



# A Collaborative Approach to Written Corrective Feedback

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## 1. Dynamic approach to written corrective feedback

Multiple factors influence the uptake of feedback. When providing feedback does not work and it just leaves some colored checking on the paper, it must raise several questions for the teacher and remind her/him of several reasons accounting for it. As Evans et al. (2010)[8] aptly put when feedback fails, other reasons of inaccuracy and resistance of errors in writing must be taken into consideration, namely, situational factors (teacher, physical environment, socioeconomic conditions) learner variables (motivation, learning style, goals, L1) and finally methodological variables (instructional design, what is taught, how it is taught). What Evans et al. add to these factors is 'manageability', 'meaningfulness', 'timeliness' and 'constancy' of feedback. He asserts that learners shirk off the responsibility of correcting their errors because it is voluminous and lengthy. Accordingly, a written product must be short enough in order not to exhaust learners' patience. The teacher must also have enough time to attend to each individual error. Besides, teacher's feedback should be understandable for the learner. This is reminiscent of input+1 put by Krashen (1985) [13], who firmly believed that for the input to be changed into intake, it should be within the present level of competence of the learner. In addition, feedback must be timely, that is to say, it must be provided at the right time when the learner is focused and involved in the activity. For the input to be nailed down, it must be provided constantly. Constant feedback can play the role of practice and ample exposure to input. It may also guarantee long lasting learning, which is the main purpose of feedback. Not only is random correction ineffective but it is also baffling for the learner. This position supports what Bialystok (1981) [1] suggested. He asserted that practice serves as the mechanism by which explicit knowledge turns into implicit knowledge. To achieve the above mentioned objectives, Evans et al. (2010)[8] suggests a dynamic approach to feedback. The two principle characteristics of dynamic WCF are:

- Feedback reflects what the individual learner needs most as demonstrated by what the learner produces;
- Tasks and feedback are manageable, meaningful, timely, and constant for both the learner and teacher. (p.452)

The procedures, according to Evans, taken in dynamic approach are as follows:

1. The learner writes a ten-minute paragraph at the beginning of the class.
2. The teacher collects the paragraphs; marks them for linguistic accuracy using error symbols; scores the paragraph for accuracy and content; returns papers to students in the next class session.
3. Records each error by category on tally sheet; types each error in adequate context in an error log; types and edits paragraph; and submits paragraph to teacher for marking.
4. Marks paragraph for syntactic and lexical errors by underlining or circling and then returns the paragraph for future editing or filing if error free.

## 2. The Study

### Research questions:

1. Does advanced learners' accuracy improve over a 10-week period as a result of written CF?
2. Does advanced learners' accuracy vary according to dynamic written CF provided?

### 2.1. Context and participants

The study was conducted in Iran Language Institute. Three advanced classes, taking general English courses, including 60 students participated in the study.

### 2.2. Procedures

The learners were familiar with paragraph writing rules because they had already been taught about the structure of the paragraph- topic sentence, main idea, supports and concluding sentence, paragraph type and the like. Therefore the procedures were as follows:



1. On day one, the pre-test was administered.
2. On week 6 immediate post was administered.
3. The learners continued writing for three more weeks but none of the groups received any treatments during the interim period.
4. Week 10 the last writing, that is the delayed post was administered in order to study the long-term effect of the treatments; therefore, it was administered without the participants being given any advance notice.

### 3. Analysis

To evaluate the accuracy of each writing, error-free clause/c was conducted. As Wigglesworth (2008)[17] has reported error-free clauses (EFC) are the most precise measure of writing accuracy that we currently have. This may be because writing will almost always produce more clauses than T-units. Thus, the clause may afford greater discriminating power than the larger T-units. So first, the total number of clauses in each sample was established. Then, each clause was evaluated to determine if it had any syntactic, punctuation, spelling, or lexical errors. The total number of EFC was then divided by the total number of clauses (EFC/C), resulting in a ratio score. Descriptive tests for each of the three tests were calculated separately for the three groups. One-way covariance (ANCOVA) was chosen to address the research questions in order to remove any effects associated with concomitant variables that might otherwise contaminate the results and lead to faulty conclusion.

### 4. Discussion and conclusion

Research question 1 asked whether advanced learners' written accuracy improves over a 10-week period as a result of written CF. As the results indicate both the group receiving unfocused correction and dynamic approach outperformed the control group in both pre-test and post-test, which like some previous research ([2];[6];[4][5]; [8];[9];[11][12];[14];[15];[16]) proves the efficacy of CF. There was a slight increase in accuracy in pos-test in control group, which in the first place, might be attributed to the effect of practice of writing and second, the effect of instruction, for the course they were taking was a general English course focusing on all four skills as well as English Knowledge (grammar, vocabulary,.....). In spite of the fact that most researchers recommend focused correction claiming that it leads to faster improvement in accuracy [3], Ellis et al. (2008) [7] did not find a difference between focused and unfocused correction in the result of their study. Besides, as Evans et al. (2010)[8] note unfocused correction may not be appropriate for classroom because there is a possibility of misunderstanding on the part of students that they do not have any other problems or the other problems are not as important, which might lead to fossilization.

The second research question investigated whether or not there was a differential effect on accuracy for the differential options. The statistics results revealed that there was a significant difference between the dynamic and the unfocused group ( $p < 0.01$ ), in other words, the dynamic group outperformed both the unfocused and control group both in pre and post-test. This method of correction may be more beneficial for several reasons: first, dynamic written feedback provides the learner with the opportunity of contemplation and as a result the activation of the grammar knowledge through indirect coding symbols and active involvement in correction process in the first step of correction. Second, as Evans et al. (2010) [8] assert feedback must be timely so that the teacher will make sure the learner takes it seriously and does not treat it as doodles on the paper. It seems the time gap between when the error is made and when it is corrected causes loss of motivation and forgetfulness on the part of the learner, which is compensated by this method. In other words, teacher's motivation and seriousness about student's error correction may boost student's motivation as well. Third, as the class meets just twice a week, the teacher provides correction through the e-mail to observe the principle of timeliness, which is not only appropriate and motivating for today's technology-oriented students but it also improves the relation between the teacher and student which might be another reason for generating motivation among learners. Moreover, although the number of paragraphs written during the experiment was fewer than the other groups, it led to gains, which was due to several exchanges between the teacher and the student. It is implied that for the correction to be beneficial errors should be dealt and removed on the spot so that they are not repeated in the following writings. It is shown that when errors are not dealt appropriately, students may use strategy of avoidance in the following writings rather than correcting the mistakes.



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