Self-assessment in EFL Writing: A Study of Intermediate EFL Students at a Thai University

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Abstract

This study investigates the implementation of a self-assessment program in writing by intermediate EFL students at a university in Thailand. The students in the control group did not have self-assessment training. The students in the experimental group, on the other hand, were trained to self-assess their essays using self-assessment checklists and guidance sheets. All the essays were graded by two native speakers. Then the student participants and the native speakers were interviewed. All of them also answered questions in reflective journals. The results from the data collected from the participants' interviews, reflective journals and the essay scores were triangulated to find out how the participants perceived the benefits of self-assessment in writing, what the differences were between the participants who had self-assessment training and those who did not, how the students' writing was affected by self-assessment, and what the common obstacles to students' self-assessment in writing were.

Keywords

Self-assessment, Writing assessment, Intermediate EFL students, Essay writing, Learner autonomy

Introduction

In the past twenty years there have been two movements which encourage the implementation of self-assessment in language learning and teaching. The first movement is the learner-centered approach (Griffith & Lim, 2010; Zohrabi et al., 2012; Massouleh et al., 2012). This approach encourages active participation of learners in the learning process. There has also been a plea for a more democratic way of testing and assessment that involves learners themselves in the assessment process. Self-assessment, then, is introduced as an alternative method of assessment in which learners have a chance to closely engage themselves in assessment as an integral part of the teaching and learning process. As a result, the learners become more aware of the overall assessment process and its effect upon their language proficiency.

In addition to the importance of self-assessment in learner-centered education, there is another incentive that encourages the use of self-assessment in the teaching of writing. There have been complaints in the workplace and in many professions that university graduates cannot write well enough to meet the demand of the internationally integrated workplace (Wongsotorn, 1994; Shohamy, 2001). Ongoing collaboration and assimilation among ASEAN communities has also prompted researchers to reconsider the process of writing assessment with the hope of finding

an assessment method that contributes to the improvement of the writing ability of the learners as well as life-long learning skills.

In an attempt to improve the learners' writing ability, teachers who teach writing employ many strategies including reviewing basic grammar, using pairs or small groups of classmates to edit students' writing, correcting all the discoverable mistakes in each piece of writing and giving individual and detailed feedback to each student writer. All these techniques have been used worldwide in the context of teaching writing in English. Similarly, in an EFL context, such as the one I am most cognizant of, these strategies have been almost completely exhausted. The afore-mentioned problems and complaints, however, still persist. Consequently, some writing teachers are now seriously considering implementing self-assessment, on a large scale, as an alternative solution that will involve learners in the learning and assessing process.

However, self-assessment, as used in this study, shares the same meaning as alternative assessment, which does not always involve an assessment resulting in numbers or grades. Such alternative assessments, such as portfolio assessment, aim at improving students' language proficiency. Self-assessment does not necessarily have to do with numbers or grades (Oscarson—personal communication, 2009).

Rationale
The complaint about the Thai university graduates' poor writing ability, as pointed out by Wongsotorn (1994) and Boonpattanaporn (2008), made me reconsider my own teaching situation. In teaching writing to first-year university students in Thailand, there are typical problems confronting English teachers. First of all, most Thai teachers do not usually give writing assignments, and they rarely include essay writing in the mid-term or final examination due to the large number of students in each class. When teachers attempt to reduce their workload, students, inevitably, have fewer opportunities to practice their writing skills. Secondly, students do not carefully note the corrections made by teachers; and they do not readily learn from their mistakes even though some teachers painstakingly make all the corrections and give individual feedback to each student. However diligently the teachers try to point out all major and minor mistakes, the majority of students still repeat most of their mistakes in the next writing assignments. I have personally shared this experience and this heartbreaking feeling with many English teachers. I cannot help but feel that my time is not well spent in trying to correct all the mistakes, most of which will eventually be regurgitated back to me either in another piece of writing or on the exam. Students usually believe that once they finish writing an assignment, the job is over. Their attitude is: "Nothing else needs to be done." This is because students have been trained in this way and inculcated with this belief. They believe that there is no further involvement of students with the written work after the writing is finished. Thus, there is no need to study corrections suggested by the teachers; the grip of repetitive errors retains its hold and these errors continue in their vicious cycle of appearances and re-appearances.

Finally, writing is an important skill students should strive to master. It is necessary that students who wish to further their study at a higher level or in an international college or to pursue work in international firms (which offer higher salaries and better benefits) must be able to write well in order to "meet the demands of the workplace." This last problem exists because it is advisable that Thai university students master writing skills. Due to globalization and industrialization, especially among ASEAN countries, there are many international organizations, corporations, factories, and offices where English is used as the primary medium of communication. Undergraduates who want to study abroad also need English skills to achieve acceptable scores on international tests such as TOEFL, IELTS, GRE, GMAT, or LSAT. This is the final and most important reason for which Thai undergraduates need to master English writing skills.

The above-mentioned situation is what writing teachers need to reconsider when reviewing their teaching situation and teaching techniques; there are important reasons why self-assessment/self-editing should be an alternative. First, if self-assessment is implemented, the teacher's workload will be reduced to a certain extent. This is because students will have to assess their own writing assignments and improve them significantly before submitting them to the teacher. The students are trained to self-assess their writing by being directed to be on the lookout while editing their writing for certain possible organizational and grammatical errors which they are prone to make. Secondly, in going through the self-assessment editing process, each student will be forced to look at possible mistakes while being guided by the self-assessment checklists. When filling in the reflective journal after doing the self-assessment, each student will have to list all the corrections made during the process. Students' attention will, therefore, be drawn towards an awareness of their mistakes and they will be given incentives for correcting these same mistakes. Hopefully, they may then be less likely to repeat these same errors in the future.

Research questions
There are three major questions to be considered.
1. How do EFL student participants and native speaker judges perceive the benefits of self-assessment in writing?
2. How was the student participants' writing affected by self-assessment of writing?
3. What are the obstacles to self-assessment of writing by EFL students, according to both the student and the native speaker participants?

Literature Review
Self-regulated Learning
The terms self-regulated learning (SRL) and self-directed learning are used interchangeably. Researchers (Boekaerts and Cascallar, 2006; Boihuis, 2003; Kirby and Down, 2007; Nicol and Macfarlane-Dick, 2006; Pintrich, 2004) agree that self-regulated learning is essential to learning and achievement in schools, colleges and the workplace. This is because students generally perceive the concepts of teaching, learning and intelligence through their experience in educational settings (Kember, 1997). Self-regulation of learning, as an educational goal, requires responsible and

cooperative learners (Slavin, 1995). Some students never learn to be independent learners and do not know how to handle problems (Candy, 1991). Thus, educational settings should prepare students so that they can become self-regulated learners.

There is no straightforward definition of SRL. Schunk and Zimmerman (1994: p. ix) define SRL as "…self-generated thoughts, feelings, and actions which are systematically oriented toward attainment of goals." Boekaerts (2002: 595) defines SRL as "…students' attempts to attain personal goals by systematically generating thoughts, actions, and feelings at the point of use, taking account of the local conditions." She stated that it is important to know which personal goals students are trying to achieve or avoid so as to understand how and why students self-regulate. Boekaerts, Maes, and Karoly (2005:199) report that most researchers agree that SRL "…refers to multi-component, iterative, self-steering processes that target one's own cognitions, feelings, and actions, as well as features of the environment" to achieve one's own goals. Pintrich (2004) identified self-regulatory learners as possessing planning, monitoring, control and reflection processes. Ainley and Patrick (2006) adopted these four processes in their study of self-regulation. Recently, two researchers studied self-regulated learners and classified them into high, low and average SRL learners. Abar and Loken (2010) concluded that students should be encouraged to have high self-regulated learning skills in order to be successful learners.

Autonomous learning
Autonomy has slightly different meanings to various researchers. Some researchers define autonomous learning as a process in which learners are responsible for their own learning (Holec, 1987; Pemberton, 1996; Benson, 2001). Autonomy to Holec (1980:3) means "the ability to take charge of one's own learning." Dickinson (1987) refers to autonomy as a learning mode, a situation or technique related to a responsible attitude to the learning process. Pemberton (1996:2) related autonomy to a number of terms including "self-directed", "self-access learning", "self-instruction", "independent learning" and "autonomous learning." Dickinson (1992) added that autonomy is a form of self-direction where learners make decisions about their learning and where there are different levels of autonomy. Little (1991) gave an all-encompassing definition of autonomy, as already seen from the researchers above, as he sees autonomy as:

> a capacity for detachment, critical reflection, decision making, and independent action. It presupposes, but also entails, that the learner will develop a particular kind of psychological relation to the process and content of his learning. The capacity for autonomy will be displayed both in the way the learner learns and in the way he or she transfers what has been learned to wider contexts. (Little, 1991, p.4)

Thus, autonomy is a life-long and practical learning ability which encompasses all aspects of learning, not only language learning.

Similarly, another group of researchers sees autonomous learners as not only being independent and in control of their learning but also as being socially responsible and motivated learners who reflect on and assess their learning (Riley, 1987; Allwright, 1990; Kohonen, 1993; Ushioda, 1996). Dam (1990) sees learner autonomy as readiness on the part of learners to take charge of their own learning for their own purposes. Autonomy is a capacity to act independently, as well as cooperatively, as a socially responsible individual. Little (1999) says that most successful learners are autonomous, which means they are responsible, constantly reflecting on why and how they are learning, and are also capable of evaluating their own progress.

A number of researchers have also suggested that changes in the teacher's role were needed. A new role for the teacher is as facilitator (Sturtridge, 1992), which includes making learners aware of their own responsibilities, language proficiency level and individual objectives, and what benefits can be derived from specific activities; learners should be directed to particular activities. Thavenius (1999) suggests that autonomous teachers are not only willing to let learners be responsible, but also share responsibility with learners, and thus encourage an interdependent relationship with learners in the classroom. Moh (1994:42) sees an autonomous teacher as an interdependent person. Moh (1994:48) found that learners have a "seed" of autonomy which allows an autonomous teacher to act as a gardener who is able to nurture it to full maturity. In sum, both teachers and learners need to alter their roles and attitudes to act in an interdependent and mutually responsible way to promote long-lasting autonomy for the learner.

Defining self-assessment
Self-assessment has been defined in a number of different ways. The definitions which are most relevant definitions for the purposes of this study have been provided by Holec, Boud and Oscarson. Holec (1985) sees self-assessment as an internal measure of the learning process. He emphasizes that this internal measure should facilitate the monitoring of the learning process rather than compete directly with external standardized tests. Boud (1991:5) sees self-assessment as "the involvement of students in identifying standards and/or criteria to apply to their work and making judgments about the extent to which they have met these criteria and standards." As Boud point out, learners should be allowed to assess their work as well as involve themselves in setting the criteria for assessment. This process will encourage learners to sort out what the qualities of a good piece of work are and then make adjustments to their own work so that this work comes closer to meeting the criteria chosen. However, Oscarson's (1997) approach is perhaps the most practical. He draws upon Holec's and Boud's definitions by agreeing to have learners assess their own work, but further develops the use of assessment to promote the learning process. Earlier, Oscarson suggested that self-assessment is about how, under what conditions and with what effects learners or language users may judge their language ability. Later on, Oscarson (1998: 133-156) redefined self-assessment as "the process whereby someone determines the nature, characteristics, quality or level of his or her own ability or learning, either individually or in interaction with someone else" (personal communication, translated from the Swedish). This definition of self-assessment suits

my context best because students with "intermediate" language ability at my university cannot set criteria as suggested by Boud. This is because it has been generally accepted in Thailand that students are not able to set the criteria because their English proficiency is not high enough, and thus only teachers can set the criteria. However, students can still decide where their language quality/level is by using the criteria provided. They can self-assess individually, or in interaction with someone else, such as a friend or classmate, or with teacher guidance.

Self-assessment as a basis for learner autonomy in teaching/learning writing to EFL learners

Blanche (1988) found from reviewing self-assessment studies in the 1980s that self-assessment was a condition that encouraged learner autonomy. Earlier studies emphasized the product rather than the process of self-assessment. However, more recent self-assessment research has focused on the development of methods and materials used rather than the issue of the validity of learners' self-assessment. Some researchers also incorporated qualitative methods to gain a deeper insight into the learner's writing process. Sullivan and Lindgren (2002) studied whether self-assessment helped promote student writers' autonomy in a writing class which used a computer-aided program. Luoma and Tarnanen (2003) used a self-rating instrument, created for DIALANG to answer the following questions: 1) to what extent did self-ratings correspond with scores given by teachers? 2) what was the self-rating process like as an activity? 3) what kind of assessment did this procedure involve? 4) did the self-rating benchmark give a "truthful" picture of writing? Luoma and Tarnanen showed that the learners could self-assess their writing skills realistically on their own. Alderson (2005) also studied the DIALANG self-assessment system. Self-assessment sheds light on learners' beliefs about their language abilities and on whether the beliefs are realistic when compared to diagnostic test results. Even though the results of the self-assessment and diagnostic tests did not match because there were too many variables involved in self-assessment, he stated that self-assessment can nonetheless contribute to the encouragement of learner autonomy because it provokes self-awareness among learners. Brown (2005) also studied the effectiveness of self-assessment of student writers by using annotated samples of learner-produced texts. The aim of Brown's project was to develop a means whereby students could reliably evaluate their own tasks. She used annotated samples which related performance to criteria and standards. Brown also concluded that this project encouraged learners to develop solid self-monitoring skills for future writing production.

The writing process for EFL learners

Matsuda (2003) analyzed the history of process writing and concluded that process-oriented pedagogy emerged to counteract the product-oriented tradition. The process-oriented movement started in the 1960s and became more generally acceptable from the 1980s onwards. In the early 21st century, the process-oriented approach is widely accepted in the field of writing pedagogy as it represents a more student-centered pedagogical approach and is preferred over the product-oriented writing pedagogy, which is teacher-centered. The process approach is seen as a self-discovery activity (Grabe and Kaplan, 1996). Flower and Hayes (1980; 1981) and Kellogg (1996)

emphasized the interaction of the stages in which writers plan, put ideas into a written text and revise the text to make it best represent their ideas as first set out in their original plans. To achieve their writing goals, the writers had to adjust and readjust the plan, the ideas and the language many times. Similarly, Bereiter and Scardamalia (1987) also saw the writing process as the interaction of two areas: content and rhetorical problems. They stated that it was "a two-way interaction between continuously developing knowledge and continuously developing the text (p. 12)." Lawrence (1972) also agrees that writing is a process that encourages student independence. Consequently, process writing should be used to encourage student writers' independence and autonomy.

In the writing context, Susser (1994) suggests two elements for the teaching of process writing: awareness and intervention. Students usually believe that writing is just to get ideas into words. Susser believes that the process approach makes students realize that writing is a process. During the process, teachers intervened to help students write. Flower and Hayes (1981:55) also agree that teachers should intervene during the writing process to help students write rather than merely to repair the finished work. However, in ESL/EFL writing instruction, Susser pointed out two problems. First, teachers needed training on how to effectively intervene during the process. Second, process writing pedagogical strategies concentrated on grammar correction at the sentence level, rather than focusing on meaning. He recommended that teachers become aware of the significance of intervention strategies which would not confuse student writers with false or even useless information. In sum, student writers should be trained to take control of their own writing process and be aware of what they are doing, what needs to be done, and how to achieve their writing goals by themselves. Writing teachers should only intervene during the writing process as facilitators or providers of what is needed to develop autonomous writers.

In sum, this literature review reveals that there is a growing need to promote life-long learning skills so that learners can rely on themselves after leaving college or university. Self-regulated learning is highly recommended. There is also a suggestion about designing an alternative form of assessment that will supplement traditional assessment or standardized summative tests for writing. Self-assessment is recommended as an alternative form of assessment which promotes life-long learning skills by training learners to be autonomous or independent. SRL and self-assessment should be combined to promote autonomous learners' independence. Yancey and Smith (2000:175) concluded that there were two options offered by self-assessment. One was a "private" world in a learner's mind; the other is related to the "public" domain and involves negotiating with others, such as receiving teachers' guidance, while assessing one's work. These researchers also posed the question: "How can we encourage collaboration and negotiation among the student, text, and teacher through self-assessment?" The emphasis on processes rather than products, especially in EFL writing, encourages writer independence as a way to develop autonomy. Thus, training learners to be independent assessors of their own work is more important than teachers' feedback. This study will investigate self-assessment as an interdependent approach, as suggested in the literature review; learner autonomy

should be collaboration between teachers and learners. The teachers can provide a self-assessment tool and training on how to use the tool. If this method is effective, student writers will be able to self-assess their essays as they go through the revision process. In addition, this study will investigate the perceptions of both learners and native speakers with regard to whether self-assessment is beneficial (or increases the learners' writing ability) and whether there are any obstacles that inhibit learners' improvement in writing.

Methodology
The research design used in this study is a mixed-methods design. The results from the student writers' and the native speakers' interviews and reflective journals were triangulated with the results from a quantitative analysis of the student writers' essay scores. The reason for collecting both qualitative and quantitative data is to take advantage of the strengths of both forms of research design to cross-validate results.

Research context
English is a compulsory foreign language for all Thai students from the time they start schooling until they finish their high school education. After that, at college or university level, English is still compulsory for all students in the first year, which consists of two semesters. Before entering any public university in Thailand, each student has to take the National University Entrance Examination. Generally, the English language proficiency of Thai university students is at an intermediate level.

The teaching methods used at most Thai universities are still primarily teacher-centered even though there have been many attempts to promote a student-centered teaching approach during the last three decades. Thai English teachers are still experimenting with various techniques to move away from a teacher-centered approach in order to promote more learner autonomy. At my university, the students' English scores from the National University Entrance Examination are used to place students into English Course Levels 1, lower English proficiency, to 6, the highest English proficiency. Students from English Course Level 5 participated in this study because the aim of the study was to study writing, which is the emphasis of English Course Level 5.

The participants
Two sections of English Course Level 5 had a total enrollment of 100 students. At the beginning of the semester, the researcher informed all the students about the research project and asked for volunteers from both groups. All 50 students in each group went through the same activities in class, but the research participants (8 from each group) kept reflective journals and were interviewed at the end of the semester. Students in the control group had no self-editing training, whereas students in the experimental group had self-editing training using self-assessment checklists and a guidance sheet. These student participants were comparable in their English language proficiency, age and gender distribution. There were also two native speaker participants who assessed the student participants' essays.

The instruments

The instruments used to collect data included reflective journals for all student and native speaker participants, and self-assessment checklists and a guidance sheet for self-assessment conferences only for student in the experimental group. The self-assessment checklist was adapted from the course book used for English Course Level 5, by Oshima and Hogue (1997). The guidance sheet, based on Min's (2006) essay guides, was also adapted to make it suitable for use with the course book and to familiarize the student participants with the writing construct during self-assessment training. Reflective journals were used to triangulate the results from the interviews of the participants. Essays were used to collect quantitative data scores to check whether self-assessment helped improve the participants' writing.

The procedures

The following flowchart summarizes the step-by-step procedural details of the self-assessment process for the participants in both the control and the experimental groups (Figure 1).

All 64 essays from both groups were graded by native speakers who were not told which essays belonged to which groups. Then the native speakers were interviewed using the students' essays and the native speakers' reflective journals as stimuli.

Coding and categorization of the data

The interview transcripts and the reflective journals of all the research participants were coded manually by the researcher. Then another colleague was asked to use ATLAS.ti to code the transcript again systematically without knowing which group of students each set of scripts belonged to. The colleague and the researcher generally agreed on major categories. Then the categories were double-checked by an expert and were later adjusted as recommended.
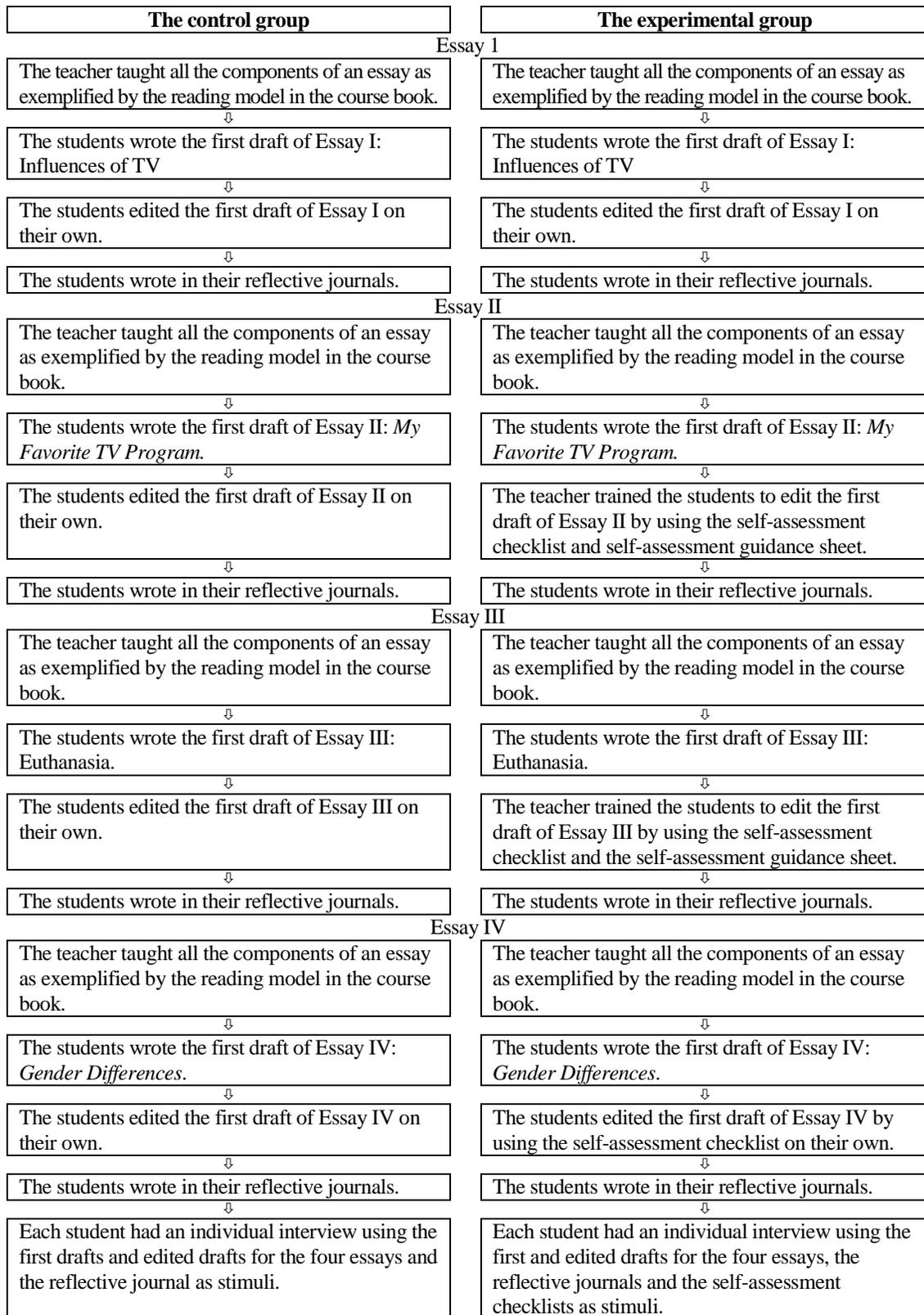
The control group	**The experimental group**
Essay 1	
The teacher taught all the components of an essay as exemplified by the reading model in the course book.	The teacher taught all the components of an essay as exemplified by the reading model in the course book.
⇩	⇩
The students wrote the first draft of Essay I: Influences of TV	The students wrote the first draft of Essay I: Influences of TV
⇩	⇩
The students edited the first draft of Essay I on their own.	The students edited the first draft of Essay I on their own.
⇩	⇩
The students wrote in their reflective journals.	The students wrote in their reflective journals.
Essay II	
The teacher taught all the components of an essay as exemplified by the reading model in the course book.	The teacher taught all the components of an essay as exemplified by the reading model in the course book.
⇩	⇩
The students wrote the first draft of Essay II: *My Favorite TV Program.*	The students wrote the first draft of Essay II: *My Favorite TV Program.*
⇩	⇩
The students edited the first draft of Essay II on their own.	The teacher trained the students to edit the first draft of Essay II by using the self-assessment checklist and self-assessment guidance sheet.
⇩	⇩
The students wrote in their reflective journals.	The students wrote in their reflective journals.
Essay III	
The teacher taught all the components of an essay as exemplified by the reading model in the course book.	The teacher taught all the components of an essay as exemplified by the reading model in the course book.
⇩	⇩
The students wrote the first draft of Essay III: Euthanasia.	The students wrote the first draft of Essay III: Euthanasia.
⇩	⇩
The students edited the first draft of Essay III on their own.	The teacher trained the students to edit the first draft of Essay III by using the self-assessment checklist and the self-assessment guidance sheet.
⇩	⇩
The students wrote in their reflective journals.	The students wrote in their reflective journals.
Essay IV	
The teacher taught all the components of an essay as exemplified by the reading model in the course book.	The teacher taught all the components of an essay as exemplified by the reading model in the course book.
⇩	⇩
The students wrote the first draft of Essay IV: *Gender Differences.*	The students wrote the first draft of Essay IV: *Gender Differences.*
⇩	⇩
The students edited the first draft of Essay IV on their own.	The students edited the first draft of Essay IV by using the self-assessment checklist on their own.
⇩	⇩
The students wrote in their reflective journals.	The students wrote in their reflective journals.
⇩	⇩
Each student had an individual interview using the first drafts and edited drafts for the four essays and the reflective journal as stimuli.	Each student had an individual interview using the first and edited drafts for the four essays, the reflective journals and the self-assessment checklists as stimuli.

Figure 1. Research Procedure

Data analysis
There are three sets of data which consist of the student participants' and the native speakers' interviews, the student participants' and the native speakers' reflective journals, and the student participants' essay scores. The analysis procedures were the same for all the interviews and the reflective journals. The interviews were transcribed by two colleagues. The researcher then cross-checked the transcription which was decoded word by word. The transcription of the interviews was read carefully twice before being separated manually by the researcher into six major categories. These categories and subcategories were based on emerging themes from the data in relation to the literature review, particularly focusing on the writing process, self-assessment and autonomy. ATLAS.ti was utilized by a colleague to analyze the data to ensure systematic coding of the interview transcription and make all the data usable in table format. Each category was assigned a specific definition, also based on the literature review. Then the researcher rechecked the coding to make sure there was no repetitive coding of the same example as well as to make sure that each example was appropriate for each category and each definition. Then both the categories and the definitions were double-checked.

The student participants' interviews
The finalized categories include six main categories comprising the writing process, self-assessment as a strategy that promotes learner autonomy, learning strategies students used/would use to improve their writing, holding on to a fixed idea, and inadequate language ability/editing training. These categories were derived from the coding process during which the researcher divided the data into small segments before assigning conceptual categories to each segment. These categories were also based on theoretical considerations about the writing process (Flower and Hayes, 1980; Kellogg, 1996) and research on autonomy (Holec, 1980; Riley, 1987; Kohonen, 1993; Little, 1991). Next interrelationships among these categories were identified. This identification provided the basis for the final selection of major categories which subsumed other subcategories. These major categories focused on the writing process during which the participants went through each step of the writing ritual. The participants' perceptions were revealed by analyzing each step.

The native speakers' interviews
The analysis procedures for the native speakers' interviews were performed in the same way as for the student participants' interviews. The interview utterances that were analyzed were related to the revision process. The analysis resulted in five major categories. The five main categories comprise the writing process, self-assessment as a strategy that promotes learner autonomy, benefits from the editing process, problems obstructing student editing, and the differences between the first drafts and the edited drafts.

The student participants' reflective journals
The student participants in both the control and experimental groups had to respond in their reflective journals to questions provided. Their responses in the journals were classified into the same categories as the interview data were. The utterances

concerned the revision process. There are three main categories derived from the statements of the participants. The first category is "revising", which refers to statements in the journals in which students confirm that they corrected various kinds of errors including "content," "word-level morphological errors," and "syntactic errors." The second category is "inadequate language ability", which includes statements in which students judged that they did not have enough language ability to make improvements in their essays. The third category is "edited drafts", which refers to students' opinions about whether or not their edited drafts are better than their first drafts.

The native speakers' reflective journals
The two native speakers recorded their responses to the participants' essays in their reflective journals. Their journals were analyzed in the same manner as that used for the student participants' reflective journals. The final categories include five categories which were obtained from statements the teachers made as they marked students' essays. The first category is "content," which consists of entries from the journals in which teachers suggested that students should add more details and examples. The second category is "organization," which refers to statements in the journals in which the native speaker judges recognized that students made changes that affected the overall organization of the whole essay. The third category is "grammar and mechanics". The fourth category is "lexis." The native speakers' statements in the journals also highlighted vocabulary improvement and better word choice. The last category contains additional opinions offered by the native speakers on how students should revise their essays.

The participants' essay scores
The 16 participants' essay scores were analyzed using SPSS. Means, standard deviation, and significant differences were summarized. The Mann Whitney U test was used to compare the results of the essay scores from the control and experimental groups. The student participants' four essays were compared. The difficulty level for each essay was identified. The mean of the composite scores from both groups also revealed the relationship of the improvement in the participants' writing ability by using examples from both the control and experimental groups. Spearman's correlation was used to find the significance of the correlation of the ratings of the two raters.

Results and discussion
This study has attempted to answer three major research questions. In response to the first research question, the student and the native speaker participants perceived positive improvement in EFL students' writing after employing self-assessment as an editing practice. They agreed that the students' essays had improved in three major areas involved in the writing process, self-assessment as a strategy that promotes learner autonomy and other learning strategies that might help improve the students' writing. As for the first benefit, the writing process, the participants believed that their essays had improved in organization, coherence and cohesion, and, as a result of self-assessment, they demonstrated more corrections of word-level morphological

errors, better word choice, and better spelling and punctuation. The second benefit was that self-assessment promoted learner autonomy. The student participants realized that they could develop self-directed and collaborative learning skills. They also thought that teachers should be facilitators who provide supportive materials and a conducive learning environment for learners so that they can become autonomous writers in the future. The last benefit of self-assessment in writing was acquiring increased awareness of other learning strategies. The student participants discovered five learning strategies that they believed might help improve the revision of their writing, including the use of teacher feedback, peer feedback and writing samples, conducting research, and exercising self-discipline. However, there were differences between the students in the control and the experimental groups in their perceptions of writing improvement. The students in the control group perceived the benefits of essay improvement, especially in the writing process, which resulted in better linguistic quality for their edited essays. In contrast, the students in the experimental group perceived that self-assessment promoted their individual development as autonomous learners as shown in Tables 1 and 2 below.

Table 1: The perception of benefits of self-assessment of writing (control group)

Categories	Students								Totals
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	
1. The Writing Process	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
1.1. Planning - Content	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	1
1.2. Formulating	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
1.2.1. Organization	0	0	1	1	2	0	0	1	5
1.2.1.1. Coherence	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1
1.2.1.2. Cohesion	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	1
1.2.2. Time Constraints	1	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	2
1.2.3. Mother Tongue Interference	2	0	3	0	0	2	0	0	7
1.3. Revising	1	0	1	1	0	0	0	1	4
1.3.1. Word-level Morphological Errors	0	0	0	3	3	2	1	3	12
1.3.2. Syntactic Errors	0	0	1	2	4	0	3	0	10
1.3.3. Lexis	0	1	1	4	1	1	1	1	10
1.3.4. Spelling	3	0	1	1	0	0	1	0	6
1.3.5. Punctuation	0	0	1	0	1	0	1	0	3
2. Self-assessment as a Strategy Promoting Autonomy	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	1
3. Self-assessment Helps Find Weaknesses and Strengths	1	3	3	1	1	2	1	3	15
4. Learning strategies Used or of Potential Use	1	1	1	0	0	2	0	0	5
4.1. Teacher Feedback	2	1	0	2	0	0	1	1	7
4.2. Writing Samples	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	2	4
4.3. Peer Feedback	2	0	1	1	0	0	2	1	7
4.4. Doing Research	0	4	0	0	0	0	0	1	5
4.5. Exercising Self-discipline	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	1
5. Pre-conceived Ideas	4	1	0	0	0	0	2	1	8
6. Inadequate Language Ability	0	1	3	4	0	0	3	2	13
Number of Times	19	12	19	20	12	12	16	18	128

Table 2: The perception of benefits of self-assessment of the writing (experimental group)

Categories	Students								Totals
	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	
1. The Writing Process	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
1.1. Planning - Content	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
1.2. Formulating	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
1.2.1. Organization	0	1	0	1	0	1	1	0	4
1.2.1.1. Coherence	0	1	1	2	0	0	1	0	5
1.2.1.2. Cohesion	1	2	1	0	0	2	2	1	9
1.2.2. Time Constraints	0	0	0	3	0	0	2	0	5
1.2.3. Mother Tongue Interference	1	0	0	0	0	2	0	1	4
1.3. Revising	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
1.3.1. Word-level Morphological Errors	1	1	1	1	1	5	2	4	16
1.3.2. Syntactic Errors	2	0	1	1	0	2	0	1	7
1.3.3. Lexis	2	0	3	3	1	0	3	2	14
1.3.4. Spelling	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	1
1.3.5. Punctuation	1	2	0	0	1	2	0	0	6
2. Self-assessment as a Strategy Promoting Autonomy	0	10	5	2	5	4	4	3	33
3. Self-assessment Helps Find Weaknesses and Strengths	5	3	4	1	1	6	0	1	21
4. Learning Strategies used or of Potential Use	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
4.1. Teacher Feedback	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
4.2. Writing Samples	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
4.3. Peer Feedback	0	1	1	0	0	0	0	1	3
4.4. Doing Research	0	0	1	0	0	2	0	0	3
4.5. Exercising Self- discipline	0	0	0	0	3	1	1	0	5
5. Pre-conceived Ideas	0	0	0	0	1	0	2	0	3
6. Inadequate Language Ability	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	2	4
Number of Times	14	22	18	14	13	28	18	16	143

The native speaker participants also concurred with the student participants' judgment that self-assessment in writing improved the students' essays. However, the qualitative data suggests that they perceived that the essays of the students from the experimental group had improved more than those of the control group.

Regarding the second research question, the students' essay scores were analyzed and the means for both groups showed that improvement might have resulted from using self-assessment in writing. The means for the students' essays in the control group started off higher for Essay 1 and decreased by Essay 4, as shown in Table 3 below.

Table 3: Means for the student participants' essay scores for the control group (without self-assessment training)

Essay scores	N	Mean
e1_composite scores	8	22.4375
e2_composite scores	8	22.4375
e3_composite scores	8	22.1875
e4_composite scores	8	21.5000

In contrast, the means for the students' essays in the experimental group started off lower for Essay 1 and increased by Essay 4, as shown in Table 4 below.

Table 4: Means for the student participants' essay scores for the experimental group (with self-assessment training and checklists)

	N	Mean
e1_comsit	8	21.9375
e2_comsit	8	21.8125
e3_comsit	8	21.4375
e4_comsit	8	22.0625

Even though the increase was minimal, this means there is potential improvement for the students in this group, who had self-assessment training using the self-assessment checklists when revising their essays. Moreover, the mean scores for Essay 4 for this group increased even though this essay was the most difficult, as suggested by the lowest mean for the composite scores of all 64 essays and also from the increased level of difficulty of the topics used for the study. In short, this means there is a continuing potential for improvement in the writing ability of the students in the experimental group who had self-assessment training.

As for the last research question, the research participants also found some obstacles to the EFL students' self-assessment in writing. The student participants found that the obstacles to their self-assessment in writing included inadequate language ability, mother-tongue interference, time-constraints, and having pre-conceived ideas, which indicates that the students believed that their first draft was as good as possible and there was no need to make any changes. However, the students in the control group reported that their most important obstacle was their inadequate language ability. In contrast, the students in the experimental group thought that their most important obstacle was time-constraints. This difference suggests that if they had had more time, the students in the experimental group could have improved their essays more than they did; whereas the students in the control group could not have improved them more than they did due to their perceived inadequate language ability. However, the two native speaker participants agreed that the two most important obstacles that hindered the improvement of the students' writing revisions were both motivation and training in editing. In other words, these results suggest that EFL students will be able to edit their essays and exhibit more improvement if they are motivated and trained on how to edit their essays, especially editing for overall organization rather than only for grammar. All the participants perceived that the students' edited essays would have improved if the obstacles had been eliminated.

The results of my study do not coincide with some other studies in which no effect was found for self-assessment, such as Blue's (1988) and Diab's (2010) studies. However, the student participants in this study agreed that self-assessment was beneficial to their writing in many ways, including leading to a better quality of writing. Moreover, the findings of this study support Brown's argument (2005) that self-assessing their own writing improved students' writing ability. The students found that time constraints and mother-tongue interference reduced the quality of their writing. They also discovered that they had repetitive errors which should be

corrected. They would refrain from repeating the same errors in their future writing. Student writers realized that self-assessment was a strategy that helped them find the weakness and strengths of their writing. This finding corresponds to discoveries by other researchers (Alderson, 2005; Delanshere, 1990; Huhta, 2007; Nitko, 1993). Self-assessment made the participants realize that there were several useful learning strategies that could improve the quality of their writing, such as learning from and correcting errors according to teacher feedback, utilizing peer feedback, consulting writing samples, and doing research to find more information and using self-discipline. Even having more perseverance in order to make corrections throughout the whole essay rather than just one part of it will help, as will making changes rather than just saying what should be done. This study reveals that L2 students could possibly revise more if they are trained. This revelation challenges another researcher's finding (Silva, 1993), that L2 writers revised less. Other researchers found that self-assessment was a condition of the reflective self that encouraged student writers' independence (Lewis, 1990; Oscarson, 1990; Sullivan and Lindgren, 2002). They made moves towards becoming independent writers because they became aware that it was necessary to edit their own writing, and, also, that they were capable of improving their writing to a certain extent. These student writers could thus be trained to conduct self-assessment of their writing processes and become immersed in, and consumed by, new editing habits. Self-assessment can equip them with the awareness that editing is crucial to the improvement of their writing. L2 writers would then plan and revise more than they used to. The participants, however, also felt that they did not have adequate language ability and self-assessment training to make the writing revision even more effective. Some researchers (Towler and Broadfoot, 1992; Nunan, Lai and Keobke, 1999; McDonald and Boud, 2003) agree that training is essential for learners to effectively self-assess their own work. The participants generally agreed that they needed some form of feedback or guidance to guide them to ensure the effectiveness of the editing process as they encountered all the existing obstacles they mentioned above. Alderson (2005) also emphasized the importance of detailed feedback. He proposed that the syncretised judgments of both teachers and learners were essential to the improvement of the learners' language ability.

Self-assessment training usually directs the student participants' attention to specific parts of their essays in order to lead them to improve the writing by themselves. Self-assessment by itself, without guidelines and training, is not as effective. Self-assessment also encourages the participants to consider various alternatives that enhance their writing ability besides merely being aware of their weaknesses, the level of their own language proficiency and the obstacles to the improvement of their writing. After going through this self-assessment process, the students emerged as independent writers who are capable of taking charge of their own written work. Some researchers (Dickinson, 1987; Oscarson, 1989; Candy, 1994; Cram, 1995) agree that self-assessment gives learners control over their learning process. Those learners who experience the benefits of self-assessment could continue to learn and be responsible for their own learning in the future.

Conclusions and recommendations

This study employed self-assessment in the form of both formative and diagnostic assessment. It was formative because self-assessment was integrated as a crucial part of the teaching and learning process; it was diagnostic since self-assessment directed learners to find out about their weaknesses in language proficiency as they proceeded through the editing process. A number of researchers (Alderson, 2005; Delanshare, 1990; Huhta, 2007; Nitko, 1993) believe that both diagnostic and formative assessment should be used to find the strengths and weaknesses of learners. Many self-assessment studies, including this study, have found that self-assessment promotes student writers' independence and autonomy.

As a result of this study, some directions for future research can be put forth. First, there should be generalizable quantitative research performed on self-assessment in order to provide more recent evidence which can confirm that all first-year university students, especially those participating in EFL writing in contexts such as found in Thailand and other Asian countries, can self-assess their writing skills reliably. Then these students should be asked to self-assess their writing, with numbers or grades, in order to counteract or balance the teachers' paramount authority in grading. Students' self-assessment scores will decrease the discrepancies found in teachers' grading, especially where many teachers teach the same course without having undergone inter-rater reliability training. Moreover, incorporating students' self-assessment in a writing course will respond to general pleas for a more democratic assessment. To generalize the findings, the participants must be representative samples of EFL students in a specific context, such as all first-year EFL university students in Thailand or in Asia. Moreover, quantitative results from an acceptable number of representative participants will yield reliable results as evidence. Such results will enable the researcher to generalize the findings when they are used to confirm the qualitative findings from a limited number of participants.

Secondly, there should also be follow-up research on learning behaviors. The student participants in this study recommended many techniques which they thought would help improve their writing, such as receiving teacher feedback or being given access to writing samples. Future research should be designed to discover what specific strategies will be more efficient in encouraging students to improve their writing as well as their autonomy as writers. Besides, the use of an e-learning module incorporating the self-assessment process in teaching writing, or an on-line writing lab, should be considered as a supplementary activity that also enhances EFL students' autonomy and improves their writing skills.

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Appendix 1: Self-assessment checklist for all essays
This self-assessment tool is adapted from the course book for English Course Level 5 by Oshima and Hogue (1997).

Questions	Answer and comments
Organization 1. Does the essay have an introduction, a body, and a conclusion?	Yes/No (Circle one) How many paragraphs does the essay have? How many paragraphs are in the body?
Introduction 2. Do the general statements • give background information? • attract the reader's attention?	How many general statements are there? Is this a funnel introduction? Yes/No Does it stimulate the reader's interest in the topic? Yes/No ……………………………………
3. Does the thesis statement state a clearly focused main idea for the whole essay?	Copy the thesis statement below : ……………………………………………
Body 4. Does each body paragraph have • a clearly stated topic sentence with a main idea? • good development with adequate supporting details (facts, example, or quotation)? • unity (one idea per paragraph) • coherence (logical organization, transition words, and consistent pronouns)?	Copy the topic sentence of each body paragraph. …………………………………………… …………………………………………… …………………………………………… List supporting details of each paragraph below: …………………………………………… Underline any sentences that break the unity. List the transitions between each body paragraph. Circle wrong use of pronouns. ……………………………………………
Conclusion 2. Does the conclusion • restate your thesis or summarise your main points? • give your final thoughts on the subject of your essay?	What kind of conclusion does the essay have? ____summary of the main points or ____restatement of the thesis
Grammar and mechanics 6. Are quotations used correctly?	Check each quotation for commas, capital letters and quotation marks.
7. Are commas used where necessary?	Circle any comma errors. Add missing commas.
8. Are verb tenses used appropriately?	Check each verb for the appropriate tense. Circle any verbs that you have questions about.
Sentence structure	

Questions	Answer and comments
9. Do all the sentences contain at least one subject and one verb and express a complete thought?	Underline any sentences that you have questions about.
10. Does the essay contain a variety of sentence types?	What sentence type do you use the most often? Simple, compound or complex (Circle one).
Content and discourse 11. Is the content of the essay sufficient and interesting?	Yes/No (Circle one) Anything else you want to add : ……………………………………………… ………………………………………………
12. Is the language used in this essay appropriate for academic discourse?	Yes/No (Circle one) Any comments? ……………………………………………… ………………………………………………
13. Do you think the readers will be convinced? Will the readers agree/disagree with your thesis statement?	Yes/No (Circle one) Why/why not? ……………………………………………… ………………………………………………
14. Is there anything you like/dislike or want to change in this essay?	Explain and clarify why? ……………………………………………… ………………………………………………

Appendix 2: Guidance sheet for self-assessment conference

This guidance sheet for reviewing essay organization is adapted from Min's (2006) multiple-paragraph essay guides.

1. Read the introductory paragraph. Is there a thesis statement at the end of the introduction? Underline the thesis statement and circle each of the main idea. Are these main ideas at the same level of importance? What is the sequence of their importance? If you cannot find a thesis statement, write a sentence based on what you have read so far and what you expect to read in the following paragraphs?

2. Next, read the first few sentences in the second paragraph. Can you find what you expect? Is it one of the main ideas in the thesis statement? Is it the most important of all the main ideas you circle in the introductory paragraph? If it is not what you expect, you should make changes here by writing a sentence which states one main idea of the thesis statement. Then look for any examples or quotations or explanations that support this main idea. If not, add supporting details to convince your readers.

3. Read the first few sentences of the third paragraph. Did you see any transition words that connect this paragraph to the second paragraph? If not, can you add one transition? If there is one already, check whether that transition word needs a comma. Is there any topic sentence that contains the second main idea in the thesis statement? If not, add one sentence. Are there any examples, quotations or explanations that support the main idea? If a quotation was used, were there any quotation marks? Do you think the details support the main idea appropriately? Will that be very convincing for the readers? If not, can you make any appropriate changes?

4. Read the first sentence of the fourth paragraph. Does this paragraph connect well with the third paragraph? Any transition signals? Any punctuation needed? Is there any topic sentence that contains the third main idea in the thesis statement? If not, add one sentence. Are there any supporting details relevant to the main idea in the topic sentence you have/have just added? Is the use of pronouns consistent throughout the paragraph?

5. Read the conclusion. Does this paragraph begin with a transition signaling a conclusion of the essay? If not, add one. Does the conclusion restate the thesis statement in the introductory paragraph? Does the conclusion have irrelevant information? Does it introduce a new topic rather than what are in the thesis statement? If so, delete the irrelevant information and the newly introduces topic.

6. Now reflect on the revision of the essay in terms of changes made in sufficiency and appropriateness of language use, content, organization, and reader awareness.