESL Writers: A Guide for Writing Center Tutors*, has only one chapter relevant to online issues (Rafoth), which focuses only on asynchronous essay tutoring. Rafoth considers how tutors read the student papers (whether as assimilationist, accommodationist, or separatist) in his writing center, and he interviews participants to determine advice for improving their practices.

There also exist some useful discussions that are largely centered on technology-based instruction with language teachers, who may also “tutor” if not in the traditional sense of the word at least in the one-to-one conferencing sense of it. For example, Aaron Doering and Richard Beach discuss how pre-service ESOL teachers can more deeply experience practice online instruction with available technology tools in ways that might help their students (e.g., developing intertextual connection skills, “links” through hypermedia and collaborative issue exploration, and multiple voices/perspectives). Similarly, in a research study of technology-based language choices, Carla Meskill, Jonathan Mossop, Stephen DiAngelo, and Rosalie K. Pasquale find that training language teachers online can help them to overcome novice tendencies to non-reflexively appropriate technology in their practices by helping them to conceptualize their practice beyond mere mastery of the routines and language of new instructional contexts. More such discussions would be helpful to writing professionals as they broaden the focus from writing center tutorials to other conference-based and group-based ESOL instructional settings.

As this brief literature review suggests, the subject of training educators to work with ESOL students in online settings has been underrepresented in the professional literature. There is a need to explore ESOL conferencing in online settings with the goal

of developing sound instructor training. Doing so may reveal ways to improve theory and practice with regard to assisting ESOL students using a variety of educational technology. It is time to develop a deeper understanding of the processes and strategies that may work best with ESOL writers who receive their instruction and tutoring online through synchronous and asynchronous modalities. Our own experiences with online instruction, training, and program development suggest that instructors need to be acquainted with some of the ways that assisting ESOL writers online both *may and may not* require new skill and thinking repertoires. Therefore, we conceive this article as a practical addition to the literature relevant to online conference-based ESOL instruction.

Training ESOL Instructors

This article is a demonstration of some of the practical strategies common to ESOL conferencing that may require different consideration in various online settings. We present these online strategies through three conference-based cases where the ESOL instructors would have benefited from additional training specific to conferencing online: a synchronous “chat” that resembles a transcript of face-to-face interaction, a synchronous whiteboard interaction that uses both text and graphical tools, and an asynchronous interaction that engages local embedded and global end commentary. After each example, we present a discussion of ESOL-based concerns that might need to be addressed somewhat differently in an online setting. We hope that readers will find these cases helpful both as a practical extension of the professional discussion about ESOL conferencing in online settings and as material for developing their own instructor-training programs.

Before we begin our exploration of strategies helpful to assisting ESOL students online, we want to set the stage. We look to training any instructor for online settings less as a platform-specific (software) concern than as a modality-specific (synchronous or asynchronous) one. In other words, instructor-trainers will be using a variety of software, which can change rapidly, so we will not discuss how one might introduce any particular program. No one, of course, feels comfortable with any computer program without using it extensively, and extensive use may in itself convince trainees that online conferencing is right for them. For example, trainees will generally find as they learn to navigate the software how easy it is to use hyperlinks to expand or reinforce points made in a conference. This ability often will help them to realize that online conferences are not just a convenience for night-owl students, but a superior delivery system for certain kinds of information. Beyond platform and modality, the obvious advantage of hyperlinks and other features available only online may create real enthusiasm for online conferencing, but it will do little to deal with the other common concern of trainees—the fear that two people peering at computer screens will never be able to interact as instructors and students should. This fear needs to be addressed explicitly throughout the training, not simply by assurances from old hands but by an immersion process in which trainees themselves can see online conferencing in action, note successes and failures in conferencing sessions, and develop processes that will help them in their own conferencing.[4]

The three authentic cases that follow engage some common online platforms to demonstrate real-life conferences at the post-secondary level.[5] One way to use these cases is to give trainees the transcripts with instructions to read a transcript carefully and come to the next session ready to point out what went right, what went wrong, and how the session could have been improved. In addition, trainees might be encouraged to consider how the nature of the ESOL writer does or does not inform particular parts of the interaction. We have followed each case with our own discussion of it, and in the course of the case discussions we highlight ten recommendations that may be familiar in any

conference setting, but that seem to require different strategies when training ESOL instructors for online settings:

1. Know how to “give face”
2. Sell yourself as a tutor
3. Make an art of “clock watching”
4. Find out what the student wants
5. Learn how to talk to a particular student
6. Know what you’re talking about
7. Proofread
8. Contextualize the conference
9. Use clear language
10. Teach by doing

As a matter of course, we think that *correctness of advice* ought to be considered the first priority, and to that end, we recommend that every ESOL instructor have either online or hard copy access to a reliable handbook and an English learner’s dictionary. Additionally, we suggest that program directors provide both experienced instructors and instructor-trainees some form of systematic feedback that will enable them to perfect their own understanding of ESOL instruction and of conducting that instruction online.

Beyond issues of correctness, trainee discussion groups most likely will come up with many of the same recommendations as these on their own, and of course trainers who use our cases are welcome to use, alter, or ignore our discussions as well. Thus, in addition to this article’s primary goal of extending the professional discussion relevant to ESOL conferencing in online settings, it may be used as training material from which one might develop other recommendations or suggestions that apply specifically to ESOL conferencing or, more broadly, it may be adapted to teaching writing in most one-to-one situations.

Online ESOL Conferencing Cases

Case 1: Online Synchronous Chat Conference

- **Sam:** I have question about the use of “that”
- **Marian:** Hi there! I’m Marian. What’s your name? done
- **Sam:** A. “It is a truth universally acknowledged , that a single man in possession of a good fortune, must be in want of a wife.” B. “Allow me to say, however , that your fair partner does not disgrace you, and that I must hope to have this pleasure often repeated.” C. “I remember hearing you once say, Mr Darcy , that you hardly ever forgave , that your resentment once created was unappeasable.” D. “for give me leave to observe that I consider the clerical office as equal in point of dignity with the highest rank of the kingdom – provided that a proper humility of behaviour is at the same time maintained.” these are all from same book. why the author used comma before that sometimes, but not other times? Usually when we write, we use “that” without a comma. can you explain?
- **Marian:** I’ll be happy to, but first I do need a little more information from you. Could

- you tell me your name, and what sort of assignment you're working on? done
- **Sam:** my name is sam. dont make me lack of patience, just explain. this is not any thing like assignment. I read to notice and learn things. if you can't answer say it
 - **Marian:** Sam, I'll be happy to explain, but I do need to ask you to be civil when you speak to me. done
 - **Sam:** Please explain.
 - **Marian:** Well, actually one of the commas you've underlined is an error, or at least it would be today. You're reading a book that's almost two hundred years old, and the rules for using commas
 - have changed in that time. done
 - **Sam:** so novels are not correct English? famous novels even?
 - **Marian:** As I've said, even a famous novel from long ago won't follow all today's rules for things like commas. And even a novel published this year may have a few "mistakes," especially when an author is trying for some special effects. Does that make sense? done
 - **Sam:** you don't answer my question. wasting my time.
 - **Marian:** I'm trying to answer. Let's look at your examples again. The comma in your sentence A is just plain wrong by today's rules. I know it's a famous sentence from a famous novel, but today
 - everyone would consider that comma an error. Okay? done
 - **Sam:** but the novel is English, not American. are you English?
 - **Marian:** No, but believe me, in England today that particular comma would also be wrong. You were right when you said earlier that today we don't use commas before "that" in situations like this.
 - **Sam:** so all those commas are error?
 - **Marian:** No, just that first one. The commas you underlined in sentences B and C are quite correct. But don't think of them as "commas before that" in these cases. Instead, think of the sentence B
 - comma as one of two commas around "however." Think of the sentence C comma as one of two around "Mr. Darcy." Do you see what I mean? done
 - **Sam:** youre not clear. incompetent. you need skills, but you lack.
 - **Marian:** I've tried to help you, but I'm sorry to say we've almost run out of the available time. If you want to complain, you can click back to our tutoring center home page and make a complaint.
 - **Sam:** I will but first let me call you an idiot.

(Student disconnects.)

Discussion

We begin our examination of ESOL conferences with the online synchronous chat conference, a format that closely resembles the dialogue and give-and-take of the traditional face-to-face conference. Our first example is a synchronous chat conference session that clearly has gone wrong, and we want to assure readers who are relatively new to online conferencing that, while it did indeed occur, it is not typical. Most instructors will never encounter such a truculent student as Sam; on the contrary, instructors with traditional writing center experience may find that students (and instructors as well, for that matter) behave better screen-to-screen than face-to-face.

We present this extreme example, though, because it raises some issues that lurk beneath the surface of quite a few conferencing sessions that are much less painful. In every session, a student comes not only with a specific request for information or guidance, but also with a personality and a personal history. In the case of ESOL students, that personal history may well include years of frustration and defeat, and a

maddening feeling that they will never manage to reach the level of competence and sophistication that they attained long ago in their first language. Students are at the same time sizing up their instructors, and their past dealings with instructors are shaping their reactions to each new experience. Similarly, in every conferencing session an instructor is presenting a persona intended to help the student, and simultaneously is trying to get an accurate sense of the new student's needs and attitudes.

Marian, with her consistently positive and helpful tone, presents exactly the persona that most online instructors find suitable. She is ready to assert her authority when necessary, as in her request at line 18 that Sam “*be more civil when you speak to me,*” but she's also ready to get back to her normal, rather chatty style as soon as possible.

Marian's early assessment of Sam seems to be that she is faced with an unusual student with a strong will, and her assessment seems entirely sensible. If his account can be trusted, he is teaching himself, or at least supplementing the other ESOL instruction he is receiving, by reading very advanced material and using it as a source for pointers on grammar and punctuation. Marian must be somewhat uneasy with Sam's approach, given the obvious difference between the task he's set himself and his present linguistic competence. Writing with shorthand words like “u” for “you” and lack of capitalization are common practices in online chat forums; this case illustrates the latter practice regarding non-capitalization of formal nouns and sentence beginnings. Yet, there are some specific markers in Sam's talk that indicate his ESOL linguistic level. People who are still writing things like “*from same book*” (line 12) and “*dont make me lack of patience*” (line 16) aren't usually considered ready for Jane Austen.

Marian very quickly formulates two goals for this session, and they seem to us to be appropriate. First, she wants to assure him that he shouldn't start putting commas before “that” in the kind of construction he's concerned with here. Further, she wants—if possible—to move him away from using early nineteenth-century texts as guides to twenty-first century usage. The goals are excellent, Marian's tone is appropriate, and her information is accurate, yet the session turns (or remains) sour. Perhaps nothing could have worked really well for Sam on this particular day, but Marian could have made things a bit better by paying more attention to Sam's need for “face,” by “selling” her own qualifications more than she did, and by watching the clock more carefully toward the end of the session.

Recommendation 1: Know how to “give face”

We get the expression “saving face” from Chinese, which also is the source of the very useful phrase “giving face.” One native Chinese-speaking colleague explains the concept of “face” as: “showing your respect for people; avoiding anything that would embarrass them; trying to praise and making sure that necessary criticism isn't aggressive.” Saving face, which is a concept similar to self-esteem, involves politeness strategies (Grundy 133; see also Brown and Levinson) that may seem especially necessary in online settings. As educators, we recognize that online conference-based instruction—for both native and non-native speakers—is like any other writing instruction in that novice writers are submitting their work for review and tend to have anxiety about what the reader will say; one's “face” is always at risk.

Sam appears to be a person with a great need for face, a need that isn't satisfied in this session. This is a student who has undertaken an immensely challenging task, all apparently on his own initiative. We imagine him as someone who reads serious literature in his own language, and has decided it's time to recover his self-respect by getting away from all the simplified “baby English” he feels he's been given in his ESOL classes. Marian does an excellent job of never talking down to Sam—one sees

throughout that she considers him intelligent, something especially important for ESOL students to sense—but Sam probably needs more praise than she gives him. Marian answers Sam’s actual questions very well, but for understandable reasons she misses a crucial opportunity to reduce his combativeness. Given Sam’s need for face, how could Marian have engaged the online technology to show such respect?

Because he cannot see her facial expression or body language to receive reassurance from them, Marian needs to use words in explicitly encouraging ways and, perhaps, emoticons like smile faces J and winks ;) to meet Sam’s affective needs. For example, immediately after Sam reveals that he reads tough material “*to notice and learn things*” (line 17), he really deserves praise for his effort and ambition, but Marian is quite naturally upset by his impoliteness and misses the chance to give him the face he seems to need so much. Similar praise could have been given later in the session, but it would have been easier to make a face-giving remark here, before more hostility made Marian feel even more defensive.

Recommendation 2: Sell yourself as an instructor

Every student will have some doubts about a new instructor, and Sam reveals early on (as in “*if you can’t answer say it*” at line 17) that he’s not one to give ESOL instructors any sort of automatic respect. We never would suggest claiming authority by anything as crude as “*I’ll have you know that I graduated with honors from XYZ University,*” but there are subtler ways of showing that one is worth listening to as an instructor. Marian knows that she’s dealing with a hypercritical student, but she doesn’t show much interest in establishing her credentials, though she has an excellent chance to do so.

Marian correctly says that the sentences Sam quotes were written about two hundred years ago, and she refers to sentence “A” as “*a famous sentence from a famous novel*” (line 30). It seems likely, then, that she recognizes that the novel is *Pride and Prejudice* and that sentence “A” is the novel’s opening sentence. Identifying the novel and the sentence might have gone a long way toward establishing her credentials with this student, and expressing her pleasure at talking with a fellow Janeite (even if the enthusiasm for Austen had to be feigned) might have served the dual purpose of showing Marian’s credentials and giving face to Sam. This claim also would have helped Marian later to express regret that Austen’s novels aren’t the right models for present-day usage, and it might have made Sam receptive to a suggestion about reading contemporary writers like Joan Didion and Amy Tan.

We suspect that Sam also would have accepted Marian’s guidance more readily if she had been ready to speak like an “expert” once in a while.[6] We don’t recommend pontificating as a way of helping most students, but Sam might have shown more respect for Marian if she had, at about line 29, made some sort of declaration like this: “*In general, the trend for the last three centuries has been to use commas less and less, so many things written long ago now seem over-punctuated by today’s standards.*”

Instructors might feel diffident at first about sounding so authoritative, especially when their training may lead them to be nondirective and collaborative with their students. However, in an online setting especially, speaking like an expert requires that an ESOL instructor put one’s aptitude and knowledge in writing (which carries, by the way, the concomitant requirement that one be correct in one’s statement). Most ESOL students would welcome a clear statement of how English works when such a statement is possible. They hear enough of things like “*Maybe it’s just my feeling, but . . .*” since there are many times when that’s all we can honestly say, so when an instructor can offer a reliable rule, he or she should be encouraged to do so.

Recommendation 3: Make an art of clock-watching

When Sam erupts in a final round of abuse and then disconnects, it's in response to Marian's attempt to show him why sometimes one does see a perfectly correct comma preceding the word "that" (lines 36–39). It's obvious to us as we watch Marian work through this session that she knows what she's talking about and can present the facts about English usage with clarity, but Sam's claim here is that she's "not clear."

And maybe Sam has a point. What Marian says is well worded and completely accurate, but she's compressing into three typed sentences an idea that most teachers would spend at least two minutes on if they were addressing a class. A classroom teacher probably would start by getting students to agree that "however" and "Mr. Darcy" constitute little breaks in the flow of the sentences they're in. Next, one might have the class come up with their own parenthetical expressions to inject into sentences containing "that," and might even introduce the term "parenthetical expression" to the class. One of us usually erases the commas, supplies parentheses in their place, and then goes back to commas, trying to show how necessary it is to complete the set of commas. Finally, one would get to Marian's main point, which is that using a comma before "that" in this situation doesn't mean that we should write, "Many people believe, that the economy is improving."

Marian probably goes through a similar routine when this sort of question comes up in a classroom or with a student in a traditional setting, but she's working in a conferencing situation where time and space limits may be observed to increase accessibility to students. Although she doesn't have a lot of time left in this conference, she could take a little more time with this material—perhaps even pasting into the chat window a pre-prepared "template" example of this common problem to solidify her lesson. Further, Marian could use textual aids available in many chat platforms like font size and color, highlighting, and formatting to aid her teaching.

All instructors come up against problems of this sort, and there is no perfect way to deal with them. It's unlikely in this case that Marian could have hurried things along earlier in the session, so here at the end she is left with very few choices. If Marian is working for an online program where students can sign up for, or connect to, a new session right away, then probably her best option would be to say at line 36 something like, "*The commas underlined in sentences 'B' and 'C' are quite correct. I'd like to show you why those commas are needed there, Sam, but I see that our time is almost up, and we're not allowed to go over our time limit. You can, though, sign up for a second conference tonight, and I think we'll be able to clear up any questions you have about those commas in just ten minutes or so. Would you like to do that, Sam?*"

If a same-day follow-up session is not allowed under the center's rules, then Marian can (a) invite her student to sign up for another session on another day, (b) avoid launching herself into this topic altogether, or (c) try for a mini-explanation. The mini-explanation that she writes about commas in lines 36–39 is well conceived, but so tightly packed that most students will be confused by it.

Case 2: Online Synchronous Whiteboard Conference

What is the easiest way to identify clause

What is your name? (I'm saying "done" so you know I'm finished talking)
Raghbir Kaur.

Hi, Raghbir. I'm Dennis. There are two ways to identify clauses as there are two types of clauses. One is an independent clause, which is like a whole sentence; and another is a dependent clause, which is not. A clause is different than a sentence because it modifies a sentence.

- (1) For an independent clause, it gives additional information that adds to the meaning of a sentence, even though it could stand alone. It is attached to a sentence with a semi-colon (;).
- (2) So is a dependent clause. It modifies the meaning of a sentence, but could not stand alone as a sentence.

Here are some examples:

John went to a very nice department store; so nice that he stayed an hour longer than he had planned.

In this case, "He stayed an hour longer than he had planned" is an independent clause. It could be a sentence on its own. done

what kind of clause was ur example ... i mean is it a adverb, adjective or noun clause.

Adverbial. It modifies "nice." done

hi Dennis, are u there.

Hi. I lost you for a second.

(Someone disconnects)

Discussion

A conference, whether it takes place online or in a traditional instructional setting, is a conversation, and in principle is tailored to the needs and abilities of the student. For example, both Marian in Case 1 and Dennis in Case 2 (above) apply conversational strategies that signal turn-taking, such as the word "done," "end," or "stop" to indicate the speaker is finished typing.[7] This short conference takes place using a synchronous electronic whiteboard, which shares the advantages of a chalkboard in terms of writing and drawing flexibility, as well as its spatial limitations, while also allowing some chat to occur. Case 2 reveals a session that never becomes a true conference, however, since Dennis makes no attempt to deal with Raghbir as an individual with particular needs. Dennis tries to look behind the student's words to sense her intentions and he makes some guesses about what she wants, but he never checks out his guesses. Furthermore, even though Dennis makes good use of the whiteboard's graphic tools to emphasize his meaning and to guide his student, he demonstrates that he's unable to handle the subject he thinks he should be presenting to Raghbir.

Recommendation 4: Find out what the student wants

Raghbir says she wants to know how "to identify clause" (line 01), and Dennis immediately thinks he knows what she's asking for. As we said of Case 1, a synchronous conference session tends to have the look and feel of a dialogue in its give-and-take, one-to-one nature. While a synchronous whiteboard session naturally has the same

capacity, this example reveals a conference that is highly monologic in that Dennis asks for no clarification from Raghbir before proceeding with his explanation. Raghbir's question actually could have meant:

- How do I know that a group of words is a clause rather than a phrase?
- How do I know whether a clause is dependent or independent?
- How do I know whether I'm looking at a noun clause, an adjective clause, or an adverbial clause?
- Can you help me understand what my book says about restrictive and non-restrictive adjective clauses?
- My teacher uses a lot of obscure terms for adverbial clauses, things like concession, contrast, and purpose. Can you make sense of those categories for me?

Without finding out what's on Raghbir's mind, Dennis spends the entire session on matters that have no connection with what Raghbir thinks she needs—and her final question (“*what kind of clause was ur example?*”) reveals this instructional disconnect.

Recommendation 5: Learn how to talk to a particular student

Before launching into his mini-lecture on clauses, Dennis knows, as far as we can see, almost nothing about the student. He knows that her name is Raghbir Kaur, and he can reasonably guess from that name that she's a female Sikh. He *may* be correct if he assumes that her first language is Punjabi, but that's about as far as he can go. However, if Dennis wants to conduct a real, personal tutorial, even if all his guesses are correct, this information isn't nearly enough to go on. And, of course, he could be quite wrong, especially about the question of what Raghbir's first language is. Most Sikhs are indeed Punjabis, but there are converts to Sikhism who speak no Punjabi at all, and a Sikh child whose family is established in an English-speaking country may very well be more comfortable in English than in Punjabi.

It's not unusual for online instructors and tutors to find themselves unable to decide whether a student is or is not a native speaker of English; in this case, as in many, there is no reliable way to reach a decision. Raghbir's omission of the article when she writes “the easiest way to identify clause” may tell us that she's an ESOL student, but then again that omission may just be a typo. Her ease with the online style when she writes “ur example” and “are u there” may indicate native-speaker fluency, or it may show only that she's part of the international online culture. Given only this sample of Raghbir's writing, no tutor could say much about her linguistic situation.

If Dennis had chatted with Raghbir for a while, rather than holding forth on clauses immediately, he might have proceeded with a much better sense of who Raghbir was. Dennis shouldn't, of course, waste time and violate the unwritten rules of respecting online privacy by asking Raghbir personal questions. There's no need to know, for instance, where she lives or what her college major is, though he may want to ask what course she happens to be taking that pays special attention to clauses, and whether she's preparing for an exam on clauses or just trying to understand her instructor's warning that her writing shows problems with clauses.

In some way, though, he needs to get a sense of what Raghbir already knows. He'll inevitably be discussing grammar in this tutorial, and he needs to decide quickly what, if any, technical terms he can count on Raghbir knowing. This information is crucial, but it needn't be collected by asking direct questions like “*How long have you studied English?*” or “*Do you understand terms like ‘subordinating conjunction’ or ‘finite verb’?*” If Dennis had spent some time asking more about what Raghbir really wants in this

session, her answers—not only what she said, but how she said it—would probably have given him all the information he needed to adjust his language and general approach to her needs and her level of knowledge.

In the end, knowing Raghbir’s ESOL or non-ESOL status is not really crucial. Good tutors don’t address all native English speakers in the same way, and there’s no reason that they should automatically shift into some sort of “ESOL-Speak” when addressing non-native speakers. As much as we can, we should be speaking to every student as an individual, and we cannot do that unless we take some time to interact with them before answering their requests.

Recommendation 6: Know what you’re talking about

Readers who know a good deal about grammar will realize that Dennis is talking nonsense here. Readers with less training in the mysteries of grammar should make an effort to unlearn anything they think they absorbed while reading this session. We can’t find a single sentence in the lecture that makes a clear and correct statement about the things he’s discussing, and in some places—such as where he tells Raghbir that it’s just fine to attach a dependent clause to a sentence by means of a semicolon—he’s giving her advice that, if followed, will result in more red marks on her essays. The textual nature of an online conference may automatically lend the instructor’s words weight, so that even if the student—like Sam in Case 1—doesn’t necessarily respect the instructor as an authority, he or she probably will expect the conference’s advice to be correct. Further, he may show the archived transcript to his or her teacher or share it with another ESOL student as a study aid. Thus, it is especially critical that ESOL instructors know what they are talking about when they instruct online.

In Case 2, we’re assuming that Dennis is working within a writing center—online or otherwise—that encourages students to ask questions about English grammar. Such a writing center implies that students will receive reliable answers. Raghbir may or may not be an ESOL student, but there is nothing specifically ESOL-related about her question. Her uncertainties about clauses are shared by most native speakers taking college English classes, and, unfortunately, Dennis hasn’t provided information that would help any student. Such problems need to be addressed in Dennis’ training, but he also could help himself (and Raghbir) by having a reliable writing handbook by his computer.

Case 3: Online Asynchronous Essay Conference

Paragraph Version 3 with Conference (Instructor Local Comments in Bold/Brackets):

Essay Title: “computers”

Course: intro to writing

Assignment description: compare and contrast paragraph

Help requested: grammar and mechanics

Even though laptops and desktops are computers, they have sizes, costs, special features, and profitability. **[Shouldn’t you be using another phrase in place of “even though”? It sounds as though you are suggesting that all the items in the list are not essential features of computers.]** Many computers have been manufactured in numerous models over the years. The two most common models are the laptops and the desktop. The average size of a laptop is seven pounds and a desktop is about 25 lbs. The cost of laptop is \$1000 more expensive on price, than a the desktop. **[And I hink you may want the phrase *in price* rather than *on price*. To *cost in price* means the actual cost.]** Also for work purposes the laptop is more helpful because it seven pounds, and is not considered a desktop sitting on one place. Special features that are used in both

computers are, CD drives, music ability, and getting to the internet. If using a laptop both at work and in home, it is better because it is more profitable than the desktop. **[I think that you may have used the wrong word: *profitable than the desktop*. Do you mean *portable* instead of *profitable*? Also, *at work* and *in home* don't match.]** If using the desktop, it is less profitable so it is too heavy to carry to work. No matter what choice the person makes, the same result remain that laptops and desktops are different in many ways. **[Zakaria, please watch out for subject-verb number agreement. Singular subjects take on singular verbs and plural subjects take on plural verbs. How would you correct this? Hint: Subjects with the “s” at the end are usually plural, and verb with “s” at the end are usually singular.]**

Instructor Global Comments:

Hi, Zakaria. My name is Richard and I'm your tutor today. Although I certainly understand, from your development of the paragraph, that this paragraph is going to be a strong contrast/comparison between the two models, and although your main idea is very solid, I do not get a good start to this paragraph. So, in response to your main idea, I can definitely say that it is a good idea, well developed and made interesting to your readers, your introductory sentences are very confusing. Zakaria, one of the basic problems you have is with comma usage. You don't need a comma before the first item of a list. For instance, in, “*Even though laptops and desktops are computers, they have, sizes, costs, special features, and profitability,*” there is no need of a comma before “*sizes.*” When you enclose phrases with commas, or if there is a phrase between a comma and a period, you can check if the comma use is correct by seeing whether you can enclose the phrase within brackets without changing the meaning of the sentence. Good luck revising, Zakaria. I'll be happy to look at your next draft!

Discussion

Conferencing online through the asynchronous medium can be challenging because it is difficult to know whether the student will “get it” or not. However, if we view the asynchronous essay conference as one where students participate and “talk” through their submission requests and their subsequent revision choices, then it becomes easier to see the conversational and dialogical aspects of this kind of conferencing.[8] In Case 3, the conference goes off-track from its beginning because Richard doesn't see Zakaria's paragraph within a fuller context. Further, he appears confused about what Zakaria is communicating and then provides confusing advice to Zakaria, missing opportunities to teach (rather than tell) about writing.

Recommendation 7: Contextualize the conference

There are a number of ways to contextualize an asynchronous conference—to understand what the student is presenting through a piece of writing without face-to-face or synchronous interaction. One of the distinct benefits of this type of conferencing is that generally it provides instructors with the time to think about the writing and what it says about the writer's needs.

Contextualizing can mean having access to an electronic archive where one can view previous essay conferences. With such access (and usually with just a few keystrokes), instructors can figure out to what extent previous conferences may have been successful by doing an electronic document comparison of a previous draft to the current one. Where there is no change at all or only surface level change, a student most likely has misunderstood the previous conference, indicating a lack of communication from

instructor to student. If too much has changed in the ESOL writer's draft that is not supported either by demonstrated competence in previous writing or the prior conference, then the student may have been too frustrated to complete the next draft through his or her own abilities and sought the assistance of a native speaker, who then provided too much "help." Below, is a fictional example of the second possibility, where Zakaria's present linguistic abilities suggest that a native speaker has written most of the revision (see underlines):

Over the past century, computers have been manufactured in various models. The two most common types of these models are the laptop and the desktop. Even though laptops and desktops are similar in many ways, they have significant differences: size and weight, cost, special features, and range of uses.

If Richard had looked in his archives and compared previous conferences for context, he would have seen that Zakaria has submitted three drafts of Case 3's paragraph, of which the complete conference above is the third. Draft 2 would show absolutely no changes from Draft 1. This lack of change indicates that despite the first instructor's efforts to teach him about topic development or sentence rules, Zakaria might have been too confused to revise his paragraph at all. Of course, one also could think that Zakaria simply was waiting for someone to "do it for him" as with our fictional example above, but we prefer to take a more optimistic view of ESOL students—that they want help and will use it well when it is presented clearly enough.

But what if there aren't previous conferences for Richard to review either because the submission is the student's first one or because the writing center doesn't archive conferences? How could Richard contextualize this conference? There are at least two things that instructors can do in such a case. The first possible step is to look to the student's submission form for the course, assignment, and writing genre. This is a common first step that instructors usually are trained to do in face-to-face or synchronous online environments. Zakaria has stated that he's in an introductory writing class and that he is supposed to write a "comparison and contrast paragraph." Zakaria's general linguistic competence, as evidenced by expressions like "at work and in home" and "The cost of laptop is \$1000 more expensive on price," suggests that he needs ESOL instruction. Richard probably has read Zakaria's submission request and he most likely knows that in this single paragraph Zakaria's teacher expects the "five paragraph" structure of introduction/thesis, three main points, and conclusion. So Richard has contextualized the conference to the degree that he addresses the paragraph as a "whole" piece and doesn't suggest that Zakaria write a longer "essay."

A second step to contextualizing without previous essay submissions is simply to watch the length of one's conference. In an asynchronous conference, some instructors try to make up for the lack of familiar face-to-face contact by writing far more text than the student has presented. Although instructors may need to explain far more to ESOL students than to native speakers, we've seen a few absurd cases where the instructors have written up to four times what the student has written, clearly overwhelming even to competent native speakers! Richard has avoided this trap; his ESOL conference is little more than one and a half times the length of Zakaria's paragraph. However, some of Richard's advice is written in such a garbled manner as to be meaningless to Zakaria, who still is struggling with the vocabulary for comparing a laptop to a desktop computer. In fact, we think that Richard may have erred on the side of too little said in this conference, another issue of length, in that much of what he says is useless and unclear, which brings us to Recommendation 8.

Recommendation 8: Use clear language

In a face-to-face conference, one can “talk around” a “rule” or writing issue until the student indicates verbally or through body language that he or she understands it. Similarly, in a synchronous online conference, one has the immediate benefit of student feedback to ensure that the communication is working. Such feedback doesn’t ensure against misinformation, as in Case 2 above, where Dennis’ garbled grammar rules demonstrate that instructors need to know what they are talking about. In an asynchronous ESOL conference, however, the feedback isn’t immediate—as we discussed above—but it does come eventually in the student’s revisions. There is another way to get such feedback, however, and that is from the conference itself. Instructors can describe a student’s writing by using vocabulary that ESOL students are likely to have learned, and they can check their conferences for clear (and correct) language usage, putting themselves in the place of students with lesser linguistic competence.

It seems obvious that Richard suffers from some of the same basic misunderstandings of punctuation rules as Dennis, as we can see when he suggests that Zakaria check for comma correctness by enclosing phrases in a list with imaginary brackets. Aside from this serious misinformation, however, Richard struggles with the basics of putting into words what he sees in Zakaria’s writing. Thus he writes in lines 22–23 that even though he thinks the paragraph will be “*strong*,” he does “*not get a good start to this paragraph. So, in response to your main idea, I can definitely say that it is a good idea, well developed and made interesting to your readers, your introductory several sentences are very confusing.*” In this short synopsis, Richard offers a meager attempt at praise—only he simply predicts future strength and neglects the current paragraph—and then writes a muddled sentence that reveals Richard’s own confusion. More helpful to Zakaria would be praise of the current paragraph, which could include (1) Zakaria’s correct understanding that this paragraph needs a topic sentence, (2) that the topic sentence rightly includes several points for development, and (3) that each of the points has at least one sentence devoted to it. Then, since Zakaria has asked for help with content development, Richard could give face by assuring Zakaria that this request is a wise choice and then writing questions that prompt more details for each idea.

Another way that Richard misses the chance to use vocabulary that Zakaria will understand comes in the embedded local commentary. For example, in lines 11–12 Richard offers the word “*portable*” for “*profitable*,” which doesn’t make sense in context. Helping an ESOL student by providing the correct word can be a good strategy, as we all know that one develops vocabulary gradually. However, most ESOL students have learned a lot of their English from teachers who use formal labels for words. Thus Zakaria would benefit more if Richard had described *profitable* and *portable* as adjectives that could modify the noun *laptop*. Richard could then suggest that Zakaria look up *profitable* and *portable* in his English dictionary to see where he went wrong to begin with. Another place where Richard could use formal vocabulary is in dealing with the phrases *in price*, *at price*, *at work*, and *in home*. When Zakaria sees that the issue is “idiomatic phrasing” that native speakers learn from the cradle, he can feel reassured that his error isn’t so much that his phrasing doesn’t “match,” as that idiomatic phrasing requires certain word choices that simply need to be memorized over time.

Crucial to using such clear language in an asynchronous conference are both a good understanding of elements that comprise a strong piece of writing and experience with articulating these elements. Even instructors who have taught English writing for years may need practice articulating *in writing* what is happening in an essay and how to address it. We think, however, that such practice makes us all better teachers in any conference environment. Richard’s program director would do well to provide guided, individualized practice and assessment through simulated conferences.

Recommendation 9: Proofread

Checking for clear and correct language choices may be challenging if the instructor is in a hurry or operating under time limits designed to increase accessibility. Yet checking one's written conference is critical if an instructor is to maintain any authority and to be helpful to the student. Thus, Richard should have caught his mistyping of *verb* for *verbs* in line 18 of the embedded commentary. More important, he has written in line 23–25 of the global commentary a confusing sentence that many consider to be seriously faulty. Since it creates an unclear message and its errors mirror those of many students—native and non-native speakers alike—he should have caught his own faulty sentence caused by a comma splice. Indeed, we expect that instructors of English, whether they are professional teachers or less experienced peer tutors, should be able to recognize such errors in their own writing. In Richard's case, this error should have signaled to him what he likely teaches his students: that his own confused sentence needs to be untangled and rephrased for clarity. Not doing so reveals his own lack of sophistication as an instructor, which in turn causes an authority crisis in the written conference. How can Zakaria trust such a confusing and confused instructor, and how can he determine what parts of the conference he can implement safely?

Recommendation 10: Teach by doing

The final recommendation that we offer is one that every instructor needs to use as often as possible. If students could learn how to write better simply by being told a rule or to “do ABC,” then a handbook would be all the supplementary help they would need. However, ESOL students particularly need—as we all do—not only examples of correct and clear writing that apply the rule or principle, but also opportunities to practice writing correctly and to correct their own errors. Thus, Recommendation 10 regards both the instructor's need to “show, not tell” and the student's need for guided opportunities to “do.”[9]

Richard applies this recommendation at the end of his local commentary to Zakaria when he explains the subject-verb rule of using an “s” with plural present tense verbs only. After using a double underline to emphasize the problem area, ensuring that Zakaria knows where the problem is, Richard asks Zakaria to make the correction himself. In doing so, Richard gives Zakaria a chance to learn by doing. The conference would be stronger, however, if Richard had applied this practice in other areas, such as the troublesome comma rule. As we can see in lines 26–31, Richard has expressed this rule in a garbled manner and has not asked Zakaria to apply it. Although he has avoided the urge to “correct” for Zakaria, Richard has not taught Zakaria with examples, nor has he noted that there are two places in the paragraph where Zakaria can correct this problem. Had he done so, Richard would have improved the conference not only by actually teaching a point that Zakaria can model, but also by selling himself as an instructor and using clearer language. With a chalkboard, a piece of paper, or an electronic whiteboard, instructors can draw lines and circles to help students make connections. With synchronous online chats and asynchronous conferences, instructors can make creative use of bullets, lists, colored highlights, and font style and sizes. Here is an example that can apply in any setting, face-to-face or online:

RULE: When using commas, be careful not to separate the subject and the verb of the sentence from the object with a comma. Subjects and their objects belong together:

INCORRECT: I have, bread, peanut butter, and ham for lunch.

CORRECT: I have bread, peanut butter, and ham for lunch.

Let's look at your sentence:

Even though laptops and desktops are computers, *they*[**subject**]*have*[**verb**], *sizes*[**object of the verb**], costs, special features, and profitability.

Zakaria's next steps:

Using the model I gave you above, where should you delete the comma from your sentence? There is a similar error later in your paragraph. Please find the sentence and correct the comma error using this same pattern.

Conclusion

Certainly, the ten recommendations we have outlined are applicable in any conferencing setting whether online or face-to-face, with non-native or native speakers of English. However, as we hope we have demonstrated, the nuances of applying these recommendations require different strategies in the context of ESOL students who seek assistance through online media.

Further, we think it is especially important for instructor training program directors to engage in internal program investigation and empirical research to learn more about the both theory and strategies for ESOL instruction when it occurs in online settings. Such research could take advantage of archived conference sessions where investigators can examine such concerns as student-instructor language, affect, applied revision strategies, and how these characteristics and products of online ESOL conferences can improve instructional strategies both specific and global in nature. Particular online writing programs might find different priorities given their student populations, administrative expectations, and instructional missions. Whenever possible, we think that investigators might publish and publicly discuss the results of their research to help fill the gap in literature relative to teaching and assisting ESOL students in online settings.

Finally, in Appendix 1 and 2, we have provided two additional cases that can be used for instructor training purposes. Among the recommendations that trainers might explore with their staff are looking for the intention behind the student's words, using the available resources, and developing excellent keyboard skills (a recommendation that may parallel speaking skills in face-to-face settings). Practicing with such cases, to which program directors might add selections from their own institutional settings, enables online instructors to develop greater flexibility and dexterity for instructing non-native speakers of English. As an added bonus, such practice will help online instructors develop overall stronger online instructional skills that are applicable to all student populations.

Notes

1 In a way, the frequent citation and use of this highly practical article speaks volumes for what has not yet been studied and written about ESOL conferencing practices. In a brief reference search, the authors found this article printed in three separate sources.

2 See also Sharon A. Meyers, "Reassessing the Proofreading Trap."

3 In light of the hybrid nature of online instruction, we will refer to any kind of educator—to include professional tutors—who works with students in online conference-based settings as an *instructor*. Because their experience levels, and therefore their authority, in ESOL instruction differ in important ways, we will refer to peer tutors simply as *tutors*.

4 We recommend that program directors consider engaging the five commonly-held educational principles that Hewett and Ehmann recommend in *Preparing Educators for Online Writing Instruction: Principles and Practices*: investigation, immersion, individualization, association, and reflection. *Investigation*, for example, occurs when one adopts an empirical research strategy that enables a systematic investigation into one's training and instructional practices. With a willingness to examine the less successful elements of one's program, thoughtful, iteratively-developed change can occur. Other elements of investigation include identifying specific goals for the research; plans to use the data to improve training; and whenever possible, sharing the data with the online trainers and instructors in the program. *Immersion* involves recognizing the instructor-trainees as adult learners who can benefit from doing all of their training in online settings where they will teach; in this way, learning to teach online is experienced in a low-risk setting where one experiments with and practices new skills. *Individualization* calls for systematic training that allows trainees to know where they are in the process, yet a flexible approach that engages their own learning styles, and consequentially can reinforce ways to approach students as learners with individual learning styles. *Association* provides instructor-trainees with a common social context wherein they can develop professional relationships with other trainees and experienced online instructors, as well as achieve human-to-human communication in a technologically-driven instructional setting. As with immersion, a consciously developed association can enable educators to practice online communicative and educational skills that will benefit their students in immeasurable ways. Finally, *reflection* involves providing clearly stated and methodical feedback strategies so that instructor-trainees can develop and internalize effective and relevant self-assessment in an unfamiliar instructional setting. Opportunities for professional development also are valuable to a reflective program. See Chapter 2 of Hewett and Ehmann for a complete explanation of these principles.

5 Using authentic sessions, we slightly modified these 3 cases, as well as the two appearing in Appendix 1 and 2, with the purpose of protecting the identities of students, tutors, instructors, and institutions involved. We also adapted Case 1 and Appendix 1 from the whiteboard platform in which they originally occurred to an instant chat/message platform, as the instructional interactions most clearly followed the structure of such a text messaging platform and did not use the unique text/graphical features of a whiteboard session. We gratefully acknowledge Smarthinking for their generous permission to explore their online Archives and their support of this research.

6 This is a recommendation that Rafoth ("Tutoring") also addresses, although he approaches the problem of student trust as one that is connected to non-directive feedback and the appearance of being "wishy-washy" (102).

7 See also Hewett and Ehmann 122.

8 See Hewett and Ehmann; Hewett, "Theoretical" and "Generating"; also see Coogan.

9 Such processes of teaching by doing relate to similar "discovery" scenarios in Meyer and Smith's discussion of working with ESOL-based error patterns (see, for example, 216-217). Such patterns reveal an "interlanguage" or intermediate system for learning the new language based on rules that he or she understands about it (216).

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Appendix 1

Online Synchronous Chat Conference

- **Lupe:** I’m taking Grammar 11 and Writing 11. I have a lot of problems with my articles. What should I do?
- **Celia:** Hi, I’m Celia! Articles in English can be confusing. Can you give me your name, and then tell me what is giving you the most trouble?
- **Lupe:** My name is Guadalupe -- just Lupe is nice. I think “*The*.” How can I use the second mention of count and non-count nouns?
- **Celia:** Well, you know the right questions and the right words, Lupe! “*The*” is what you use when you’ve already mentioned something. You do that because you’ve already mentioned it; the “something” becomes specific, and “*the*” is the article to use when something is specific. Does that make sense?
- **Lupe:** Yes, but they do use “*the*” when there is only one of something, or in front of a noun? And that make me confused.
- **Celia:** Lupe, you’re not alone. Lots of people are confused by the use of articles in English! If you want the honest truth, most of us who are native speakers only know what to do because it “sounds right,” and not because we can tell you the rules! But there are some general guidelines and I’ll see if I can help you understand them. “*The*” is called a “definite” article – and that means when you use “the” you’re generally talking about something specific, or definite. Let’s look at some examples. **An apple is a good snack.** I used “*an*” apple because I don’t mean any particular apple – just any one. **The apple on the desk is for my snack.** I used “*the*” because I mean a very specific apple – the one on the desk. Does that help?
- **Lupe:** I think so.
- **Celia:** Did you have any other sentences you wanted to look at today?

- **Lupe:** When I say “ Last afternoon I drunk the dark coffee in the word.” Is these sentences ok?
- **Celia:** Well, I’m a bit confused because you can’t drink coffee in a word. Do you mean something like in a cup? Or where did you drink the coffee?
- **Lupe:** “world”
- **Celia:** In English that doesn’t make much sense because we don’t think of coffee in the world. We think of it in a container of some sort, or you can drink it in a place, but just not in the world. I know that isn’t helping you very much, but it’s the way we use certain words, and that’s very confusing to someone who isn’t a native speaker. I’m sure your language does similar things. So, where did you drink the coffee? Or, where was the coffee that you drank? Let’s start with that.
- **Lupe :** I know “coffee” is non-count but in my language we say these kind of expression then when I try to write in English it sound like that for me. But I drunk the coffee in a Cuban restaurant call “Espresso.”
- **Celia:** You’ve got it! You drank “the” coffee in a Cuban restaurant. Why “the”? Because you’re talking about a specific cup of coffee – the one you drank in a restaurant! If you say “I drink coffee when I go out to dinner” then you wouldn’t use “the” because you’re not talking about a specific cup of coffee. But when you say “in the Cuban restaurant” then you’ve made it a specific cup of coffee – so you use “the.”
- **Lupe:** Oh, ok. I’m finished Thanks you very much. Bye.
- **Celia:** Bye, Lupe. It was very nice talking with you.

(Student disconnects)

Appendix 2

Online Asynchronous Essay Conference

Asynchronous Conference on Essay (Tutor Local Comments in Bold/Brackets):

Essay Title: “Summer”

Course: ESOL Writing 3

Assignment description: Describe your favorite season

Help requested: check my writing, please

I like summer. The feeling of summer to me is colorful and invigorating. Fortunately, there are four seasons in the country in which I live. No matter if I live in Japan or America, I always look forward the summer coming. **[We always need the preposition “to” after “look forward, Naoko.]** Summer makes me excited because of the weather, nature and its activities. I can enjoy many things in this season.

In America, the weather in summer is milder in summer than in the winter or even spring. Unlike winter, the temperature is always between sixty to ninety degrees fahrenheit in this season. I think the temperature is suitable for humans. The light winds make us comfortable when they are blowing. Sometimes we have little rains instead of a snowstorm. The rains are helpful for the soil, trees and flowers. As a result, the gardens are revived in summer. **[This is going really well, Naoko. You have a lot to say, and you express yourself clearly. I do have a suggestion here, though. Even in Japan, no one could accurately talk about the whole country, from Hokkaido to Okinawa or even just to Kyushu, as having the same weather, right? Here, you’re saying that summer is the same all over the U.S., but of course that’s not true. How about specifying the part of this country that you’re talking about?]**

Besides the weather, there is a change in nature. If you notice the sky, you will find the pretty blue sky becoming more clear and bright. The sun rises at approximately six o'clock in the morning. When I get up early, the sunshine already permeates everywhere. The scenery before my eyes is full activity; **[We'd say "full of."]** for example, I see the dense leaves of trees and many kinds of growing flower. I really like this refreshing season. There are many choices for us to do outdoors in summer. **[Do we "do" a choice? I think we make a choice, or we have choices of things to do.]** For example, I can jog in the park or climbing a mountain. **[I notice in going into the files that your previous tutor talked aboutmaking similar ideas parallel grammatically. Here, if you say "I can jog" you need to continue the idea with "climb," not "climbing."]** I can also go on a picnic with my family on the weekend. In addition, fly-fishing is a special activity in this season because the trout are active in the summer where I live. I can follow my husband to go fly-fishing in some particular areas. Here I can not only enjoy the natural scenery, but also have a lot of fun catching fish. Camping is one of the popular activities in summer, In any national park, there are many areas provided for camping. **[Check your punctuation in this sentence, please, Naoko.]** There are so many interesting plans in summer that my weekend schedules are always occupied.

Indeed, summer is a wonderful season because of the mind **[I'll bet you didn't mean "mind" here, did you? Be sure to check all your writing for typing errors like this.]** weather, the changes in nature and the abundance of outdoor activities. You should enjoy the great season as much as I do. Get outdoors and appreciate the scenery. Don't miss this wonderful summer!

Naoko Asynchronous Conference on Essay (Tutor Global Comments in Bold):

Hi, Naoko! My name is Rachel. This was really good to read because you write welland have lots of interesting things to say. Most of your writing problems are minor mattersinvolving idioms. I've pointed out a few things you'll want to change, but I need to warn you that I haven't tried to clean up every little example of things that aren't exactly normal in English. For example, your use of the verb "permeate" might seem very natural if you only looked at the dictionary definition of the word, but if you ask some U.S. friends what word they'd use there, they'll probably suggest something different.

Now here's my last suggestion, but bear in mind that I might be wrong about this, since I don't know exactly that your instructor said in giving you this assignment. You've organized this paper in a way that many English teachers call "the five-paragraph essay,"and because of this I wonder why the essay is actually three paragraphs long. In ParagraphOne, you introduce your subject and you tell your readers that you're going to discuss three aspects of your subject: the weather, nature, and the activities that are possible in the summer. Many readers will say to themselves "Ah, now I'm going to see a paragraph on the weather, a paragraph on nature, and a paragraph on activities, and then I'll see a concluding paragraph."

That makes me wonder why you have four paragraphs, with the third paragraph discussing both nature and activities.

Wait a minute – maybe you really intended a new paragraph to begin at "There aremany choices," but just forgot to leave space between the paragraphs. If so, you can fix that easily, and I'll stop worrying about it. But notice that readers can recognize paragraph divisions better if you always indent at the beginning of each paragraph, as I have in this message to you. Both ways – indented paragraphs and unindented paragraphs – can be used, but indented paragraphs are probably what

will be expected by most college English departments, so it might be a good idea to get into the habit of indenting.

Thanks for letting me read this enjoyable paper, Naoko, especially since I've been working on it in the middle of winter, with snow on the ground! I hope I come across your work again sometime when I'm reading essays in the queue.



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