

Forms of Feedback in the Writing Classroom: Steps toward Autonomy

Claudia Kunschak
Shantou University, China

Abstract

In an effort to examine the impact of forms of feedback on the development of learner autonomy, an action research project was designed and implemented in an Academic Writing class at a Chinese university. While providing an ample background of online resources for the planning and drafting stages, the scaffolded autonomous learning component focused on forms of feedback in the revision stage. The three sections of the class were rotating between peer evaluation, self-evaluation and teacher-evaluation for their various writing assignments in order for students to experience differing degrees of autonomy in the revision process. A writing conference was added to clarify issues identified by the students themselves, their peers or the teacher, based on the feedback form used by the respective sections in a particular assignment. Journals, questionnaires and the revisions themselves document the struggle for autonomy among these learners and point towards possibilities and limitations of this approach.

Introduction

Learner autonomy, together with communicative competence and critical thinking, has been at the center of attention of researchers and practitioners alike for quite a while now, particularly in tertiary institutions and ESL/EFL settings. These concepts, however, have emerged from a Western educational culture and may not be readily transferable to other settings around the globe (cf. Palfreyman, 2003) where tradition may dictate a more conservative approach to teaching and learning. One way to overcome this cultural gap consists in a gradual transformation of students, an exploration in the constructivist paradigm (Bruner, 1966), a scaffolded approach to organising the learning experience (Vygotsky, 1962). This approach can be applied to the feedback process in a writing classroom in order to increase learner autonomy at the same time as developing communicative competence and critical thinking. Different feedback forms will need to be presented in a scaffolded mode in order for students to explore the writing process in a progressively more peer- and self-reliant way. By shifting the responsibility away from the teacher and towards the learner with the former remaining accessible on the margin, not only can students be encouraged to develop their autonomy but can teachers be relieved of some top-down feedback of doubtful effectiveness. Even though students allegedly still prefer teacher comments, research has shown that without incentive to improve, written feedback by the teacher may not have the desired impact (Chandler, 2004). While changes in students are clearly visible over the course of the semester, the real transformation will often come to fruition later on in their study or work life, which makes learner autonomy come full circle with life-long learning and educational purposes in general (cf. Smith, 2003).

Background

Forms of feedback to student writing, both teacher response (Ferris, 2003) and peer review (Liu & Sadler, 2003), have been reexamined in depth over the past few

years, especially in the context of teaching English as a Second Language. In a review of seminal studies in the field in book format, Ferris (2003) concludes that students are most receptive to, but also most sensitive to, feedback on language errors, prefer teacher response to other kinds of feedback, but can be convinced that a combination of different types of feedback may be helpful as well. Ferris (2002) thus suggests a series of activities, ranging from strategy training to grammar mini-lessons and including peer and self-editing workshops as the pathway to learner autonomy in the writing classroom.

A contrary viewpoint is championed by Truscott (1996), who presents an impressive array of previous research to support his claim that grammar correction should be abandoned in the writing classroom. However, his paper, though comprehensive, suffers from several weaknesses. On the one hand, by picking on grammar in an isolated way, he neglects the semantic function of grammar and the contextual approach that has been widely practiced in writing classrooms over the past decades. On the other, his choice of research to bolster his theory is quite deliberate if not misleading, a point brought up by Chandler (2004) in her response paper. Finally, though Truscott's paper is intentionally polemical, he commits the same mistake he charges his opponents with by speculating and drawing conclusions that cannot be upheld under close scrutiny. Most importantly for the practitioner, he does not offer any alternative to the much maligned "grammar correction" in contrast to Ferris (2002), e.g., who embeds it in a series of other feedback categories.

Liu and Sadler (2003), to cite just one example of research focusing specifically on peer review, investigated a specific mode of peer review, that is, electronic peer review, in comparison to traditional face-to-face feedback. According to their data, even though the electronic mode produced more comments, more revision-oriented comments and more overall revisions, the traditional mode fostered more global comments and more revisions per comments. These findings suggest that students still need some face-to-face interaction and negotiation of meaning with their peers, and some guidance from a teacher, in order to achieve in-depth revisions of writing assignments.

In order to move them into the direction of autonomy, which in the case of writing classes would be the capacity for self-editing, students need to be guided in a scaffolded way. According to Applebee and Langer (1983), this process is characterised through intentionality, appropriateness, structure, collaboration and internalisation. In the case of writing training, these concepts can be translated into the purpose of the activity, the relevant level of complexity, a step-by-step progression, a team approach and a gradual automatisisation of the steps towards writing proficiency. In concrete terms, the purpose of the set of activities is to develop in students both the criteria and resources for evaluating writing; the level of complexity requires the selection of relevant samples, provision of a list of criteria, and development of strategies for applying these models to students' own and their peers' writing; the step-by-step progression leads students from teacher response to peer-review and self-editing with the possibility of additional loops if needed; the team approach ensures that processes and criteria are negotiated and interactively constructed by students in a socially embedded learning experience (cf. Lantolf, 2000); and the gradual automatisisation of the revision process will be accomplished by moving through the different stages three times during one semester.

The types of feedback that can be exploited in this process are three-fold, including expert response, peer-response and guided self-assessment. In the context of the current study, expert response refers to the written comments of the teacher, peer response to the peer review conducted in class, and guided self-assessment to students checking their own work and formulating questions based on guidelines provided by the teacher (see appendices). According to Hedgcock (2005), the effectiveness of expert response depends on a series of factors, among them learner variables such as their proficiency in writing, their needs and expectations, institutional

constraints such as curricular requirements and teacher availability, task-related issues such as the purpose and nature of the writing assignment, pedagogical considerations like the focus of the teacher's comments and the expected outcome of the learner training. Peer-response, on the other hand, cannot be left simply to the learners; it needs to be modeled by the teacher, its rationale and procedure explained, and controlled through some specific task or required output to be accomplished by the students (cf. Kroll, 2001). Finally, the success of guided self-assessment depends on such crucial parameters as the capacity for self-direction (Candy, 1991), the readiness for self-evaluation (Kusnic & Finley, 1993), and the auto-concept of self-efficacy (Bandura, 1997). These parameters need to be taken into consideration when designing a scaffolded approach to writing development.

Context

The current study was conducted at the English Language Center of Shantou University. Shantou University, a public key university with private foundation support, is characterised by its reform-mindedness and international orientation, serving 8000+ student in undergraduate and graduate programmes of eight colleges. The English Language Center in its current set-up was established in 2003 as part of the English Enhancement Program. It offers a 7-level integrated skills programme for majors of all colleges, places a heavy emphasis on co-curricular activities and has a diverse faculty of Chinese, foreign trained and international teachers.

The overarching goal of the study was to increase students' learner autonomy by having them experience a scaffolded writing process and a variety of feedback formats. The concept of learner autonomy underlying the curriculum was based on Little's (2003) elements of insight (understanding the writing process), attitude (losing the exclusive teacher focus), reflection (critically examining one's own work), self-management (organizing the writing/learning process) and interaction (learning from/with peers). The different feedback formats were chosen with a view to raising students' awareness of their individual challenges in writing. The subsequent goal was to increase students' autonomy in addressing these challenges. In this process, building a community of learners by creating different patterns of interaction was considered the main vehicle for bringing about the desired changes in knowledge, attitude and behaviour.

Method

The design of the study, which took advantage of the teaching assignment of the researcher at the time, was based on a 3x3 pattern of class, assignment and feedback, encompassing three sections of an Academic Writing class with 16 students each, who had to complete three written assignments and were exposed to the three different feedback modes of teacher comment, peer review and self-evaluation at different stages in the semester. The syllabus of this class was built around the above mentioned three major writing assignments with two drafts and one reflective journal each. The supporting details of the writing process included samples to be analysed, an outline to be critiqued collaboratively and checklists to be applied in the evaluation process (see Appendix C). The feedback mode consisted of a combination of teacher response (written comments on their drafts), peer review (one full 2 hour class period in small groups with or without check list) and self-evaluation (check list only) based on guidelines in the form of check lists and was complemented by a 15 minute writing conference for each student with the teacher to clarify any issues emerging from the self/peer/expert feedback. Additional error check activities were conducted to raise students' awareness of micro-level editing and purely linguistic errors. These took the form of exercises where incorrect sentences from somebody's journal were displayed on screen and students were asked to improve them. In order to gauge progress in the development of autonomy, critical thinking and communicative competence, a different

questionnaire was administered at the beginning and at the end of the semester (see Appendices A & B). To obtain a clearer picture, interviews were conducted with a volunteer sample of three students out of a total of 45 enrolled in the three sections of the writing course. The following section will describe findings from the pre- and post-questionnaire, Journal 5 (the last one in the semester, designed as a retrospective on the entire learning process), and interviews with the three students.

Findings

The initial questionnaire was administered as a diagnostic instrument with the purpose of exploring students' self-concept and previous knowledge. According to their answers, students considered speaking their poorest skill closely followed by writing as shown in Table 1a.

Table 1a: Self-assessment of Skills

	<i>Reading</i>	<i>Listening</i>	<i>Writing</i>	<i>Speaking</i>
Self-assessment from 1 (excellent) to 5 (poor)	2.43	2.7	2.97	3.08

Their confidence level also showed a central tendency as can be seen in Table 1b, with all of the self-assessments between 2.5 and 3.

Table 1b: Self-assessment of Confidence Level

	<i>Working with an international company</i>	<i>Taking an English proficiency test</i>	<i>Studying abroad</i>
Self-assessment from 1 (very confident) to 5 (not at all confident)	2.65	2.72	2.91

While a large number of respondents stated having learned the genres planned for this course previously, with percentages ranging from 30% to 68% depending on the individual assignment, only 2% to 22% declared they had mastered the respective genre, again depending on the assignment. As for their enjoyment of writing as such, the majority declared they enjoyed this activity both in Chinese and in English, whereas only one third felt confident in Chinese and a mere 6% in English. Concerning the writing process, two thirds of respondents stated that they would generally consult with their friends over a paper, which seems quite significant given the wide-spread complaints about students being unwilling to engage in peer-review (cf. Reid, 1993; Ferris, 2003).

Table 1c: Initial Questionnaire Responses

Mastery of genre	30-88% done before	2-22% mastered
Writing in general	33% confident in Chinese	6% confident in English
Peer review	naturally done outside of class by 66%	

The exit questionnaire was designed to explore students' experiences with and opinions of the writing process as practised in this class. From among the overall skills targeted in this process (see Appendix B), students considered they had improved most in writing, followed by research and Internet, autonomous learning, professional skills and confidence (see Table 2a). Other options like oral interaction, listening or reading were chosen less frequently.

Table 2a: Exit Questionnaire – Progress on different skills

	<i>Writing</i>	<i>Research and Internet</i>	<i>Autonomous learning</i>	<i>Professional skills</i>	<i>Confidence</i>
Mean self-assessment from 1 (great progress) to 5 (no progress at all)	2	2.02	2.18	2.24	2.3

Among the five elements of writing that students' evaluation was based on, they felt they had progressed most in formatting, followed by organisation, grammar, content and vocabulary. The individual self-assessment scores can be seen in Table 2b.

Table 2b: Exit Questionnaire – Progress on writing elements

	<i>Formatting</i>	<i>Organisation</i>	<i>Grammar</i>	<i>Content</i>	<i>Vocabulary</i>
Mean self-assessment from 1 (great progress) to 5 (no progress at all)	1.75	2.02	2.18	2.21	2.23

As indicated in Table 2c, when asked for their preferred form of feedback, students chose teacher comments over other forms such as error check, peer review and self-evaluation.

Table 2c: Exit Questionnaire – Effectiveness of Different Feedback in Promoting Learning

	<i>Teacher comments</i>	<i>Writing conference</i>	<i>Error check</i>	<i>Peer review</i>	<i>Self-evaluation</i>
Mean rating from 1 (very effective) to 5 (not effective at all)	1.54	1.83	2.16	2.31	2.64

Finally, the most useful topics from the syllabus turned out to be process writing followed by CV/cover letter, formatting, book review and group work. The breakdown for each category can be seen in Table 2d. It would seem thus that students are

embracing the process approach and are developing higher-order organisational and writing skills.

Table 2d: Exit Questionnaire – Usefulness of Syllabus Components in Developing English Skills

	<i>Process writing</i>	<i>CV/cover letter</i>	<i>Formatting</i>	<i>Book review</i>	<i>Group work</i>
Mean rating from 1 (very useful) to 5 (not at all useful)	1.38	1.44	1.73	1.85	1.95

The journals, and in particular Journal 5, confirmed the findings from the post-questionnaire. Among the skills they had acquired in academic writing, students emphasised format, genre, organisation and academic versus personal style, in that order. For writing in general, they appreciated process writing, paragraph development, outlining, development of logic and transitions. The elements they were still worried about included vocabulary, their capacity for critical thinking and cultural differences. When asked how they would try to address these issues, students suggested practicing and combining reading and writing or reading and analysing. Their future plans with English ranged from taking an exam to working as a translator or journalist. The question how this class might help them in their future dealings with English was again answered with an increase in confidence level, by serving as a self-study path, and aiding in job hunting. These open-ended answers once again emphasise a more holistic perspective and a high level of discernment among students.

The interviews were aimed at clarifying some of the underlying reasons for the students' choices in the questionnaire; however, they turned out to deliver more complementary information. As could be expected, students have different histories, purposes, approaches and attitudes towards writing in Chinese versus English which can be partially addressed by the focus on autonomy but require considerable scaffolding in some cases. According to the interviewees, Chinese students in general still rely too heavily on reading, memorising, reciting, grammar rules and electronic English-Chinese dictionaries even though they are aware of their limitations. Consequently, the main difficulties they still face are related to wording, structure and Chinese thinking patterns. In order to overcome these difficulties, students would focus their attention, use an outline and exchange ideas with their peers. This is not quite in line with Huang (2005) who ranks grammar problems first, followed by use of words and textual cohesion. While all interviewees preferred teacher feedback, they were ambivalent over the usefulness of peer review. Finally, quite unexpectedly, they asked for more recommended reading. While this would strengthen the reading-writing link as well as the development of vocabulary, it was certainly a discovery on the part of the researcher, who tends to recommend reading widely but so far has not suggested any particular reading matters beyond internet links to course-relevant materials. Maybe a quick sideline on how to choose reading material might be helpful to cater to the Chinese tradition of providing clearer guidance to students in this matter while at the same time equipping them with a tool to make the choices themselves.

While all these data may not make the students seem exceedingly autonomous, I believe we must consider students perceptions within a traditional system. Though it is true that students still prefer teacher comments, the difference in numbers from one type of feedback to the next is not that immense; even self-evaluation is situated only slightly past the mid-point. Furthermore, besides writing itself, several autonomy-

related skills were chosen in the category of most notable improvements. Finally, though informal checking with roommates may be common practice, a more formalised approach to peer review in addition to self-evaluation should help students develop their writing and editing skills to a higher level.

Discussion

The results from the questionnaires, journal and interviews described above show a clear awareness on the part of students of their needs, the learning process as such and their achievements. They do possess a sense of self-efficacy, being in control of their learning process (Bandura, 1997), while at the same time being acutely aware of their challenges. Whereas the majority if not all of the students prefer teacher feedback, they still consider other options such as peer-review or self-evaluation useful in the learning process. Peer review was not introduced to these students for the first time by teachers; rather a majority of students consult with their peers even unasked if they have to submit written homework. Thus a combined approach to feedback should be offered to students to maximise feedback and learning opportunities.

These results are indeed encouraging. As Little (2003) succinctly summarises, the success of learner autonomy depends on a series of elements such as insight into the nature of independent learning, the right attitude towards this process, a reflective stance vis a vis one's own practice, both self-management and an openness to collaboration, interaction and exchange with one's peers. All these qualities can be fostered by a scaffolded approach combining language awareness, learning awareness and learner awareness. A model based on multiple ways of interaction, different types of evaluation and various directions for reflection can ensure that students can derive maximum benefit from their learning experience. Most of all, though, teachers need to become autonomous themselves, sensitive to students' needs, willing to explore their backgrounds and expectations, in order to ensure the success of learner autonomy in its own right, independent of pedagogical politics or dominant philosophy (cf. Benson, 1997).

The Author

Claudia Kunschak (MA Interpreting, University of Vienna, 1991; PhD Education, University of Arizona, 2003) has taught translation, literature and culture, and language for specific purposes (English, German, Spanish) at universities in Europe, the US and Asia since 1988. She currently teaches Academic Writing at the English Language Center of Shantou University in Southern China. After focusing on language testing, the Common European Framework and student mobility while in Europe, she has returned to her interests in language awareness, learner autonomy and the learning process at her current place of work.

Appendix A

Initial questionnaire

This questionnaire is meant to give me an idea of your previous English experience, your needs as a learner and your specific academic and writing background. Please take your time to fill it out carefully.

1) Name: _____

2) Major: _____

3) Years of learning English: _____

4) Contact with English outside of class:		hours/week
(please check)	___ TV/movies	_____
	___ music	_____
	___ reading	_____
	___ internet	_____
	___ interaction with foreigners	_____
	___ other: _____	_____

5) a) How would you rate your
(from 1 to 5)
(1=excellent, 5=poor)

listening ability	_____
reading ability	_____
speaking ability	_____
writing ability?	_____

b) Please rank them in the order of their importance for you:

1) 2) 3)

6) Do you plan to apply to study abroad? Yes ___/No ___?

b) How confident do you feel? (from 1 to 5, 1=very confident, 5=not confident at all) _____

7) Do you plan to work with an international company? Yes ___/No ___?

b) How confident do you feel? (from 1 to 5, 1=very confident, 5=not confident at all) _____

8) Do you plan to take a specific English test (CET; TOEFL etc.)? Yes ___/No ___?

b) How confident do you feel? (from 1 to 5, 1=very confident, 5=not confident at all) _____

9) Which of the following genres have you (please check)	done before	mastered
CV	_____	_____
cover letter	_____	_____
personal statement	_____	_____
problem-solution essay	_____	_____
compare-contrast essay	_____	_____
argumentative essay	_____	_____
book review	_____	_____
other: _____	_____	_____

b) Which other genre that has not been mentioned would be helpful to you in your field? Explain:

10) Do you enjoy writing in Chinese? Yes ___/No ___? Why/why not?

11) Do you enjoy writing in English? Yes___/No___? Why/why not?

12) What do you write (about) in Chinese? (content + genre)

13) What do you write (about) in English? (content + genre)

14) Would you consider yourself a good writer in Chinese? Yes___/No___? Why/why not?

15) Would you consider yourself a good writer in English? Yes___/No___? Why/why not?

16) What is most difficult for you when writing in English?

17) What is your writing process like in Chinese? Do you use an outline? Do you revise?

18) Do you consult with your friends when writing a paper? Yes___/No___? Why/Why not?

THANK YOU!

Appendix B

Final questionnaire

This questionnaire is designed to let me know how far this class has met your expectations and what you feel you have achieved during the semester. Please take your time to fill it out carefully.

Name (optional): _____

Section number (please circle): 48 49 50

1) After this class on academic writing, how would you rate your progress in the different skills?

PLEASE CIRCLE! (from 1=great progress to 5=no progress at all)

writing	1	2	3	4	5
reading	1	2	3	4	5
listening	1	2	3	4	5
speaking	1	2	3	4	5
oral interaction	1	2	3	4	5
awareness of cultural differences	1	2	3	4	5
research and internet skills	1	2	3	4	5
social skills	1	2	3	4	5
autonomous learning skills	1	2	3	4	5
professional skills	1	2	3	4	5
confidence level	1	2	3	4	5

Additional comments

2) Within your writing, how would you rate your progress in the different aspects?

PLEASE CIRCLE! (from 1=great progress to 5=no progress at all)

selection and presentation of content	1	2	3	4	5
organisation of both essay and paragraphs	1	2	3	4	5
knowledge and application of formatting rule	1	2	3	4	5
vocabulary, especially academic word choice	1	2	3	4	5
awareness and use of grammar	1	2	3	4	5

Additional comments

3) In this class, you have experienced different types of feedback. How would you rate them in terms of effectiveness in promoting your learning? PLEASE CIRCLE! (from 1=very effective to 5=not effective at all)

self-evaluation	1	2	3	4	5
peer evaluation	1	2	3	4	5
teacher evaluation	1	2	3	4	5
error check	1	2	3	4	5
writing conference	1	2	3	4	5

Additional comments

4) According to the syllabus, you have had the opportunity to engage in the following topics and tasks. How would you rate their usefulness in developing your English skills? (from 1=very useful to 5=not at all useful)

Overview of AW incl. Contrastive Rhetoric	1	2	3	4	5
Writing process (outline, paragraphs, transitions)	1	2	3	4	5
Formatting (APA)	1	2	3	4	5
CV + Cover Letter/Statement	1	2	3	4	5
Essay types (PS/CC/AE)	1	2	3	4	5
Book review	1	2	3	4	5
Discussion and debating	1	2	3	4	5
Media/Internet literacy	1	2	3	4	5
Online exercises	1	2	3	4	5
Presentation	1	2	3	4	5
Journals	1	2	3	4	5
Group work	1	2	3	4	5

Additional comments

5) How would you rate the difficulty level of this class compared to lower level ELC classes/your major?

more difficult ___ about the same ___ less difficult ___ *than previous ELC*
 more difficult ___ about the same ___ less difficult ___ *than major classes*

6) How would you rate the amount of time required for complying with all tasks compared to other classes?

more time-consuming ___ about the same ___ less time-intensive ___ *than ELC*
 more time-consuming ___ about the same ___ less time-intensive ___ *than major*

7) How would you rate the grading level of this class compared to lower level ELC classes/your major?

tougher grading ___ about the same ___ softer grading ___ *than ELC*
 tougher grading ___ about the same ___ softer grading ___ *than major*

8) How much money did you have to spend on print-outs compared to other classes (textbooks)?

more money ___ about the same ___ less money ___ *than ELC*
 more money ___ about the same ___ less money ___ *than major*

9) What topic or activity did you like most?

10) What did you like less but saw the use of?

11) What did you like least and should be discontinued?

12) What was missing or would you have liked more of?

Appendix C

Feedback Forms for Writing Assignment 1 (CV and cover letter/personal statement)

CRITIQUE YOUR RESUME

It is important to create a resume that is strong and concise. It should clearly state your career goal with the body of the resume logically supporting this objective. Your resume makes a personal statement about you and your career. It is important that you feel comfortable with your resume format and content. If the final product doesn't make you feel proud to use it as your personal sales tool, take time to make the changes necessary to achieve this goal.

When critiquing your resume, the following chart can serve as a reminder of key points to review.

OVERALL APPEARANCE	SATISFACTORY	NEEDS WORK
Is the layout/format pleasing to the eye?		
Does the resume look as if it fits comfortably within the page (as opposed to appearing crowded together or practically empty)?		
Is the identifying information easy to understand and correct?		
If two pages are used, does each page contain identifying information?		
If graphics are used, do they look professional or do they detract?		
Is the resume on 20 pound bonded paper, and is the print type clear and not smeared?		
Is the resume easily readable? (bullets used, no long sentences, no obscure fonts, no unexplained abbreviations)		
Does the resume use bold, italics and underlining appropriately to highlight key strengths?		
Is the information you wish to highlight located on the left side of the page and near the top of the page whenever possible? (for example, job title rather than employment dates listed in left margin)		
Does the resume capture attention appropriately and excite a person to find out more about you?		
<i>I would rate the overall appearance of this resume as:</i>		

SPECIFIC ATTRIBUTES	<i>SATISFACTORY</i>	<i>NEEDS WORK</i>
Goal focused: Does the text support the objective?		
Length: Could it tell the same story if it was shortened? Is it too short? Is it limited to no more than 2 pages?		
Relevance: Is the material sequenced in order of importance and relevance? Has extraneous material been eliminated?		
Format: Is the resume written in the best format (reverse chronological, skills-based or combination) that presents you in the most positive light?		
Action Orientation: Do sentences and paragraphs begin with action verbs?		
Specificity: Does the resume avoid generalities and focus on specific information about experiences, projects, products, etc.?		
Completeness: Is all important information included?		
Bottom Line / Targeted Focus: How well does the resume accomplish its ultimate purpose of getting the employer to interview you? Is it focused enough so that the employer is clear about what type of position you are seeking?		
Qualified Results: Are results of your past work experiences quantified when possible?		
Sections: Are the headings used for specific sections appropriate?		
Activities/Interests: Is there anything included that could detract from your candidacy? Anything controversial or misleading?		
Spelling and Grammar: Is anything misspelled? Are words used correctly and is the sentence structure correct? Are the verbs and descriptions appropriate to the level of the position you are seeking?		
<i>I would rate the specific attributes of this resume as:</i>		

<http://www1.umn.edu/ohr/img/assets/15942/CritiqueChart.doc>

Editing Checklist - Personal Statement

The following checklist is divided into the basic categories that we used to organise this course: content, structure, and style.

CONTENT

- Are you answering the actual question given in the prompt?
- Have you been sincere and personal?
- Is your essay within the word limit?
- Will your reader find the essay interesting?
- Are you showing rather than telling?
- Does your introduction grab the reader's attention?
- Do you explore your experiences in sufficient depth?
- Does your essay contain a high level of detail and concrete evidence?
- Have you avoided unsubstantiated claims?
- Do you offer specific, personal insights rather than trite generalisations and clichés?
- Does your essay reveal anything meaningful about your character?
- Do you avoid summarising information that can be found elsewhere on your application?
- Will your essay make you stand out?
- Does your conclusion leave a lasting impression?

STRUCTURE

- Can you identify an overarching theme? Have you articulated that theme in the essay?
- Does your theme have multiple layers and genuine depth?
- Do you have a reason for placing every paragraph where it is?
- Do your paragraphs flow smoothly? Are there any gaps or jumps?
- Does each point build upon previous points, or does your essay sound like a list?
- Have you written insightful transitions and resolutions that highlight your key themes?
- Are your stories well integrated into your essay?
- Is the essay clear and coherent? Have you strengthened its impact by using the optimal structure?

STYLE

- Have you achieved a simple, straightforward style?
- Have you varied your sentence constructions?
- Have you avoided unnecessarily fancy vocabulary?
- Have you avoided passive voice?
- Have you achieved active writing through the use of strong verbs?
- Have you avoided overusing adjectives and adverbs?
- Is your tone conversational, rather than too casual or too formal?
- Have you conveyed confidence, enthusiasm, and passion?

http://www.essayedge.com/business/essayadvice/course/lsix_checklist.shtml

Error checklist

Error type	Where?	Problem	Rule	Solution
Verb tense				
Verb form				
Subject verb agreement				
Noun ending				
Article				
Other determiner				
Word choice				
Word form				
Prepositions				
Pronouns				
Word order				
Omitted words				
Unnecessary words				
Spelling				
Punctuation				

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