

***Improving Korean University Student  
EFL Academic Writing with Contrastive Rhetoric:  
Teacher Conferencing and Peer Response Can Help\****

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The field of Contrastive Rhetoric has existed as a discipline within ESL/EFL composition studies for the past forty years. Nevertheless, this article is one of the first to report the findings of a research study testing the effectiveness of specific pedagogical techniques (teacher conferencing and peer response) for delivering contrastive rhetoric-oriented instruction in an English composition classroom. The results of this study hold important implications for EFL university writing (especially in East-Asia), contrastive rhetoric-oriented instruction, and composition studies in terms of further delineating the effectiveness of teacher conferencing and peer response in English composition classrooms.

This study was conducted at Handong Global University in Pohang, South Korea in Spring 2004. In this study, the teaching treatment of reinforcing contrastive rhetoric-oriented writing instruction conducted in classroom lecture with contrastive rhetoric-oriented writing instruction rendered in teacher conferences and peer response groups helped lower-level Korean university writers make significantly better improvement in their essay writing (as measured by pretest/posttest results) when compared to their control group peers, who only received contrastive rhetoric-oriented writing instruction through classroom lectures, discussions, and written feedback on essays. The current article expands on the original findings in an attempt to explain more precisely the effectiveness of

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\* The core findings of this study were presented at the 4th Hawaiian International Conference on Education on January 6, 2006.

teacher conferencing and peer response in this study.

Forty years ago, Kaplan (1966) pioneered the field of contrastive rhetoric in an attempt to help students who were writing in English as their second language to compose better academic essays. After analyzing over 600 essays, Kaplan (1966) described general rhetorical patterns for five different culture groups including, English / linear; Semitic / parallel; “Oriental” / indirect (spiraling outward); Romance & Russian / digressive. In addition, it was his conclusion that transfer of these preferred patterns of first language (L1) rhetoric into English often led to instructor criticism of even advanced ESL student writing. As Kaplan (1966, p. 4) put it, the academic English compositions of second language writers, even those writers of advanced English proficiency, “often seem out of focus” when first language (L1) rhetorical patterns are transferred into their English writing.

Kaplan’s (1966) original work was soundly criticized, largely for overgeneralizing, especially in applying the controversial term “Oriental” to all of Asia. Nevertheless, subsequent research has largely substantiated his findings that a widely used rhetorical pattern emphasizing indirectness exists in the English writings of students who come from East-Asia: China, Japan, and Korea. Compelling evidence has been found to suggest that many university level students from the aforementioned East-Asian countries prefer reading and writing essays that conform to the general rhetorical pattern representing their first language and culture (Chu, Swaffar, & Charnay, 2002; Eggington, 1987; Hinds, 1983, 1987, 1990) as identified by Kaplan (1966). Moreover, the rhetorical differences between the L1 and English have been found to interfere with reading comprehension (Chu, Swaffar, & Charnay, 2002; Eggington, 1987; Walker, 2004, 2005, 2006b) and also negatively impact how East-Asian student writing is evaluated by native readers of English (Hinds, 1983, 1987, 1990; Kaplan, 1966; Liebman, 1988; Matalene, 1985; Reid, 1989; Walker, 2004, 2005, 2006a). Although it is a very interesting topic, it is beyond the scope of this article to fully delineate all of

the ways in which contrastive rhetoric impacts second language reading and writing. Rich discussions of these issues may be found in several sources already in print (Atkinson, 2004; Casanave, 2004; Connor, 1997; 2002; 2004; Leki, 1992, 1997; Walker, 2004).

The focus of this writing, then, is to conduct a more detailed examination of the positive effects that contrastive rhetoric-oriented writing instruction, reinforced by teacher conferencing and peer response, can have in a university level English composition course. For the purpose of this article, contrastive rhetoric-oriented writing instruction may be defined as writing instruction for ESL or EFL students that focuses on comparing and contrasting the similarities and differences between the rhetoric of both the first language and the target language when teaching the second language learner how to organize and develop an English composition for a western academic audience. Such comparisons may be initiated by introducing students to research-based observations of culturally influenced rhetorical features of academic writing as a starting point for initiating student-centered discussions in intercultural rhetoric (See Appendix C).

Once students are familiar with those general features of rhetoric, students may then be turned into ethnographers as Liebman (1988) did in her study of Kaplan (1966) in order to see if those received parameters of rhetoric apply to the students' first language writing. If so, the question then becomes, do the rhetorical patterns students use in academic writing in their first language transfer into English, and how would that transfer impact the perceived rhetorical quality of the English academic essays these students write? Connor (2004) has also more recently recommended the ethnographic approach for contrastive rhetoric studies. Turning students into ethnographers in this way allows for rich, student-centered discussions of intercultural rhetoric and also helps to alleviate much of the concern that postmodernists have raised in their claims that contrastive rhetoric studies have been too text-based, overgeneralized and overly-fixated on received notions of culture (Atkinson, 2004; Connor, 2004). As Atkinson (2004) observed, culture is not limited to received notions of national culture that have been transmitted

historically from generation to generation, but is dynamic and complex and may be discussed on many levels, for example, national, classroom, academic, and youth.

Although one must be careful when applying contrastive rhetoric-oriented instruction to avoid oversimplifying the writing process of international students, a fair amount of evidence supports the conclusions that different rhetorical patterns that are culturally specific exist and adherence to L1 preferred patterns may cause a significant number of non-native writers of English difficulty when their academic essays are read and evaluated by native English speaking audiences (Chu, Swaffar, & Charnay, 2002; Eggington, 1987; Hinds, 1983, 1987, 1990; Kaplan, 1966; Reid, 1989; Walker, 2004, 2005, 2006a; Yang, 2004). In addition, it has been further noted that writing skills do transfer across languages (Cumming, 1989; Hall, 1990). Thus, it stands to reason that students who have been strongly influenced by received notions of rhetoric in their first language writing may benefit from having the cultural expectations of academic audiences in the target language delineated and discussed in contrastive terms, scaffolding what they already know about rhetoric from their first language to the new knowledge they must learn about the rhetorical preferences of the target audience. This could enable second language learners to better understand what is expected of them when they write academic essays in the target language.

It further stands to reason that capitalizing on the educational benefits of scaffolding and raising awareness of potential first and second language rhetorical differences in academic writing may help second language teachers better understand their students as well as allow ESL/EFL learners to more precisely comprehend the adjustments that they may need to make when writing academic essays for the target audience (Eggington, 1987; Ferris & Hedgcock, 1998; Haley & Austin, 2004; Harklau, 1999; Kaplan, 1988; Leki, 1992; Matsuda, 1997; Yang, 2004). It was largely in this manner that the contrastive rhetoric-oriented writing instruction discussed in the following study conducted at Handong Global University in Pohang, South Korea was implemented.

## Teacher Conferencing

The research, though mainly conducted in L1 settings, informs us that teacher conferences make great forums for facilitating student higher order thinking, building struggling students' confidence, and reinforcing principles of English rhetoric taught in the classroom (Carnicelli, 1980; Jacobs & Karliner, 1977; Oye, 1993; Patthey-Chavez & Ferris, 1997; Walker, 2004, 2005, 2006a). It has been well documented in L1 composition research that even native English speaking college freshmen, immersed in an English culture from birth, often have difficulty adjusting to the academic standards and expectations, the rhetoric of the university (Bartholomae, 1985). This begs the question: If native English-speaking students have difficulty acquiring the academic rhetoric of their own first language, how much more difficulty would non-native English writers have learning it? Although it is widely agreed by composition specialists that writing an essay for a target audience is essential to becoming a good writer, many native English-speaking students write in egocentric fashion, leaving out many important developmental details that make papers difficult for readers to comprehend.

The tendency to write in such a way is known as writer-based prose (Flower, 1979). Writer-based prose, left unrevised in the final draft of an essay, presents a serious problem in English academic essay writing because it leaves important ideas largely undeveloped and significant, controversial arguments insufficiently supported. In addition, writer-based compositions are often lacking completeness of information that leave their audiences confused. Such essays are not reader-friendly from the perspective of American English academic audiences to say the least. Conversely, writer-based prose may not be problematic in some other cultures. John Hinds (1983, 1987, 1990) has identified Japanese, for example, as possessing a writer-based rhetoric, which means the reader bears the responsibility for interpreting the writer's intention, even if that intention is only indirectly stated. The writer versus reader based typology could provide an additional difficulty for Japanese writers of English, which might be aided by additional reinforcement of

discussions on intercultural differences in rhetoric through one-to-one teacher conferencing and/or small group work in peer response activities.

However, as the literacy reporter for Jacobs and Karliner (1977, p. 489) put it, “Their problem isn’t grammar; it’s thinking.” This reference was to college freshmen who were native writers of English. How much more difficulty, then, would non-natives of English have discerning a foreign academic rhetoric and culture? Many ESL/EFL writing programs make the mistake of putting too much focus on grammar and form at the expense of paying insufficient attention to rhetorical issues. This lack of attention paid to rhetorical issues may be contributing to the English writing deficiencies that have led Kaplan (1966, p. 4) and others to describe the writing of even advanced ESL/EFL writers as being “out of focus.”

As Eggington (1987) indicated, students in Korea at the secondary and tertiary levels are often lacking explicit instruction in rhetoric in both Korean and English. This causes many Korean students great difficulties in moving back and forth between ESL/EFL composition and writing in Korean. Succinctly stated, these students often painfully find their writing criticized in both languages. First, they are frequently told that their English writing is “illogical” when they initially start writing for American academic audiences as they study overseas or take English composition courses with American instructors in Korea. Then, if these Korean students study English for an extended period of time, especially in an overseas ESL environment, they usually eventually learn English rhetoric, often implicitly. In many cases, those Korean students who learn the mores of English rhetoric implicitly, through the crucible of trial and error, then become so accustomed to English rhetoric that they make the *faux pas* of transferring it back into their Korean writing, perhaps unwittingly. This often results in many professionals and scholars, who were well educated overseas, being told that they do not know how to write in Korean by their own native Korean audiences (Eggington, 1987; Reid, 1989).

Teacher conferencing represents a venue where struggling students gain confidence (Oye, 1993), and experts guide novices through the writing

process and assist them in making better rhetorical choices (Patthey-Chavez & Ferris, 1997). The research here concurs with my own observations and experiences with both first and second language writers. Both native and non-native writers of English have thrived in practically every situation where I have ever employed teacher conferencing. Simply stated, each student brings unique talents and interests to the writing process. A great range of diversity exists even in the approaches that different composition students bring to the same writing task. Thus, it can be reasonably concluded that classroom lecture and written feedback alone cannot fully meet the needs of university level writing students.

Despite the logistical difficulties of meeting so many students, individually or in small groups, I have personally found teacher conferencing to be an almost indispensable part of any writing curriculum (Walker, 2004, 2005). Notwithstanding, I would not describe teacher conferencing as a panacea. Although teachers are the experts and students often want to be told very simply what to do, the most fruitful teacher conferences occur when good writing instructors resist the often very powerful urge to take over the writing process and do the hard work of thinking through writing problems for the student. Instead, a non-direct approach to writing instruction during teacher conferencing is highly recommended (Carnicelli, 1980; Murray, 1985; Rogers, 1994; Walker & Elias, 1987), especially with lower level students (Oye, 1993; Walker, 2004, 2005, 2006a). That means writing teachers help their students the most by refraining from taking the path of least resistance and simply telling students how to fix their papers.

Both research and my own experience suggest that students benefit much more when writing teachers merely affirm what students are telling them about their own writing, suggest a number of rhetorical choices that can be made, and describe different ways in which an audience may perceive the student's work. Thus, the role of the instructor in teacher conferencing is that of a facilitator-consultant rather than an expert writing sage. It is a more authentic role to say the least. In this role, instructors can better cultivate students' long term development by allowing them to sort through their own

ideas more independently instead of merely writing the papers that their instructors would compose. This is similar to the idea expressed in the old proverb that it is better to teach people how to fish than to catch fish for them.

It is what the humanist psychologist Carl Rogers (1994) formulated as the non-direct model of instruction, a therapeutic style of education. The non-direct model works very well when applied to teacher conferencing. The research has indicated that when well executed teacher conferencing not only facilitates better writing through improvement of higher order thinking skills (Carnicelli, 1980; Jacobs & Karliner, 1977; Oye, 1993; Patthey-Chavez & Ferris, 1997), but it also helps students internalize writing principles through social interaction (Newkirk, 1995; Patthey-Chavez & Ferris, 1997; Vygotsky, 1978). Thus, the forum of teacher conferencing is an ideal place for students to receive sound, individualized attention and advice about their papers and also learn to make their own rhetorical decisions regarding what would be the best way to present their ideas to a given audience.

### **Peer Response**

A substantial portion of existing research in contrastive rhetoric (Kaplan, 1966; Liebman, 1988; Raimes, 1991; Walker, 2004, 2005, 2006a; Zamel, 1983) multiculturalism (Dunn, 1997; Ladson-Billings, 1994; Ravitch, 1990), and cooperative learning (Kagan, 1992; Ladson-Billings, 1994; Slavin, 1987) suggests that the types of small group discussions found in peer response activities may increase audience awareness of and sensitivity toward cross-cultural issues. It stands to reason, then, that such increased awareness of and sensitivity toward cross-cultural issues would enhance students' understanding of audience and increase their proficiency in making sound rhetorical choices. Better rhetorical decision-making would then lead to improved academic writing, perhaps both in the first and second language. Notwithstanding, while there is a wide consensus in the field of composition among researchers and practitioners concerning the merits of teacher conferencing, the issue of peer response, especially in ESL/EFL writing, seems much more complicated



and controversial.

Some scholars have been quite positive about the potential advantages of peer response (Mendonca & Johnson, 1994; Mittan, 1989); others have been more cautionary (Carson & Nelson, 1994, 1996; Connor & Asenavage, 1994). The Mendonca and Johnson study (1994), however, involved graduate students, not the typical undergraduate composition students that are of the greatest concern in this study. Connor and Asenavage (1994) noted in their own study that peer response had minimal impact on the revisions of the essays of the college freshmen they examined. Of even greater concern to ESL/ EFL writing instructors, especially those working with East-Asian students, is the finding that student responses to peer response activities in collectivist cultures such as Chinese, Japanese and Korean has, in many cases, ranged from lukewarm to hostile (Carson & Nelson, 1994, 1996).

Notwithstanding, the incorporation of peer response activities into the writing curriculum has become increasingly more common and popular in recent years, even in East-Asia. The underlying theoretical justification for this growing trend seems to be based on the Vygotskian concept that social interaction helps the student to internalize knowledge. In composition, for instance, this Vygotskian notion has found manifestation in Bruffee's (1986, p. 774) assertion that "new ideas are constructs generated by like-minded peers." In other words, the Vygotskian idea that social interaction helps students to internalize knowledge fits well with the composition instructor's goal to increase audience awareness among student-writers through the creation of authentic discourse communities that discuss and internalize appropriate standards of academic writing.

When peer response activities work well, they offer students more opportunities to explore ideas and exercise higher order thinking skills, take a more active role in their learning, and become more adept at negotiating and expressing their ideas (Mendonca & Johnson, 1994). Peer response activities may also enable students to develop a greater sense of audience through peer feedback, hone critical thinking skills needed to analyze and revise writing, and gain greater confidence in their own work by observing, first-hand, the

difficulties that other students are having with their own writing.

On the other hand, Carson and Nelson (1994, 1996) have found that students from collectivist cultures may respond differently, seeing peer response activities as either unhelpful or even intimidating. In collectivist cultures, it has been often observed that students may tend to give only positive feedback in order to keep harmony in the group and avoid embarrassing a group member, especially one senior in status. Another limitation found in peer response activities is that students who are unsure of what they are doing tend to make only surface corrections to the papers they review and offer few, if any, helpful suggestions regarding rhetoric or content (Leki, 1990). This conclusion concurs with Connor and Asenavage's (1994) disappointing finding that little revision came from peer comments (5%) in their study.

In my own experience, peer response sometimes works well, and at other times it does not (Walker, 2004, 2005, 2006a). I have found in my own classes that peer response activities work much better when a lot of time and energy are taken to set them up. Students respond better when instructors thoroughly explain the expectations of the peer response activity; inform students of the benefits of doing peer response; outline the role of students as friendly coaches giving advice (not as overbearing teachers); explain why both positive and corrective comments are helpful to their peers; admonish peer reviewers to go beyond making surface corrections; help students be immersed into the activity by teaching them to prioritize feedback; and provide students checklists that explicitly state clear criteria for good writing. It also helps to allow students to be introduced to peer response by initially working on neutral papers, ones that do not come from their peers. This allows students to gradually adjust to the idea of critiquing more easily.

## **METHOD**

This study in contrastive rhetoric-oriented teaching methods for EFL university students was conducted at Handong Global University in Pohang,

South Korea. Sixty-five undergraduate students from all different majors who were taking the core writing course, English Grammar and Composition (EGC), participated in this quasi-experimental study of contrastive rhetoric-oriented teaching methods. These students were tested on their ability to write English academic essays before (pretest) and after (posttest--See Appendix D for specific writing prompts) receiving a semester's worth of English composition instruction that included contrastive rhetoric as a focus.

The experimental group (29 subjects) received contrastive rhetoric-oriented instruction in teacher conferencing and peer response activities, in addition to obtaining it in lecture, class discussions, and written feedback on essays. The control group (36 students) received contrastive rhetoric-oriented instruction only in lecture, class discussions, and written feedback on essays. The experimental group (29 students) consisted of 16 males and 13 females averaging 20.8 years of age and 7.3 years of studying English. Three of the experimental group subjects reported having studied English overseas for a period of 16 years total. The control group, however, contained 15 males and 21 females, averaged 21.3 years of age, and reported an average of 9.1 years of English study. Twelve control group students had studied English overseas for a sum total of 18 years and one month. No significant effects were observed related to age, gender, or prior English study, domestic or overseas.

The student essays were rated on a seven point scale adapted from one similar to what is used to rate the Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL) essays (See Appendix A), but modified to focus on the rhetorical value of an essay as judged by three raters who were experienced EFL professors. These three EFL professors were male, visiting EFL professors in Handong Global University's Department of Language Education who averaged over 15 years of teaching experience, five at Korean universities. The inter-rater reliability coefficients for the ratings of the student essays used in this study were .72 for both pretest and posttest measures (Howell, 2002). These inter-rater reliability ratings were considered adequate for establishing the validity and reliability of the raters and rating scale used in this study as composition rating can be somewhat problematic in nature.

Three different Handong Global University instructors from the Department of Language Education volunteered to carry out the prescribed contrastive rhetoric-oriented writing instruction in six writing classes. Two of the instructors were female and one male. All three of these instructors were experienced EFL professors who averaged 5 years of experience teaching English at universities in Korea. One of the female instructors was fully bilingual, speaking both English and Korean. The other two instructors were native English speakers with limited Korean proficiency. Each instructor who implemented the study was given one experimental class and one control class but was not informed which class the experimenter considered to be the treatment group. The reason why each instructor taught both one experimental and one control class was to negate the potentially convoluting effects of personality variables. After all, we all know that some teachers are simply more skilled than others. This is likely a reason why it is sometimes difficult to replicate the results of educational research. Since this precaution was taken, the effects observed in this experiment cannot be attributed to teacher talent.

### **Implementing CR Instruction**

In this study, contrastive rhetoric-oriented instruction was implemented using a student-centered, naturalistic/ethnographic approach as recommended by Connor (2004) and implemented by Liebman (1988). Succinctly stated, the writing instructors at Handong Global University conducted contrastive rhetoric-oriented instruction in the classroom with both experimental and control groups by lecturing and facilitating class discussions that delineated the rhetorical expectations of an American English academic audience. Then, both rhetorical similarities and differences between the students' first and second language academic writing and the expository compositions that they were expected to produce in English essay writing were explored. The rhetorical instruction was contrastive in the sense that students were repeatedly, specifically asked to compare the rhetorical style in which they

composed academic essays in Korean with the way they wrote the same type of essays in English as a focal point of the instruction they received. The ways in which students perceived their own expository academic writing in Korean and English were compared to the rhetorical expectations that would be demanded of them by academic English audiences.

The instructors started this process, as Liebman (1988) did, by introducing students to observations researchers have made about first language-influenced rhetorical patterns that have appeared in the English academic essays of East-Asian writers (Appendix C), in general, sometimes referred to as received notions of culture (Atkinson, 2004). Students were then requested to analyze and evaluate the applicability of those observations in relation to their own writing. In other words, students were asked if those features of rhetoric that have been identified by researchers as being a general part of Korean academic writing culture were taught to them by their Korean writing instructors.

Students were also asked whether or not those features of rhetoric appear in either their own Korean or English academic writing. The aforementioned cross-cultural comparisons of rhetoric were performed in terms of direct versus indirect statement of the thesis and discussion of the topic; general to specific or specific to general topic development; emphasis on functionality of the text versus concerns for politeness and artistry. In the preceding pairs, the former terms are generally identified as conventions of American English while the latter are often viewed as rhetorical preferences among East-Asian academic audiences. Moreover, intercultural rhetorical comparisons were also made regarding standards of evidence demanded and how they might be different between cultures; reader-friendliness or writer-based typology; and the role of authority and value of old versus new sources in academic writing. See Appendix C for a comprehensive list of contrastive rhetorical features for East-Asian and American English expository academic essay writing that were discussed in this study.

It was determined that it would be helpful to begin class discussions for both experimental and control group students with generalizations concerning the rhetorical differences in academic prose as a starting point to initiate

student-centered dialogue in intercultural rhetoric. This student-centered dialogue about intercultural rhetoric, then, served as a framework for inspiring critical thought regarding potential first language cultural differences in rhetoric that could influence second language writing. Nevertheless, it was also deemed important, as it was in Liebman's study (1988), to allow students the opportunity to either agree with or debate the findings of the research since not all individuals from a culture group write in precisely the same rhetorical style despite whatever generalities may exist for that group. Individual variability in rhetorical writing was recognized and valued in this study since, as Atkinson (2004) put it, we are all influenced by our social systems but our behavior is not passively determined by them. We are influenced by our received ideas of culture; nevertheless, culture is also dynamic in that we can influence our cultures somewhat as well.

Meanwhile, in addition to contrastive rhetoric-oriented class discussions, the experimental group received the teaching treatment of contrastive rhetoric-oriented discussions in both peer response activities and teacher conferencing sessions. During the teacher conferencing sessions, course instructors used the checklist found in Appendix B to focus their three teacher conferencing sessions (one per essay) on contrastive rhetoric-oriented instruction with the experimental treatment group. The underlined portions of the checklist in Appendix B reflect opportunities for making the discussions of the rhetoric found in students' papers contrastive. Instructors were trained and directed to make the discussions of rhetoric as intercultural as possible.

When discussing student introductions, for instance, the instructors would ask students in the experimental group if the way in which they structured their thesis statements and/or introduction as a whole was different or the same in English as in Korean. The instructors would then further ask what a Korean audience might expect in an academic paper's introduction versus what the students had learned in their current class about English academic audiences. Moreover, if instructors observed any indirectness in the body paragraphs of any essays, they would ask the student if s/he felt any awkwardness about approaching the topic more directly. Students were asked

to compare how they would develop a similar argument in Korean or how the ways they had been taught how to write might contribute to any perceived indirectness in their English writing. At last, students would be asked if their conclusions provided the type of closure that English academic audiences desire. If a student's conclusion was more open-ended than ideal, s/he would be asked if that was the way in which s/he formed conclusions in his/her L1 academic writing. In addition, writing conferences would often discuss general strengths and weaknesses in students' English academic essay writing compared to their Korean academic essay composition with a focus on whether or not the ideal way to write for the two distinct audiences was the same or different.

### **Training and Observation**

This study, as is true for many classroom studies in education, was a quasi-experimental one, which means there was a lack of randomization of subjects. This was the case since the researcher had no control over course enrollment. As a result, the researcher and cooperating classroom teachers had to take great care not to allow any threats to the internal validity of the study that could convolute the study's ultimate findings. This involved the researcher using pretest-posttest research design, implementing a week-long workshop to train classroom teachers in contrastive rhetoric and threats to internal validity for quantitative studies (Appendix E), conducting random observations of each instructor's classes, and holding regular weekly meetings with instructors to ensure that the intercultural rhetorical instruction was being implemented according to design. It also involved the researcher conducting an analysis of covariance (ANCOVA) on the data with the pretest as the covariate in a pretest-posttest design in combination with other analysis and controls (Huitema, 1980; Reichardt, 1979; Vockell & Asher, 1995). The statistical analysis will be discussed further in the results section of this article.

The three classroom instructors in this study were experienced English as a Foreign Language (EFL) instructors who had spent a significant amount of

time teaching at the university level in South Korea, an average of five years. Like many EFL instructors, they had heard of contrastive rhetoric and were somewhat aware of some of the culturally-based rhetorical differences between English and Korean. Nevertheless, the instructors needed significant, specific training to begin the study regarding exactly how they should implement contrastive rhetoric-oriented instruction in the classroom. This was rendered to them during the week-long workshop. An entire day's worth of instruction was devoted to training classroom instructors how to effectively teach rhetoric using the CODA paradigm (See Appendix F), incorporate contrastive rhetoric into their systematic teaching of rhetoric using the CODA paradigm, and apply contrastive rhetoric in CODA in their Handong University composition classrooms.

The CODA paradigm is a simple model of systematic rhetorical instruction that provides writing instructors and their students, both native and non-native, a common language for discussing rhetoric in academic writing courses. The CODA paradigm of English rhetoric was created by the researcher for use in both first and second language writing university level courses. It was applied in all experimental and control group courses in this study by all three instructors as a way to ensure the rhetorical instruction was easy to follow, uniform, and consistent in all classes.

The researcher conducted random observations in all experimental and control group classes with all instructors participating in the study. At some point during the semester-long study, each class was randomly visited in all three situations of instruction: class lecture/discussion, teacher conferencing, and peer response. Classroom teachers were not informed of the pending visit until within 30 minutes of class to minimize the chance that the lesson plan would be influenced by the observation. The researcher took notes on each class session to ensure that instruction was uniform and that classroom discussions for both experimental and control groups were contrastive rhetoric-oriented. Meanwhile, teacher conferencing and peer response sessions were only contrastive rhetoric-oriented for the experimental and not the control group classes.



## RESULTS

Table 1.1 below shows some of the results of this study. As demonstrated in the table, both research and control groups benefited from contrastive rhetoric instruction in their English composition courses as measured by improved essay scores from pretest to posttest.

**TABLE 1.1**  
**Overall Mean Essay Scores**

Group	Pretest Mean	Pretest SD	Posttest Mean	Posttest SD	N
Experimental	3.1831	.79908	3.8045	.95694	29
Control	3.2589	1.12713	3.5392	1.00168	36
Total	3.2251	.98771	3.6575	.98337	65

However, the gain for the experimental group, overall, was not statistically significantly higher than the gain for the control group ( $p = .243$ ). The improvement, then, of both groups was statistically equal overall. This may have been due to a “ceiling effect,” meaning that high level students ( $> 3.5$  pretest) made no significant improvement in their essay scores, regardless of group. This lack of improvement for high level students may have held down the improvement in overall scores (Walker, 2004, 2005, 2006a).

Notwithstanding, the second research question of the study was whether or not low level students ( $< 3.5$  pretest score) improved their essay writing as a result of the teaching treatment (reinforced contrastive rhetoric-oriented instruction through teacher conferencing and peer response). The improvement for low level students in the experimental group proved to be significantly higher than it was for the control group, who were rendered contrastive rhetoric-oriented instruction only through lecture and written feedback on essays. Tables 2.1, 2.2, and 2.3 show that these results were significantly better for those low level students who received contrastive rhetoric-oriented instruction through teacher conferencing and peer response (experimental group) than those who only received it via lecture and written feedback on essays (control group) as measured by analysis of covariance (ANCOVA)

and analysis of variance (ANOVA) statistical analyses.

**TABLE 2.1**  
**Essay Mean Scores of Low Level Students**

Low Level Students	Pretest Mean	Pretest SD	Posttest Mean	Posttest SD	N
Experimental	2.8627	.59562	3.8936	.89909	22
Control	2.3853	.73063	3.1579	1.04550	19
Total	2.6415	.69612	3.5527	1.02676	41

As indicated in Table 2.1, the posttest mean score for the low level students in the experimental group was significantly higher ( $p < .05$ ) than the posttest mean score for low level students in the control group when the posttest score differences were controlled for the covariate, which was the pretest score. Actually, both the experimental and control groups of low level students receiving contrastive rhetoric-oriented instruction increased their mean scores from the pretest to the posttest. The low level control group subjects that received contrastive rhetoric-oriented instruction only in lecture, class discussion, and written feedback on essays improved roughly three-fourths of one point on their mean essay scores from 2.39 to 3.16. Nevertheless, the low level students in the experimental group who received contrastive rhetoric-oriented instruction in teacher conferencing and peer response activities in addition to class lecture, discussion, and essay feedback made significantly better gains, improving their mean essay scores more than one full point from 2.86 to 3.89.

**TABLE 2.2**  
**Analysis of Covariance for Low Level Students**

Source	SS	df	MS	F	P
Cor. Model	5.701	2	2.850	2.970	.063
Intercept	24.745	1	24.745	25.784	.000
Pretest	.182	1	.182	.189	.666
Group	4.228	1	4.228	4.406	.043*
Error	36.469	38	.960		
Total	559.654	41			
Cor. Total	42.170	40			

As illustrated in Tables 2.1 and 2.2, the posttest mean score for low level students in the treatment group was statistically significantly higher ( $p = <.05$ ) than the lower level students' posttest mean scores were in the control group when the pretest scores were controlled for the covariate. The results in Table 2.2 indicated that although both experimental and control groups demonstrated noteworthy improvement in their essay scores from pretest to posttest, the lower ability level students' increase in mean essay scores was significantly larger ( $p = .043$ ) in the experimental group when compared to the control group. The results from this ANCOVA, then, suggest that the low level students in the treatment group benefited more from the contrastive rhetoric-oriented classroom writing instruction that was reinforced in teacher conferencing and peer response than did low level subjects in the control group who received contrastive rhetoric-oriented instruction only in classroom lecture, discussion, and written feedback on essays (Walker, 2004, 2005, 2006a).

Moreover, analysis of variance (ANOVA) results for low level students (See Table 2.3) indicated that the significance of the difference between the experimental and control groups may be even greater than indicated by ANCOVA results.

**TABLE 2.3**  
**Analysis of Variance for Low Level Students**

Source	SS	df	MS	F	P
Cor. Model	5.519	1	5.519	5.872	.020
Intercept	506.943	1	506.943	539.433	.000
Group	5.519	1	5.519	5.872	.020*
Error	36.651	39	.940		
Total	559.664	40			
Cor. Total	42.170	41			

The significance between the mean differences in posttest essay results was even greater ( $p = .020$ ) in the ANOVA for low level students (Table 2.3) when the pretest covariate, insignificant in the ANCOVA test ( $p = .666$ ,

Table 2.2), was dropped from the model (Walker, 2004, 2005, 2006a). Since the covariate was insignificant in the ANCOVA, the ANOVA results may better reflect the effect of the teaching treatment. In either event, both ANCOVA and ANOVA analyses indicate that subjects in the low level treatment group improved their essay scores more than their peers in the control group classes.

## **DISCUSSION**

These aforementioned results, then, beg the question: How are teacher conferencing and peer response activities helpful in presenting contrastive rhetoric as a significant part of a university ESL/EFL writing curriculum? This is the primary question addressed in this article. Essentially, teacher conferencing and peer response activities seemed to be good vehicles for reinforcing the contrastive rhetoric-oriented instruction that students received during regular class discussion time.

Since teacher conferencing and peer response activities were performed in tandem, it is impossible to verify statistically, without further research, which of the methods had the greater effect upon students or if the two working together produced the desired result. Nevertheless, it is clear that the teaching treatment, using both teacher conferencing and peer response in tandem, as a means for reinforcing contrastive rhetoric-oriented instruction in class discussions, was effective, especially for helping low level students improve their academic essay writing as measured from the gains achieved from pretest to posttest.

In terms of the prior research cited in the literature review, observations the researcher performed during the study, comments made during the weekly meetings by the study's classroom teachers and feedback received from students, one might tentatively venture that teacher conferencing may be the more effective technique for reinforcing contrastive rhetoric-oriented writing instruction. Peer response can also be effective as a teaching technique, but is

more complicated to implement and less consistent in its effectiveness, according to the literature review. However, in this study, the two techniques were employed together as a teaching treatment. Thus, which technique worked better or whether or not one single technique by itself would have been able to produce a statistically measurable improvement in academic essay writing cannot be determined without further study.

All of the rhetorical features observed in East-Asian academic writing as cited in Appendix C were introduced and compared to the rhetorical features of American-English academic composition in this study. Notwithstanding, the classroom instructors in this study progressively focused on an increasingly narrower array of student-centered contrastive issues according to the features of rhetoric that were most prevalent in their pupils' writing and were of the greatest concern to students in class discussions. In fact, the rhetorical features most prominently discussed and culturally compared and contrasted concerned the following: directness versus indirectness in the thesis statement; location of the thesis (earlier versus later) in the text; directness versus indirectness in treatment of the topic; issues of politeness and sophistication versus efficiency and functionality of the text; and making a conclusion that fit the cultural expectations of English academic readers in terms of providing explicitly stated implications for the essay and closure. Writing rhetorically appropriate thesis statements and conclusions were especially challenging for many students in this study in terms of meeting the culturally-based rhetorical expectations of the target audience as is often the case with Korean undergraduate students writing expository essays in English. Korean student academic essay writing is often too indirect and open-ended for English audiences in terms of thesis statements and conclusions, respectively.

The complexity of these rhetorical issues in an intercultural sense seemed to make the one-to-one interaction of teacher conferencing and interactive pair groupings of peer response ideal settings to further discuss rhetorical concepts and apply them to the students' own writing. For the control group, the contrastive rhetoric-oriented discussions stopped with class lecture, discussions and written feedback on essays. Thus, it stands to reason that they

would have gained less from contrastive rhetoric-oriented discussion that was not applied to their own writing and reinforced in the manner that it was with the experimental group.

The researcher visited at least one teacher conference for every subject in the study. In the experimental group, instructors typically asked students contrastive rhetoric-oriented questions about their papers that were underlined on a checklist that instructors used. The contrastive rhetoric-oriented checklist that was used was based on the parameters of rhetoric for academic writing that researchers have observed as appearing prominently in the compositions of East-Asian writers of English (Appendix C). These were the same parameters of intercultural rhetoric on which the class discussions, delineated at the beginning of this section, were initiated. Thus, the teacher conferencing and peer response sessions employed in the experimental group effectively reinforced the contrastive rhetoric-oriented lectures and class discussions they had received. These discussions were student-centered in the sense that the instructors asked the questions on the checklist in a contrastive manner as applicable to the rhetorical strengths and weaknesses found on student essays. Therefore, not every contrastive rhetoric-oriented question was asked of each student on every essay though each student usually received at least one or two such questions. Many students in the experimental group often asked one or two rhetorically contrastive questions on their own after the instructor had initiated a discussion in intercultural rhetoric.

In the control group, a non-contrastive checklist was used where instructors and students would discuss English rhetoric in non-contrastive terms. In these situations instructors were careful to avoid any comparison of L1 and L2 writing unless students specifically and emphatically asked. Control group students very rarely asked the instructor for comparisons between Korean and English since they were not prompted or encouraged to do so whatsoever.

In peer response activities, class instructors similarly led contrastive rhetoric-oriented discussions. For peer response, students had rhetorical checklists that were similar to the one found in Appendix B except for the contrastive element. In other words, these checklists from their textbook,

*Blueprints 2*, covered the basics of English rhetoric, but made no attempt to scaffold principles of rhetoric in the target language with the students' native language. Therefore, when instructors held peer response activities for the classes in the treatment group, known to them as "Class B," they wrote contrastive type questions on the board and emphasized that students should discuss the similarities and differences of the rhetorical issues found in their books' checklists in intercultural terms, comparing the similarities and differences between Korean and English. For the control group, known to the instructors as "Class A," each peer response session involved only discussion of English rhetoric without any attempt by the instructor to make the discussion intercultural in any way whatsoever.

Since the experiment was so closely monitored in terms of randomly scheduled observations and weekly meetings with classroom teachers, the researcher could safely rule out the chance that the improvement in academic writing experienced by low level treatment group subjects was due to alternative explanations to the teaching treatment such as additional writing practice. It is quite unlikely that the experimental group would have received any additional benefits that could have explained their improvement such as additional writing practice for the following reasons: the same teachers taught both one experimental class and one control class and the low level students were somewhat equal in ability. Moreover, for an effect such as additional practice to have made a significant effect, it would have had to spontaneously occur in more than one treatment class but no control group classes. No such variation in teaching technique or student response was observed by the researcher in his many observations. Classroom instructors did not report any variation in either teaching treatment or student behavior in their weekly meetings with the researcher either.

## CONCLUSIONS

In this study, conducted at Handong Global University in South Korea, it

was found that both experimental and control group students were able to improve the ratings of their academic essays when they received instruction that incorporated contrastive rhetoric-oriented pedagogy in a core curriculum writing class, English Grammar and Composition (the first writing but fourth English course in a core series of required credited English classes). Moreover, lower level students in the study who received contrastive rhetoric-oriented instruction through teacher conferencing and peer response (experimental group), in addition to simply receiving contrastive rhetoric-oriented instruction through lecture and written feedback on essays alone (control group), made significantly higher gains in their posttest essay scores, compared to their control group peers (Walker, 2004, 2005, 2006a).

Thus, this study on contrastive rhetoric teaching methods for EFL university students established the following: 1) contrastive rhetoric-oriented instruction, taught even through the traditional composition methods of lecture and written feedback on essays (control group), can help students write better English academic essays; 2) the use of specific composition techniques such as teacher conferencing and peer response activities in tandem (teaching treatment) can significantly increase the improvement in students' English academic essay writing, especially for lower level English composition students (Walker, 2004, 2005, 2006a). The findings of this study are important because, although the field of contrastive rhetoric is forty years old, few studies have been pedagogically-oriented in this field. More studies are sorely needed that can harness the great pedagogical potential in intercultural rhetorical studies and substantiate the effectiveness of specific practical teaching techniques for incorporating contrastive rhetoric-oriented instruction into a university English as a Foreign Language (EFL) writing curriculum.

Until this study, contrastive rhetoric was still carrying the epitaphs of being "disappointing" and "limited" (Liebman, 1988, p. 7) and lacking in development and application to classroom instruction (Leki, 1991; Liebman, 1988; Matsuda, 1997; Raimes, 1991; Walker, 2004, 2005, 2006a). Casanave recently described it as a field "lodged" in a "quagmire" and as being still in its "infancy" (Casanave, 2004, p. 41). The lack of pedagogical progress is a



bit perplexing for a field that has been in existence for forty years. It is hoped that the findings of this study will reinvigorate discussions of contrastive rhetoric issues in the sense of making a contribution toward returning the field to reexamine its original purpose, enabling ESL/EFL students to write better English academic essays. In the forty years since Kaplan's original study, the field of contrastive rhetoric has spread throughout the world but, unfortunately, has had limited impact in the development of specific teaching techniques for using contrastive rhetoric oriented discussion to improve ESL/EFL student academic writing.

This study's main contribution is the finding that contrastive rhetoric-oriented writing instruction can be an integral part of a writing curriculum, especially when traditional lecture and written feedback are reinforced with innovative teaching techniques such as teacher conferencing and peer response. It is important to note that this effect bears great significance since it was the low level students, those needing improvement the most, who received the greatest benefit from the teaching treatment. The implication of this finding is even more noteworthy because a vast majority of ESL/EFL university level writing students may indeed enter their undergraduate writing courses as low level writers, as was true in this study (41 of 65 subjects were low level). Succinctly stated, contrastive rhetoric-oriented writing instruction reinforced by teacher conferencing and peer response activities could be helpful to a majority of second language writing students in many contexts, as was the case at Handong Global University.

Thus, the results of this study seemed to confirm the findings of L1 composition research on teacher conferencing, especially that it can help lower level students gain confidence (Oye, 1993). These results also seem to concur with previous L1 composition research on teacher conferencing that view it as a good forum for facilitating the improvement of higher order thinking skills (Carnicelli, 1980; Jacobs & Karliner, 1977; Oye, 1993; Patthey-Chavez & Ferris, 1997; Walker, 2004, 2005, 2006a). These results may also apply to second language writers of English as they discuss contrastive rhetoric-oriented writing issues in their teacher conferences.

Notwithstanding, it should also be noted that a non-direct method should be used in teacher conferencing (Carnicelli, 1980; Jacobs & Karliner, 1977; Murray, 1985; Rogers, 1994; Walker, 2004, 2005, 2006a; Walker & Elias, 1987), especially on such culturally sensitive issues as contrastive rhetoric. It is my experience that teacher conferencing works better when students explore writing issues for themselves, and teachers mentor them through the process by facilitating the awareness of issues with thought-provoking questions, offering possible outcomes, and acting as facilitators or professional consultants.

The findings of this study further support the idea that taking an ethnographic approach to contrastive rhetoric, as Connor (2004) recently suggested. Initiating student-centered discussions of intercultural rhetoric can be an effective means of delivering English academic writing instruction to non-native writers of English. This study confirms the finding that many EFL students will agree that their L1 rhetoric is different from English, and those differences may cause them difficulty when writing in English. Nevertheless, it is important to remember to use a student-centered, ethnographic approach since we know that not every writer will use the same rhetorical style that may be commonly found among people who share their L1 background. Atkinson (2004) reminds us how complex culture is and that an individual's school, youth culture, or other factors may lead them to have different perceptions of culture and rhetoric than what is commonly reported as a preference for their national, ethnic, or language group in a global sense.

Thus, students may become offended if someone from outside their cultural backgrounds, even a well-intentioned writing instructor, makes strong generalizations about their languages and cultures without their input or if they think that their first language and culture are being criticized (Liebman, 1988). On the other hand, many students enjoy exploring the differences between their own languages and others if the process is tactfully facilitated by a caring teacher who uses a student-centered approach to initiate a free, open, and intelligent discussion of rhetoric and culture. Peer response activities and teacher conferences may provide students the

additional reinforcement of intercultural rhetorical principles necessary to scaffold between the old knowledge of their L1 rhetoric and the new knowledge of the L2 rhetoric and improve their academic writing. Ultimately, the student-writer has ownership over his/her writing. Thus, it is the writing instructor's job to provide an audience and consult with the writer on the possible consequences of his/her rhetorical choices instead of taking over the process. Nowhere is this truer than in contrastive rhetoric instruction where writers must consider more than one language and culture when making important rhetorical decisions in communicating their ideas.

A final limitation of this study may have been the amount of training in contrastive rhetoric that the classroom teachers had. Although there was a rather extensive intensive workshop, three full days worth of training before the semester and weekly meetings during the semester, the classroom teachers who graciously volunteered their time and efforts for this study had little prior training specifically in contrastive rhetoric-oriented writing pedagogy. Notwithstanding, while this limitation may have prevented an even greater benefit from the teaching treatment, it should not be used to dismiss the importance of the results. In fact, it may be argued that the limitations of training make this study more realistic and applicable to real-world university writing programs.

The fact remains that very few first or second language writing programs contain sufficient numbers of instructors who are fully qualified to teach composition, let alone intercultural rhetoric. In ESL and EFL settings, many instructors who are teaching composition have some academic background and experience with linguistics but not necessarily writing. In America, many English composition teachers who teach basic freshman writing classes in core curriculums are not sufficiently trained in composition either. Many of these positions are filled by adjuncts and graduate students who work part-time. Many such instructors have literature degrees or are studying in graduate programs in English literature while supporting themselves with jobs teaching English composition. Thus, the amount of training and experience that these instructors brought to this study compares favorably

and realistically with what a real English composition teacher attempting to use teacher conferencing and peer response in their own classrooms may have. Any research-based methodology, then, needs to be capable of being implemented without extensive prior training for that research-based pedagogical approach to be practically and realistically applied in either first or second language university level writing programs.

In conclusion, student-centered contrastive rhetoric-oriented writing instruction reinforced by teacher conferencing and peer response can help students in academic writing courses to be able to bridge the gap between the rhetorical expectations of their first language and culture with the expectations of the target audience when writing in English. While a student-centered implementation of contrastive rhetorical-oriented instruction with the aforementioned techniques requires some sophistication on the part of the practitioner, this study has demonstrated that it can be effectively performed by reasonably qualified personnel. More pedagogically-focused study should be done in implementing contrastive rhetoric-oriented writing instruction at the university level, but this study should make a valuable contribution in that direction.

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## **APPENDIX A**

The following rating scale was adapted from the TOEFL Essay Rating Scale for the purpose of evaluating the rhetorical value of English essays. An inter-rater reliability correlation coefficient of .72 was established between the three raters on all essay ratings using the scale below.

### Parameters

7---- Essay does a superior job of addressing the prompt. Controlling idea is exceptionally clear and well located. The essay is extra-ordinarily well organized and developed. Audience expectations are fully satisfied. The overall rhetorical quality is outstanding, top-notch.

6---- Effective (very)

5---- Generally good

4---- Adequate (passing)

3---- Inadequate (deficient) (low ability)

2---- Seriously deficient

1---- Incoherent (non-essay)

\*\*\*\* All criteria for 1-6 is the same as the parameters for a 7 point score with the substitution of the listed value “Effective,” “Generally Good,” etc. being the only difference.

## APPENDIX B

### Teacher Conferencing Checklist with Contrastive Rhetoric

\*Underlined questions are considered to be contrastive rhetoric-oriented

#### INTRODUCTION

- Hook?
- Clear thesis? Stated early or delayed introduction of purpose?
- How do you introduce your idea in Korean?

#### BODY

- Clear topic sentence and one main idea for each paragraph?
- Do all of the body paragraphs related to and support the thesis?
- Are there any subthemes that do not directly connect to the thesis? If so, why are those there? What purpose do they achieve? Do you use indirect subthemes in Korean?
- Unity within paragraphs? Is there any indirectness within the paragraph where there should not be in an English essay?

#### CONCLUSION

- Does your successfully signal the end of the essay?
- Does it introduce any new themes? Is it direct enough for an English audience? Are your expectations & opinions directly stated?

#### STRENGTHS & WEAKNESSES

- Do any of the problems in your essay reflect the differences between Korean and English writing conventions?
- Does the way you write in Korean help you to write better in English in any way?

## APPENDIX C

Contrastive Rhetoric Features : Some Observed Differences between East Asian and American English Expository Academic Essay Writing

1. “Delayed entry of purpose”
2. Defining the thesis by what it is NOT
3. Insertion of seemingly unrelated sub-themes (without transitions)
4. Lack of connection between points
5. Excessive indirectness or specific to general: conclusions not specific, explicit, no closure: too open-ended
7. Expository writing more “artistic,” “poetic” than “functional”
8. Insufficient supporting evidence, consideration of multiple points of view, relies heavily on author experience
9. Reader friendly or writer-typology?
10. Writing that gives more deference to the distant past & authority

(Chu, Swaffar, & Charnay, 2002; Eggington, 1987; Hinds, 1983, 1987, 1990; Kaplan, 1966; Kobayashi, 1984; Matalene, 1985; Shen, 1989; Walker, 2004, 2005, 2006a)

## Appendix D

### Prompts Used in the Study

**Pretest prompt:** Do you think the Korean education system is mostly good or mostly not so good? What causes the Korean education system to be the way it is (good or bad)?

Write an essay explaining either 1) what you think causes the Korean education system to be either good or not so good OR

2) what you think the effects are of the Korean education system on its students OR

3) what you think causes the Korean education system to be the way it is and what you think the effects of the system are on its students?

**Posttest prompt:** Do you think arranged marriage is mostly good or not so good? What causes some Koreans to enter into arranged marriage? Write an essay explaining either

1) what you think causes arranged marriage to be either bad or good OR

2) what you think the effects of arranged marriage are for couples who enter into it OR

3) what you think causes arranged marriage to be the way it is (good or bad) and what you think the effects are on the couples who enter into it.

\*\*\*Every effort was made to make the writing prompts as identical as possible so cause and effect essays were chosen on topic with which many Korean students would be familiar in order to present the fewest non-writing language and cultural difficulties as possible.

## Appendix E

<b>Period</b>	<b>Day 1 Experimental Principles</b>	<b>Day 2 Contrastive Rhetoric/CODA</b>	<b>Day 3 Peer Response / Teacher Conferencing</b>
<b>1</b>	<b>Threats to Validity</b>	<b>Contrastive Rhetoric Principles</b>	<b>Why peer response? Setting it up</b>
<b>2</b>	<b>Practical Application / Control</b>	<b>Fitting Contrastive Rhetoric into CODA</b>	<b>Why conferencing? How to do it</b>
<b>3</b>	<b>Review / Trouble Shooting</b>	<b>Student-Centered Application of Contrastive Rhetoric &amp; CODA</b>	<b>Forming a consensus on writing prompts</b>

## Appendix F

### CODA Paradigm: The Nuts and Bolts of an Effective English Essay

**C**ontrolling idea. Whether you want to have a traditional looking paper with a thesis or not, your essay **must** be linked together with a clear controlling idea. So, what is a controlling idea? It is your main point. It is the reason why everything else in your paper exists: in order to support the controlling idea / thesis.

What else is it? It is an **opinion** and not a fact! Likewise, it is not a question. It is an attempt to answer a question. This is what an essay is trying to achieve no matter your purpose or other circumstances. Essay comes from the French word *essayer* meaning “to try” or “to attempt.”

Good controlling idea / thesis: It is impossible to understand the depth of the grace of God in the life of the apostle Paul without first understanding the depth of depravity to which he had reached while persecuting Christians as the Pharisee named Saul.

Bad controlling idea: Paul was a follower of Jesus Christ and wrote several books of the Bible.

Some things to think about concerning your controlling idea:

- ✍ Is the main idea and your stance stated early in the draft?
- ✍ Does the thesis statement / controlling idea adequately state the main idea of your essay?
- ✍ If not, how could this be improved?

**O**rganization. One of the most important basic features of writing is that it be well organized in a manner that is reader friendly. In American English culture, the primary burden of communication in speech or writing,

is on the communicator not on the audience. Therefore, it is of the utmost importance that you as a writer learn how to be better at structuring your ideas for your audience.

It all starts with that controlling idea we just talked about. Does it accomplish the things a controlling idea should? Is it in the right place? In the culture of English communication, the thesis or controlling idea almost always comes at the beginning of the essay: sooner rather than later. After all, this is the information age of instant gratification. In most cases (some exceptions do exist), the writer is much better off getting right to the point without delay.

Next, each paragraph must be designed to contribute significant support for the controlling idea. The controlling idea should be supported in a variety of ways using facts, examples, explanations, anecdotes and all kinds of evidence until the writer has thoroughly made his / her case. However, it is of vital importance that these paragraphs be arranged strategically, according to some rational purpose, in order to most effectively communicate the ideas to the audience.

Some things to think about regarding organization:

- ✍ Do all the supporting ideas--details, facts, examples, and explanations--illustrate the writer's attitude toward the controlling idea?
- ✍ Are there any digressions from the main idea? If so, where do they occur?
- ✍ Is the organization of ideas between paragraphs logical and fluent?
- ✍ Do all the paragraphs seem to be connected in terms of meaning?
- ✍ Are all the subpoints regarding the controlling idea clearly separated into paragraphs of appropriate length and development?
- ✍ Are the paragraphs appropriately sequenced in a way that will effectively get the point across to the audience?
- ✍ Does each sentence flow logically from the previous one?
- ✍ Does the writer need to add transitions to make connections between ideas more clear?

**D**evelopment. The essay must employ enough evidence to thoroughly achieve its purpose and sufficiently explain its controlling idea. How much development is necessary? That will depend on the controlling idea, purpose, audience, and style of the writer. As a general rule, I would say that too much is better than not enough. Although it is entirely possible for one to go into an unhealthy digression, most inexperienced writers tend to leave ideas unsupported more times than not. Furthermore, one must not only make their case, but it is also necessary to consider other points of view and possible some well designed refutation of counterargument.

Some things to think about when you are developing an essay:

- ✍ Has the writer supported the main idea with sufficient evidence?
- ✍ Are the facts, examples, authorities quoted, statistics and other supporting details convincing?
- ✍ Where does the writer need to add or possibly remove detail?
- ✍ What strategies, techniques or forms of evidence may be more convincing in order to achieve the writer's purpose with his / her audience?
- ✍ Is there something missing in this essay that makes it less powerful than it should be?
- ✍ Does the introduction grab the reader's interest and establish the credibility of the author?  
If not, how could it be improved?
- ✍ Does the conclusion sufficiently summarize the author's point(s) and provide a big picture to the audience regarding the importance of the essay?

**A**udience. Finally, it is absolutely critical to tailor your entire essay to the group of people that you are targeting to read your work. No matter what your writing means to you, if you have not successfully communicated your ideas to the reader and achieved the desired effect, then you have failed to communicate. It is that simple. So, all of your strategies and techniques for



development, tone, style, language, rhetorical devices, etc. should be consistent with what might work with the mind set of your audience in terms of age, race, culture, politics, etc.

Things to think over include:

- ✍ Who will be reading this? What are their needs? What is the age group, race, culture, gender, and belief system of this group?
- ✍ Is the audience friendly or hostile?
- ✍ What is my purpose and how would it best be achieved considering my reader?
- ✍ How would I react if I were reading this as a member of the audience and not as a writer?
- ✍ Have I written anything that might be considered offensive by my audience?
- ✍ Could I achieve my purpose without offending them?