

Boosting Students' Autonomy as well as Writing Accuracy and Fluency through Journal Writing

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This study focuses on students' journal writing with the attempt to promote students' autonomy in writing in English as well as their writing accuracy and fluency. About 115 students from four faculties participated in the research. Students were asked to keep their journals in a systematic way. Students were constantly given guidance as they continually worked through their own writing. They were encouraged to reflect on their writing by learning to correct their own mistakes. Furthermore, the students were motivated to set goals in order to improve their subsequent journal writing. Moreover, both fluency and accuracy were encouraged during the entire journal writing process. With the help of new technology and a little support from the teachers, these students emerge with their autonomy to write in English. This experience will also generate their life-long learning and writing in English as well as establishing positive attitude towards studying English on their own in the future.

Each year the Department of Foreign Languages, Faculty of Science, Mahidol University, Thailand has offered Introductory English courses for all the first year students of the university with the emphasis on reading skills supplemented with listening skills which are passive skills inculcated at the expense of productive skills including writing and speaking skills. A group of English teachers at the Department has tried to encourage students' productive

skills which require students to use a higher level of English proficiency by asking them to write their journals in English. This research is a pilot study to discover whether it will be worthwhile to ask students to write on their own and create supplementary exercises. The researchers would like to focus on the students' autonomy, as well as their writing accuracy and fluency. Another reason why this research should be carried out is the current move of the Ministry of Education, the University, the Faculty and the Department towards a more student-centered teaching and learning approach which fortuitously corresponds to the researchers' purpose. Most teachers have practiced the traditional teacher-centered teaching and learning approach for a long time. It is very difficult to change from the old habit of being dictators to a new role as facilitators. The researchers need solid evidence to convince these colleagues, as well as students themselves, that students can be autonomous. They can express their higher level of English proficiency by writing their journals. Moreover, journal writing can increase students' writing accuracy and fluency. This is the main focus of the study. The researchers have high hopes that journal writing will also yield other positive results.

For the purpose of the study, the following research questions are considered:

1. Will students be able to write accurate, clear and grammatically correct sentences?
2. Will students be able to write fluently with ease and confidence?
3. Do students have a positive attitude towards writing after writing their journals in English, and will continue writing on their own in the future?

Some researchers use "journal" and "diary" to mean different methodology; some researchers use the two terms interchangeably as shown in the literature review below. In this study "journal" refers to students' personal account ranging from daily routines to topics chosen from their own interests written in English, whereas "diary" refers to students' opinions on writing "journals" in English. These opinions are expressed freely in their native tongue, the Thai language.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Journal/diary study is one of the introspective methods used to discover some of the internal thought processes of the language learner. This is because becoming aware of what they think about helps shed light on their behaviors. Introspection is “to observe or to reflect on one’s thoughts, feelings, motives, reasoning processes and mental states” (Nunan, 2001, p. 115) in order to understand the behavior. Bailey and Ochsner (1983, p. 189) define diary as “an account of a second language experience as recorded in a first-person journal.” Bailey (1990, p. 215) adds later that the diary study is documented through “regular, candid entries in a personal journal” which is analyzed for recurring patterns. Genesee and Upshur (1998, p. 120) refer to journals as interactive diaries or dialogue journals; journals are “written communication between students and teachers.” To Wallace (1998), diaries are private and yield “honest and forthright” data. Information from private diaries can be accessed by implementing a “confidential” code of ethics when another researcher acquires access to the information or by making clear from the beginning that there will be both “private” and “public” versions. Wallace thinks journals are different from diaries mainly because journals can be read in public such as in classroom discussions. However, both diaries and journals reveal hidden factors that influence teaching and learning processes. Marefat (2002) also mentions that journals include student questions, concerns, failures or success. He used journals to identify some common problems which emerged among learners. Journals have developed from being only a personal account into an interactive conversation between teachers and students since the teaching and learning process has changed to focus on a learner-centered approach in which learners are encouraged to participate more in the learning processes. Learner’s opinions revealed through their journals, can be beneficial to the improvement of the pedagogic process.

Who Keeps Journals

Both teachers and students can keep journals as data collection. King and Campbell-Allan (1998) asked teachers at the Carrie E Tompkins (CET) Elementary School in Croton, New York to keep journals of their class observation under “Kid-watching” program. The “Kid-watching” project was introduced as a part of the three school and district goals which included building collaborative community, setting proficiency standards and improving instruction through the development of portfolios. All teachers were asked to keep journals throughout the year for reflection on students’ and learning process as shown in a teacher’s journal sample below:

Journal entry – Ms. A.

I had a moment of clarity as [student] steered us away from rubrics toward the notion of the portfolio as learner-centered. Words like student “ownership” rang loud and clear. I then began to understand my pilot as a way to help children “self-assess”; I would, in fact, be giving them the power to judge themselves. Once they learn to “self-assess”, they then will learn to set their own goals that are within their reasonable limit. The child will learn to describe his/her own work and will learn to reflect on that work; then, hopefully, the child can see the next step or goal to reach for. (p. 160)

King and Campbell-Allan used journals to help teachers reflect on their own teaching and, consequently, guide them to better instruction and practice as well as more student-centered assessment planning.

Students can also keep and benefit from journals. Journals give rich data that reveal insights into factors that affect interaction and learning (Allwright, 1983). They are “records of opinions and perceptions” important to learners (Allwright & Bailey, 1991). Bailey (1980) kept her journal during a ten-week French reading course at UCLA and discovered three findings. First, social and physical environment affects her attitude. She had a better attitude toward language learning when the class environment was improved. Second, the teacher’s democratic teaching style made her more enthusiastic about

language learning. Finally, the teacher's positive feedback to students led to students' eagerness in learning the target language.

Bailey (1983) also kept a diary during the university French class and found that anxiety related to competitiveness. She started highly anxious and competitive, but the level of anxiety and competitiveness was decreased after she became more proficient than her classmates. She concludes that language learners' anxiety can be caused by the competitiveness when they compare their proficiency to their peers' language proficiency.

Butler (1982, pp. 76-77) asked 64 students to keep their journals as a requirement of a three-week writing course. The emphasis is on 'privacy' as shown in the instructions below.

Keep a private journal...of twenty entries...Allow from ten to twenty minutes for each entry. Write about anything you want, knowing that you will not be required to show your journal to anyone. The privacy of your journal is guaranteed absolutely.

Students were asked to evaluate their journals on "J. Day" when they finished writing the twenty entries, using the following criteria:

1. Quantity: How much did you write?
How frequently? How regularly?
2. Variety: Which topics did you choose?
Did you shift topics?
3. Depth: What sorts of topics seem most intense?
Which topic shows most insight?
4. Interest: Which entries are most interesting to re-read?
5. Value: How valuable has the journal been to you?
Is the journal worth preserving?

Butler suggests that self-evaluation of students' own journals can be part of written assessments based on holistic scales. Their comments also shed light on the value of journal writing. Twenty-six students express positive statements that writing journals is an "enjoyable and exciting" experience

(Butler, 1982, p. 78) while only four students have negative comments such as noting lack of structure, which leads to laziness, having no private place and time to let the writing flow, and believing that playing harp is a better way to express feeling. However, the main purpose of the self-evaluation is to make students realize how much they have achieved. From the analysis of their journals, twenty-one students realized that their writing ability had improved; as one student says "I am able to write and ... writing can be enjoyable" (Butler, 1982, p. 81).

Similarly, Marefat (2002) asked 80 Iranian EFL students who were taking a writing course to keep their journals to reflect on classroom events, teaching materials and the teacher. The subjects were asked to write on their journals for 5-10 minutes at the end of each session for 13 sessions. Marefat (2002, p. 107) gave his students the following instruction before they wrote their journals:

You are asked to write your reactions to class events, other students, the teacher, specific exercises, what you found most / least useful? Most/least enjoyable? Anything you want to remember or explore? You may include your problems, your suggestions and your questions. Write freely and in any form you wish. Don't worry about spelling, grammar or correctness. Do take risks and get your voice on paper. I read for ideas only and no grades for that. In looser framework, write about your reactions to in-class / out-of-class activities, your problem and what you've learnt.

Marefat finds that students are happier to write without "worrying" about grammar; and they are more aware of the reader they are communicating with. He recommends leaving grammar behind at the first stages of writing. He confirms that the analysis of students' journals reveals students' areas of difficulty and interests. The analysis shows that students need simpler texts, appreciate peer connection and enjoy 'realistic' class discussions, all of which result in better writing. The findings lead to syllabus and material revisions which improve the teaching and learning of writing.

Beside language learners, students in other disciplines can benefit from

keeping journals as well. Selfe and Arbabi (1986) experimented with 35 engineering students at Michigan Technological University. These students had to write one page a week in their journals throughout a ten-week quarter. They were asked to write about their reaction to the teaching and learning of the course. They were graded on “how seriously” the task was undertaken and “how regularly” the task was done instead of on content, grammar or spelling. Another control group of students, who were not writing journals, was used for comparison. The writers’ first impression on journal writing is negative because it is time consuming. However, after regular journal writing, they realize how writing could help them think and solve problems besides helping them learn and understand technical content. They also think journal writing promotes better relationships between students and teachers. Questions, comments and feedback were included and covered throughout the quarter. The study reaches five conclusions about students in the experimental group as follows:

1. They had more writing practice.
2. They could write more coherent, organized and complete assignments at the end of the course.
3. They revealed more information concerning the teaching and learning process to the teacher interactively.
4. They gave more complete information about their background, engineering experiences and progress to the teacher.
5. They could participate in continuous dialogue and receive positive feedback from the teacher throughout the quarter.

Selfe and Arbabi recommend that giving feedback will not be burdensome if journals are collected only three times during the ten-week quarter. Journals are also graded on a pass / fail basis.

In the same year Selfe, Peterson and Nahrgang (1986) also did another experiment on a mathematics class at Michigan Technological University to see the effects of journal writing on these students. The two research questions are, first, whether journal writing helps students learn and understand math

concepts better and, second, whether journal writing affects their attitude toward math concepts and writing. There are three groups of students and two teachers participating in the study as shown in the following:

Section 1 (N = 30)	Section 2 (N = 24)	Section 3 (N = 28)
Journals and tests	Quizzes and tests	Tests
Teacher 1	Teacher 1	Teacher 2

(Selfe, Peterson, Nahrgang, 1986, p. 194)

Thirty students in the experimental group have to write twenty – four journal entries within a ten-week quarter. Information is collected from five sources including content exams, student attitude survey, writing apprehension tests, journals and open-ended comments so as to get more subtle effects of journal writing.

1. Content exams: 5 one-hour exams, every two weeks, based on geometry and calculus concepts given to all three sections.
2. Student attitude survey: a 25-item attitude questionnaire given to all students at the beginning and the end of the quarter.
3. Writing apprehension test: a 26- item test designed to measure student anxiety level at the beginning and at the end of the quarter.
4. Journals: only the experimental groups to be used as evidence for thinking and problem– solving skills.
5. Open – ended comments: both the teacher and students in the experimental group will give comments on the use of journals at the end of the course.

The teachers, the students and the researchers who participated in this experiment had their own opinions about journal writing. The teachers see three positive effects of having students write journals as expressed in the open – ended comments as follows:

1. Writing about math concepts and problems helped register those concepts in student's mind.

2. Putting the math concepts in writing reinforce students' confidence in solving problems and participating in class discussion.
3. Journals are also evidence of an evaluation of students' progress.

Students themselves also express their opinions to the open-ended question as shown below:

1. Writing about concepts in math helps students "think" about them and earlier concepts.
2. Journals are 'reflections' on classroom experiences.
3. Writing journals helps students understand math better, remember more completely what happened in class and provide better strategy and explanation for the next math courses.

The researchers have six conclusions from the experiment.

1. Students in both control and experimental groups performed equally well.
2. There was no change in students' attitude about writing in the experimental group.
3. Writing journals doesn't reduce students' anxiety.
4. Some students in the experimental group use journals to help them learn about math concepts and problem solving.
5. The teacher of the experimental group thinks journal writing is beneficial in helping students understand and solve math concepts and problems.
6. Generally, students in the experimental group have positive feeling about keeping journals.

Advantages and Limitations of Journal Writing

Journal writing has many advantages as well as some limitations as mentioned by many researchers. Gaies (1983) refers to three advantages of qualitative research method such as journal writing. First, this method allows adequate investigation of the learning process even from quiet students. Second, it gives insights into students' thinking processes involved in learning

experiences. Third, it generates discovery about variables involved in the teaching and learning processes. Matsumoto (1987) also agrees with Gaies that journal writing has been used for the last twenty years to explore aspects of classroom teaching and learning that the empirical researcher doesn't permit accurate investigation. Schmidt and Frota (1985) did a case study of a language learner who kept journals and found that journals provide insight into language learning processes which cannot be easily attained in any other ways.

Studied as qualitative research method, journals have many advantages. Matsumoto (1987, pp. 24-26) thinks diary/ journal study has five advantages as follows:

1. It provides detailed description of various aspects of the teaching and learning processes over a period of time.
2. It both "generates new hypotheses" and "discovers new variables" involved in a language classroom.
3. It deals with "natural" classroom data generated from participants themselves instead of from observers.
4. It reveals "unobservable" aspects of classroom experience including psychological variables such as learning strategies.
5. It is not only a research tool but it can be used for other purposes such as self-evaluation, self-improvement or therapy.

Nunan (2001) agrees with Porter et al. (1990) who point out that diary study has the following benefits.

1. Students can express their opinions on course content.
2. It encourages autonomous learners. Students will be responsible for their own learning.
3. Students gain confidence and insights from corresponding with the teacher.
4. Students' journals promote "more productive" class discussion.
5. Students are encouraged to connect the course content and the teaching and learning processes.
6. Journals encourage out-of-class interaction between teachers and students

and among students themselves.

7. Journals emphasize process rather than product.

Along the same line, Rossetti (1998) thinks that diaries develop creativity, improve self-expression, provide a means for personal growth and need investigation. Genesee and Upshur (2002) also agree that journal conversations encourage literacy skills such as topic initiation and variety, audience awareness, creativity and independence in writing, grammar and language functions. They also recommend using journals as part of an evaluation for the following reasons:

1. Student journals reveal insights about the teaching and learning processes.
2. Students' involvement in the learning process leads to collaborative goal-setting and assessment criteria.
3. Knowing the criteria promotes students' better judgment on their own learning.
4. Students' journals help teachers provide student-centered instruction.

Moreover, Butler (1982, p. 79) finds that students see journal writing as "therapy" or a means of "unwinding and relaxation" and "an outlet of frustration and tension."

Despite many advantages in using journal writing, there are also some limitations in using journals in the teaching and learning processes or as a researcher tool. Many researchers agree that reading journals can be tiring and burdensome. Wallace (1998) suggests that teachers or researchers can focus on fewer issues at a time so as not to become too "fatigued". Genesee and Upshur (2002) recommend some alternatives such as peer response or group discussions to lessen the teachers' burden.

The other limitation concerning journal writing is the problems of generalizability, reliability and validity (Matsumoto, 1987; Nunan, 2001). Matsumoto (p. 27) cites three problems of diary study as follows:

1. It cannot be generalized because it deals with an individual account in a specific circumstance.
2. It is burdensome for the journal keepers because they have to both study the language and keep the journal about the learning as well.
3. It is time consuming for the researcher to interpret and analyze data.

Matsumoto states that including many cases in the study will solve the problem of generalizability. More researchers should participate in order to avoid only one subjective judgment in data analysis and interpretation so as to gain more reliable results. To achieve validity, "precise" description and measurement of variables could be done through "non-threatening" learning environment. Besides, journals can be supplemented by other qualitative methods such as questionnaires or interviews. She finally suggests that by utilizing more subjects and data quantification will lead to generalizable, valid and reliable findings.

Guidelines for Journal Writing

Bailey (1983, pp. 72-73) suggests that a diary study includes five activities.

1. The writer provides personal account of the language learning.
2. The writer records details or feeling about the learning in a confidential diary.
3. The journal information can be made accessible for public use by appropriate changes such as deletion of names.
4. The researcher looks for recurring pattern from data analysis.
5. The researcher interprets or discusses important findings about language learning or teaching experience.

Genesee and Upshur (2002, pp. 123-124) recommends the following guidelines especially when journals are used as methods of collecting information for evaluation.

1. There should be separate books for journals. They can be electronic

journals if computers are available.

2. Journal writing should be students' routine writing, preferably in-class writing.
3. Teachers should collect and read students' journals on a regular basis so that students do not think of them as another empty writing exercise.
4. Give some instructions to start with to ease possible difficulties at the beginning. The purpose of writing should be clear.
5. Encourage students to write about both success and difficulties in the learning process.
6. Allow time for students to proceed slowly at the beginning to develop confidence in writing on their own and independently.
7. Try to avoid judgmental or evaluative comments to encourage students' confidence.
8. Help students interpret their own feedback and decide on actions in response to it.

Journals can give insights into students writing abilities if the writing is free flowing and spontaneous which means students should be allowed to write without worrying too much about grammar. When journal entries are routinely made, they reveal the writers' continuous development. Thus, journals should not be highly structured. Moreover, non-judgmental feedback from teachers is essential to encourage the interactive and conversational nature of journals.

Ethical Concerns

Since students might express their disturbing feeling and concerns in the journal, confidentiality is essential. As Butler (1982) mentioned that some students used journals as "an outlet of frustration and tension" or a "therapy" to unwind and relax, teachers' suggestive and sympathetic feedback will be beneficial to students' writing development.

METHODOLOGY

Subjects

Three groups of students participated in the study. These students wrote their journals in English.

Group I: Forty-one students from the Faculties of Dentistry and Pharmaceutical Science

Group II: Thirty-seven students from the Faculties of Pharmaceutical Science and Veterinary Science

Group III: Fifty students from the Faculty of Radiological Therapy

However, only thirty students from Group I, fifteen students from Group II, and forty students from Group III volunteered to keep their diaries in Thai to express their comments on writing journal in English.

Procedures

Three groups of students participated in the study. The first group consists of 41 students from the Faculties of Dentistry and Pharmaceutical Science. The second group comprises 37 students from the Faculties of Pharmaceutical Science and Veterinary Science. The third group is composed of 50 students from the Faculty of Radiological Therapy. The reason we chose to study these groups of students was because we taught them which made it feasible to do this study. Administratively, it is very inconvenient to collect data from other people's students. It might result in having incomplete data for the study.

Each student was asked to write her/his journal in English, for ten minutes each day, for twenty days. For the first ten days they started with daily routines and, after 5 days, moved from routines to writing about any topics they wanted. After the first period of ten days, these students were asked to

get the average number of words they could write for each ten-minute period. Then they had to “set goals,” which meant they had to set the next average number of words they could or wished to accomplish for the next ten times of journal writing.

During the next ten days, they continued to write about any topics of their own interest on condition that they had to think about organization as well. The time limit was still the same which was ten minutes each time. After finishing the second set of writing, each student calculated the average number of words they could write. Then they could compare the two “average” numbers and the goal set earlier to see how much they achieved. They will know how many percents their fluency increases or decreases.

As for accuracy, students were asked to type the first-ten-day of their journals into the computers. Then the journals would be printed out with all the mistakes underlined with the “red” and the “green” lines as appeared on the computer screen. These mistakes would be counted and recorded as “computer” mistakes. Then students tried to correct their own mistakes in the computers until there were few or no “red” and “green” lines of mistakes. The corrected version of journals would be printed out and handed in to the teachers so that other mistakes would be underlined. Students would count and record these underlined mistakes as “teacher” mistakes. The “computer” and the “teacher” mistakes would be added to make students’ overall mistakes. Students would again try to correct their “teacher” mistakes by writing the correct words above the underlined mistakes. Then the teacher would check whether students’ corrections were right or wrong by putting ✓ or X for each correction. After getting the journal back from the teacher, students would count the mistakes left uncorrected and record them. Finally, students could compare “overall” mistakes to the number of mistakes they could correct by themselves with the guidance of the computer and the teacher. The result would indicate how much more accurate their writing would be after they tried to correct the mistakes themselves.

After students were through with all the calculation to measure their writing fluency and accuracy, volunteer students were asked to write their diaries in

Thai for 1 to 3 times to express their opinions on writing journals in English.

Questionnaires with 5 Likert scales were piloted with 45 students before being used with the participants in the study.

RESULTS

Data collected from students' journals, in their portfolio, were tabulated to show their fluency and accuracy. The fluency was calculated using the following format.

$$\frac{\text{average no. of words}(2^{\text{nd}} \text{ time}) - \text{average no. of words}(1^{\text{st}} \text{ time})}{\text{average no. of words}(1^{\text{st}} \text{ time})} \times 100 = \text{fluency \%}$$

The accuracy was calculated using the following format.

$$\frac{\text{mistakes collected}}{\text{overall mistakes}} \times 100 = \text{accuracy \%}$$

(from computer & teacher guidance)

Another set of data collected from questionnaires was analyzed quantitatively by using a software program. The last set of data derived from participants' diaries written in Thai was analyzed qualitatively.

The Results from the Journal

Writing Fluency

Almost all the students from three groups get higher percentage of writing fluency. The average percentage of writing fluency of Group 1, 2 and 3 is about 42.73%, 37.95% and 26.01% respectively. However, only few students from Group 1 and Group 3 have lower percentage -0.6%, -0.8%, -27.5% as shown in Table 1 and Figure 1.

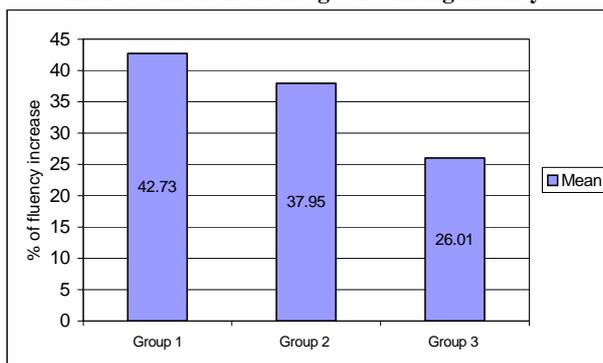
TABLE 1
Percentage of Fluency Increase (Percentage Rearrangement: Highest to Lowest)

Student Number	Group 1 (DT, PY)			Group 2 (PY, VS)			Group 3 (RT)		
	AV No. of Words 1	AV No. of Words 2	% of fluency increase	AV No. of Words 1	AV No. of Words 2	% of fluency increase	AV No. of Words 1	AV No. of Words 2	% of fluency increase
1	79.9	185.1	131.6	69.7	168.0	141.0	62.9	115.8	84.1
2	96.1	183.2	90.6	68.2	150.6	120.8	58.0	104.0	79.3
3	83.2	155.2	86.5	55.6	122.5	120.0	57.8	97.7	69.0
4	50.0	91.0	82.0	190.5	238.5	107.3	110.0	180.0	63.6
5	79.7	140.9	76.8	97.3	158.0	62.4	63.3	98.4	55.5
6	62.4	108.0	73.9	77.0	118.0	53.0	91.8	132.4	44.2
7	65.3	111.0	70.0	123.1	187.9	52.6	67.0	95.7	42.8
8	70.8	118.0	66.7	78.4	117.8	50.3	110.0	157.0	42.7
9	107.3	176.3	64.3	107.7	159.9	48.8	140.2	199.6	42.4
10	99.4	156.6	57.5	91.3	135.3	48.2	56.0	76.0	35.7
11	78.4	123.3	57.3	117.7	174.2	48.0	70.9	96.0	35.4
12	103.5	160.7	55.3	144.6	205.9	42.4	108.0	146.0	35.2
13	42.3	65.3	54.4	66.1	90.7	37.2	57.0	75.4	32.3
14	72.7	111.8	53.8	112.7	154.2	36.8	80.6	106.6	32.3
15	109.9	165.4	51.5	112.2	150.4	34.1	75.7	100.0	32.1
16	108.0	159.9	48.1	64.3	83.4	29.7	64.0	84.3	31.7
17	72.0	106.2	47.5	93.2	119.4	28.1	60.8	79.9	31.4
18	77.9	114.5	47.0	70.6	90.2	27.8	61.0	78.8	29.2
19	66.5	95.9	44.2	102.2	128.0	26.0	141.8	178.1	25.6
20	75.4	108.0	43.2	109.0	135.6	24.4	123.2	153.6	24.7
21	75.6	105.3	39.3	91.3	113.3	24.1	85.0	106.0	24.7
22	85.6	118.5	38.4	79.0	99.0	22.2	103.5	127.8	23.5
23	74.9	101.0	34.9	111.4	136.0	22.1	94.0	115.0	22.3
24	61.9	82.0	32.5	166.0	200.0	20.5	84.5	103.2	22.1
25	86.1	113.9	32.3	100.9	120.4	19.3	79.1	95.6	20.9
26	83.0	107.0	29.0	138.0	162.0	17.4	112.0	135.0	20.5
27	51.5	65.3	26.8	140.4	164.6	17.2	84.6	100.4	18.7
28	137.0	168.0	22.6	214.0	249.0	16.4	65.0	76.0	16.9
29	120.1	144.4	20.2	157.6	180.5	14.5	78.5	91.2	16.2
30	100.0	119.5	19.5	143.0	161.5	12.9	89.5	103.6	15.8
31	100.2	119.7	19.5	114.4	127.4	11.4	89.0	103.0	15.3

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32	105.8	125.9	19.0	112.3	124.7	11.0	60.0	69.0	15.0
33	72.7	85.3	17.3	60.0	98.0	7.9	150.0	172.0	14.7
34	92.8	107.7	16.1	128.0	119.0	7.0	119.8	137.0	14.4
35	125.0	132.9	13.8	120.9	122.4	2.5	59.0	67.5	14.4
36	94.8	104.9	10.7	92.7	93.5	0.9	98.0	111.0	13.3
37	51.1	55.0	7.6	0	0	0	93.0	105.0	13.0
38	89.2	94.1	5.5				93.0	105.0	12.9
39	114.1	115.4	1.1				74.0	82.0	10.8
40	104.5	105.4	0.9				92.0	101.7	10.5
41	147.4	146.5	-0.6				136.6	150.9	10.5
42							107.0	117.0	9.4
43							70.6	77.0	9.1
44							120.0	126.0	5.0
45							127.0	132.0	4.0
46							137.0	142.0	3.6
47							94.2	95.9	1.8
48							59.9	60.0	0.2
49							130.5	120.0	-0.8
50							138.8	100.6	-27.5
Mean			42.73			37.95			26.01

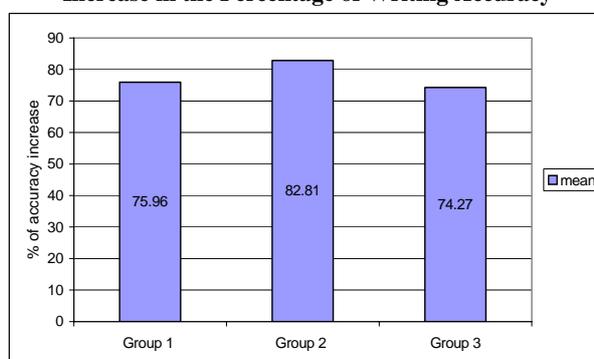
FIGURE 1
Increase in the Percentage of Writing Fluency



Writing Accuracy

As a whole, the percentage of writing accuracy of most students from every group is quite high with the average percentage of about 75.96%, 82.81% and 74.27% as shown in Figure 2.

FIGURE 2
Increase in the Percentage of Writing Accuracy



The Results from the Questionnaires

One hundred and fifteen students from four faculties responded to the questionnaire. The questionnaire is divided into five parts. Part I is about “writing ability” in general. All respondents agree that writing journals increases their overall writing skills. They can write accurately and fluently with correct spelling and clarity in meaning. Part II focuses on learning strategies. All respondents agree that they have better learning strategies. They can correct their own errors. They are more confident in using self-directed learning and have life-long learning skills. They can self-assess, reflect on their own progress, have better computer skills, and realize that multiple drafts lead to a better final draft. Part III concentrates on other benefits resulting from writing journals in English. All respondents also agree that journal writing also yields other benefits such as reducing tension from

studying too hard or other problems, increasing computer skills, encouraging students to find new information from other sources, and helping students to review other subjects as it becomes information for students to write about in their journals. Moreover, the systematic way of writing journals which includes correcting their own errors and calculating their fluency and accuracy, step by step procedures, makes them become autonomous learners. Part IV asks the respondents to decide what/who is the most helpful in assisting them to correct their errors. The choices are the learner, their peers, the teacher, grammar books and dictionaries. Most respondents, 33%, think the teacher is the most helpful in pointing out their errors. 27.83% think they can correct their own errors. 25.22% think their classmates are helpful. Grammar books and dictionaries are moderately helpful. Part V is provided for respondents to express their opinion freely on writing journals in English. Their responses can be concluded as follows.

1. Positive attitude towards writing journals
 - a) There is more English environment when students have to write in English everyday.
 - b) Journal writing should be done everyday in all courses from the beginning to the end of the course.
 - c) Students are willing to go on writing their journals in English even after completing English courses.
 - d) Students realize that they, not only teachers, should be responsible for their own writing.
2. Negative comments towards writing journals
 - a) Writing journals everyday can be burdensome especially before the examination.
 - b) Some students, especially those who are not ready to be autonomous learners, think that teachers should give feedback, immediately and constantly, after each journal entry is written and correct all the mistakes right away.

The Results from Participants' Diaries

There were 30 students from Group I (DT, PY), 15 students from Group II (PY, VS), and 40 students from group II (RT) who wrote their diaries, in Thai, to express their opinions on writing journals in English. Their diaries were read and analyzed. Our conclusions are as follows.

Writing Journals in English Encourage Autonomous Learners

Students can write on their own. They think about the topics to write about. They do research when they do not know what to write about. They can correct their own mistakes. When they cannot or do not know how to correct their mistakes, they do research, they consult a dictionary or a grammar book or talk to other people such as their classmates or friends from other groups or faculties. They also apply “how to set goals” in studying other subjects as well.

Writing Journals in English Increases Students' Fluency and Accuracy

When students were asked to write their journals in English, they were upset at first because they had never tried it before. So the researcher told them to start with their daily routines. After repeating daily routines for a while, they could let it flow out easily. Then it was time to write about something else. With the same amount of time, they said they could write more. By the end of twenty days, they had satisfactory feeling that they could write more fluently than at the beginning. After correcting their own mistakes with the guidance of the computer and the teacher, these participants were assured that their writing accuracy would be improved.

Writing Journals in English Increases English Proficiency in General

As far as writing skill is concerned, participants realize that they have

richer vocabularies, better organization, more accurate grammar, more complex sentence structures, various cohesion strategies and more efficient use of dictionary and grammar books. In addition, most stopped their translation habit. Some students, when asked to keep their journals in English, started doing it in Thai and then translated into English. As they went along, they changed and stopped writing in Thai. They started writing in English and realize that they could do it more smoothly and fluently. They ended up thinking that writing in English is not "that difficult." Some students started reading English books when they did not know what to write about. And they intend to go on reading out of curiosity even after journal writing stopped. Some students realize that they could understand English they have listened to as well. Writing journals probably helps lead their attention to the latent English environment existing around them daily. Having to write in English each day also expands the environment or chances to use English in their life.

Writing Journals in English Leads to Self-reflection, Evaluation and Improvement

Participants realize that they need a number of skills to be able to write well. They know that their grammar needs to be improved, their vocabulary list is limited, and that they need writing practice. After reflecting on these limitations, they try to highlight their own problems and come up with better writing. For example, some participants realize that they had repetitive mistakes on choice of tense used to talk about past events. So they corrected all the main verbs by using past tense. From then on they intend to use past tense for past events. Thus their reflection leads to self-evaluation and finally improvement. The improvement is not only limit to writing in English but also applies to their learning strategy. Some of these participants realize that at the end of each day, upon writing their journals, they have time to think of what has happened during the whole day and ponder how their behaviors and choice can be corrected or improved. And as far as other subjects are concerned, these participants think that writing about those subjects in their journals is a good way to review those subjects, especially since they enlarge

their field-related vocabularies. One participant said “reading is not enough, we have to think, analyze, memorize and revise what’s learnt. Writing is an important skill in revising the subject knowledge.” Some participants said writing journals also generates a “systematic thinking process.” They train themselves to think logically and systematically during the writing process. That leads to better organization, not only in writing but also in learning other subjects as well. In other words, they can also apply a systematic learning strategy to other subjects and learn better in those areas as well.

Writing Journals in English Promotes Confidence and Positive Attitude towards Using and Studying English

Participants are more confident in using English after finishing writing their journals. At the beginning they didn’t know how to write and what to write about. They were much concerned that they could write well and would make too many mistakes. But when the teacher told them to start with daily routines and ignored grammatical mistakes for awhile and let “words of thoughts flow out,” they began to write. The more they write, the longer and the more fluent they become. They finally concluded that writing in English is not “that difficult.” One participant even ends up thinking that English is easier than the Thai language. Some participants were disappointed when they were told to stop writing at the end of the semester and intended to continue writing their journal in English in the future. They also recommend that English teachers use journal writing with other groups of students as well because they think it is a very good practice that helps them gain confidence in using English, not only in writing but also in speaking to foreigners and reading books in English.

Writing Journals in English also has the Additional Benefit of Increasing Computer and Typing Skills

Participants can use computers and type better after writing their journals.

They also know how to use computers to help correct their writing in English by allowing them to see the mistakes and showing that those mistakes are corrected. Computers also provide information for participants when they do not know what to write about, they can get all kinds of topics and information from the Internet. Besides, their navigational skills are improved after using computers to find needed information as well as typing in both English and in Thai.

Writing Journals in English is also a Good Way to Spend their Time

Some participants think writing journal can be “entertaining” when they think about funny subjects to write about; and it can be a “hobby” as well as “educational.” One participant said she had a better relationship with her friends after writing journals. After trying to correct her mistakes, she couldn't correct all of them and tried to get help from her friends. After helping each other through the whole period of writing, they became better friends. So she thinks her time is better spent. Besides, one participant said that writing a journal at the end of each day helps refresh and retain memories. Another participant realizes that, as her number of words increases each ten minutes, her ten minutes are worth spending.

DISCUSSION AND SUGGESTIONS

Since this is only a pilot study, the research findings cannot be generalized. The research which includes representative' samples from each faculty at Mahidol University should be included. All teachers teaching within each section of each course should participate and share their opinions when analyzing the student journals and diaries so that the result will be less subjective, and, thus, be valid and reliable. The data that can be quantified should be done as exemplified in the first part of this research when the writing accuracy and fluency are calculated. The following suggestions

should be carried out:

1. Representative samples from each faculty whose students take Introductory University English courses should be included so as to be able to generalize the findings, as also suggested by Nunan (2001).
2. All teachers teaching the same courses should participate in the study.
3. Each student should keep their journals from the beginning to the end of the semester continually, except for one week before the mid-term examination and another week before the final examination. This arrangement will help lessen students' worry when they have to prepare for their examination.
4. To lessen the "burden" of the teacher, peer collaboration should be encouraged, as also suggested by Genesee and Upshur (2002). Some student journals, which can be shared in public, could be discussed with their peers provided that students are told in advance which journals will remain can be private and which ones will be shared in peer discussions. Students can help check each other's journals as far as grammar, spelling, punctuation or clarity are concerned. They can also check their friends' calculation of writing accuracy and fluency table before the end of the course after each student completes his/her own calculation.
5. Journal writing should be included as part of the course evaluation in order that students' productive skills such as writing can be evaluated. Journal writing is an excellent means of measuring writing ability as each student makes progress gradually along the writing continuum.
6. Students can be encouraged to write about field-related topics to familiarize themselves with the technical terms as they are practicing writing in English.
7. Students, as well as teachers, should be trained to be autonomous learners and teachers as shown in the result from the questionnaire that most students still think teachers are most helpful in correcting most of their mistakes. However, there is a good sign that these students can work independently. The researchers are confident that these students can be trained to be autonomous learners if they are given a chance.
8. New technology such as software programs should be developed to enable students to correct more mistakes on their own.

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Boosting Students' Autonomy as well as Writing Accuracy and Fluency through Journal Writing

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