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## What's in an Essay: A Study of International Student Writing Growth over Two Terms

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# What's in an Essay:

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## A Study of International Student Writing Growth over Two Terms

By  
Amber Rynearson

An Honors Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the  
Requirements for Graduation from the  
Western Oregon University Honors Program

Dr. Cornelia Paraskevas,  
Thesis Advisor

Dr. Gavin Keulks,  
Honors Program Director

Summer 2020

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## **Abstract**

Academic language is a specific variation of language that is marked by its own grammatical features. It is one register, or specific variation of language characterized by certain types of vocabulary and grammatical structures; others include fiction writing, news writing, spoken language, magazine writing, etc. All of these registers differ both grammatically and lexically. In order to become proficient in a specific type of writing, one must become familiar with using the different rules and guidelines (both spoken and unspoken; the conventions) of that type of writing. For academic writing, which is learned over time, writing growth can be observed in various ways, such as through vocabulary usage, thematic development, use of nominalizations, use of non-finite clauses, use of prepositional phrases, and use of embedded clauses. This growth can be observed over time through a writer increasing in the number of appropriate grammatical choices based on the discipline or style they choose to write in; the more advanced syntax they use, the more they've grown in their writing ability. Many of these aspects of writing are difficult for native speakers to grasp, more so for non-native users of English. This is because academic language has to be learned by all- it is no one's native language. The following project seeks to investigate change and growth in specific areas of academic writing (such as vocabulary, thematic development, lexical density, and reading level) of international students throughout twenty weeks (two terms) and chart their improvement. Further, the study will connect the various aspects of writing growth with self-reported survey data inquiring about the student's own beliefs on what constitutes good academic writing, and how they feel about their own writing and

language growth. This survey allows for connections to be made between the areas in which students produced the most growth and the grammatical features they see as most important. It also allows a glance into their self-confidence when producing their second language, which is a crucial aspect of success in a second language.

This project will be based in both quantitative and qualitative data sets and will utilize corpus software and manual analysis.

## **1 Introduction**

At the beginning of my second year at Western, I had to plan and write a proposal for my thesis. I was at a bit of a disadvantage, because most students had completed two years of study, and were more familiar with their majors; at that point, I had only taken two linguistics courses, although I was taking another two simultaneously with my thesis orientation. Suffice to say, I wasn't really sure what to do as a project, nor did I have enough knowledge about any one topic. The proposal I submitted was originally supposed to be comparing the grammar of academic writing between French and English. This was a difficult project, especially due to the lack of access to native French speakers in the US.

However, the next fall during my theories of foreign language acquisition class (the first of the TEFL sequence), I took on a term project in which I looked at vocabulary growth and motivation in international student writing. This seemed like a much more reasonable project, and honestly a bit more relevant to my future, so at the end of fall term after meeting with my advisors, I switched projects. This wasn't a complete one-eighty, since it dealt more with a shift in my data set and still focused on academic writing, but I still had to play quite a bit of catch-up to complete this project, including applying for IRB approval on an expedited timeline.

This project is relevant for two reasons. Primarily, it allows me to apply the theories and methods I've learned throughout my three years at Western. It combines lessons in syntax, corpus study, foreign language acquisition, and research methods in a culminating project. Additionally, it allows me experience in recognizing student writing growth in second language learners from multiple

angles, which is practical with regard to my short-term goals of teaching English internationally.

### **1.1 Premise of the Thesis**

Writing is an essential, yet somewhat neglected area of second language (L2) learning. Many methods of teaching emphasize communication, and fluency, yet study abroad students are ill-prepared to face the rigorous writing challenges that come with education in their L2 countries. L2 classrooms lack the experience with longer, more academic pieces of writing; students who work towards tests such as the TOEFL (Test of English as a Foreign Language) or IELTS (International English Language Testing System) do not have a need for longer pieces of writing, as shorter samples suffice (generally less than 300 words). In contrast, when in English speaking universities, students have to work hard in order to successfully complete writing classes. Despite the difficulties of these challenges, it would logically follow that international students, who speak English as a foreign language would grow noticeably in their writing ability, specifically academic writing, throughout a year abroad.



## **2 Literature Review**

The following literature review will examine some of the grammatical constructions typically used in academic writing (including stance, pronoun usage, and phrasal vs clausal complexity), different measures of writing growth (such as thematic development), and some of the affective factors that play into second language acquisition (specifically self-efficacy and self-confidence).

### **2.1 Academic Writing**

There are a number of factors that can determine the type of language that we use in a given circumstance, such as the communities we belong to, and the kind of texts appropriate for these communities. The text we want to create (for example, academic text, short story, text message to a friend, etc.) can determine the type of grammatical conventions and grammatical/lexical choices that we make, just as our tone and manner of speech often depends on who we are speaking to. Speech is one of the distinct types (also referred to as registers) of language; fiction, news, and academic writing make up the others (Biber et al 2002). Each register carries its own distinct grammatical characteristics, that is, certain features are more prominent in one register of language than another; for example, certain verb participles, first person pronouns, or adverbial clauses are more common in fiction or speech than in academic or newspaper writing. One thing to keep in mind is the fact that constructions chosen can depend on whether or not the user is a native or non-native speaker, and their experience (or lack thereof) with writing. In a study by Alice Henderson and Robert Barr (2010), the issue of stance was examined in the academic writing of students (Native French speakers writing in English, Native English speakers writing in English,

and a sample of texts from the Directory of Open Access Journals (DOAJ)). They found differences in pronouns, grading adverbs (such as “very,” “most,” and “more”), and adjectives; the N-gram data showed differences in phrases that signaled causal relationships, which is signaled in phrases such as “in order to,” “due to the,” and “can be seen”.

As Henderson and Barr demonstrate, first person pronouns in the NNS papers (non-native English speakers) were used to a) signal text structure, b) justifying methodology, c) explicitly claiming expert status, d) expressing what has been understood, and e) listing events. This is in direct opposition to the native speaker and DOAJ texts, where pronouns in general were used much less. First person pronouns (“I” and “We”) were used much more in the NNS corpus, with “I” totaling 35 uses, or 7.59 per 10,000 words, and “we” totaling 153 uses, or 33.20 per 10,000 words. The DOAJ corpus had 10 uses of the pronoun “I”, or 7.79 per 10,000 words, and the pronoun “we” was used 30 times, or 23.37 per 10,000 words. For the BAWE (i.e the native speaker’s corpus), uses of “I” occurred 20 times, or 4.82 per 10,000 words, with “we” occurring 63 times, or 14.20 per 10,000 words. To clarify, the DOAJ corpus was smaller than both the BAWE and NNS corpuses, totaling 12,837 words, as opposed to the 41,454 and 46,084 words, respectively. This accounts for the slightly higher than expected pronoun uses. Further, the “we” pronoun was often paired with a modal verb, to indicate a) text organization, b) comparison, c) reference to other studies, d) expressing causal relations, and e) direct translations that could be replaced with passive constructions/removed entirely, without weakening the idea of the

phrase(253-254). Any instances of “we” pronouns followed by modal verbs in the BAWE and DOAJ corpuses were less prevalent.

Further, they found that grading adverbs were paired with indicators of stance (ex. “therefore” and “more”) more often in the student writing than in the DOAJ corpus. Adjectives were used less frequently in the NNS works, and occasionally incorrectly. Certain constructions that work in French don’t directly translate into English. For example, “Je pense que le chose le plus important est...” would be translated into “I think the most important thing is” and opposed to “I think the thing the most important is”, which would be a direct translation. Therefore, the students would use certain aspects of French grammar when writing in English, which doesn’t translate well. The concluding statements suggested that these students seemed more intent on a logical progression of arguments and on presenting an argument’s validity as opposed to taking a specific stance.

Ken Hyland (2002) examined pronoun use as it relates corresponds to stance in undergraduate writing at a Hong Kong university. What he found was that first-person pronouns were used in specific circumstances; to express self-benefit, to state a purpose, to explain a procedure, to elaborate on an argument and to state results and claims. Based on his findings, Hyland concluded that these students sought to deflect ownership and authority from their work, something that could be in part because of personal preference, cultural pressure, teacher instruction, or a combination of the three. Often, students at the undergraduate level are unaware of how to write properly, or how to convey their stance, and are often under experienced, or lack the experience altogether.

Laura Aull (2019) explores a similar topic in her article titled “Linguistic Markers of Stance and Genre in Upper-Level Student Writing.” She notes at the beginning that students often overuse boosters (words such as “definitely”), as opposed to hedges (words such as “perhaps”). Students are often taught to “prove their point”, and “win the argument” in order to write persuasively. This leads to undergraduate students overusing boosters in their writing to prove their point and convey their stance when in reality academic discourse is more about contributing to the ongoing conversation as opposed to shutting it down (Graff, et al., 2009). Aull concludes with the point that stance, typically signaled by hedges, is an essential part of academic writing.

The high volume of first-person pronoun use (as seen in Henderson and Barr, 2010) is different from stereotypical English lessons in writing, as many high school teachers deter their students from using them, citing that such use is unprofessional and unnecessary. It’s one of the many misconceptions about academic discourse taught to high school students. Academic writing is typically seen as formal, elaborate, and complex, which makes it seem difficult to beginning writers. Douglas Biber and Bethany Gray show this in their article “Challenging stereotypes about academic writing: Complexity, elaboration, and explicitness” (2010); Biber also discusses the many variations of writing in his 1988 work *Variation Across Speech and Writing*. Biber and Gray tackle the structurally elaborate features typically associated with academic writing, which are finite and non-finite complement clauses, finite adverbial clauses, finite and non-finite relative clauses, attributive adjectives as pre-modifiers, nouns as noun pre-modifiers, prepositional phrases as noun postmodifiers, appositives as noun

postmodifiers, and prepositional phrases, as adverbials. They also address some of the other features of academic writing, such as phrasal complexity (in contrast to clausal complexity). Firstly, they show that embedded complement clauses appear in speech, just as they do in fiction, albeit in potentially different ways, meaning that embedded complement clauses are a marker of conversation as opposed to academic writing. For example:

*I just don't know [if that's[what he wants]]* (spoken example)

*As I saw him go, picking his way among the nettles, and among the brambles that bound the green mounds, he looked in my young eyes as if he were eluding the hands of the dead people, stretching up cautiously out of their graves, to get a twist upon his ankle and pull him in.* (elaborate writing, *Great Expectations*)

(pg. 6, Biber and Gray)

This contrasts directly to academic writing, in their findings, which tends to feature less of the embedded clauses and more complexity within phrases. Prepositional phrases, for example, are much more prevalent in academic writing, as seen in the following example:

*This may indeed be part [**of** the reason [**for** the statistical link [**between** schizophrenia and membership [**in** the lower socioeconomic classes] ]]] (7)*

Their biggest observation here is that academic writing relies more on phrases to add subsequent information, as opposed to the dependent clauses of conversation.

Secondly, Biber and Gray clarify that although conversation features more finite dependent clauses, the information within those clauses is much more

limited than in academic writing, due to high frequency lexico-grammatical patterns (for example, out of the many verbs to a that complement clause, in conversation, 70 percent of those clauses are preceded by one of three verbs: “think,” “say,” and “know,” (Biber & Gray, 9). Academic writing, on the other hand, is structurally less complex, as a majority of the additional information given via phrasal modifiers (nominal pre and post modifiers mostly). Essentially, phrasal modifiers are optional, as they provide additional information to a phrase. At the same time, they are more condensed than a clausal modifier, which Biber and Gray suggest is the opposite of elaborate; phrasal modifiers provide additional, yet compact detail to a sentence, but do not provide the same kind of elaboration that clauses do. For example, the phrase “the participant’s perspective” is much less elaborate and explicit than “the perspective that considers the participant’s point of view,” but they both convey the same idea. The former structure (phrasal modifier) is more present in academic writing than the latter (which is a clausal modifier).

They tackle the idea that academic writing is much more explicit than other registers, as a contrast to conversation, which often has the advantage of two participants sharing a time, space, and context. While yes, based on the environment, academic discourse must be more detailed, in the grammatical constructions Biber and Gray note that with regard to passive voice and nominalizations, academic writing is quite implicit in conveying meaning. In fact, there has been a historical shift in favor of more implicit and more elaborate academic prose.

## **2.2 Measures of Writing Growth**

Language teachers often use somewhat arbitrary means of measurement when it comes to scoring papers and other works in the classroom. Both rubrics for native and non-native speakers alike are rarely exact or objective and leave many professors to grade on instinct without much real linguistic knowledge to back up the grades they assign (Fang & Wang, 2011). To accurately measure progress, and/or properly assess a students' work, instructors should have working knowledge of the various grammatical conventions of the genre in which they are teaching; academic prose differs from fictional writing, and so forth. The type of paper that students write determines some of the grammatical choices they might make, which in turn influences the organization, voice, sentence fluency, and other aspects of paper writing that make up the grading scale. Fang and Wang (2011) suggest that rubrics should be based on functional language analysis (an approach to language based on linguistic patterns), which will allow teachers to grade writing accurately and obtain a more specific perspective over their student's progress.

Much of the progress a student makes in their writing over time is evident in their thematic development. The actual definition of theme is somewhat debated, although many linguists defer to M.A.K. Halliday's interpretation. A clause has both a theme, and a rheme, of which a theme is generally thought of as the point of departure for a message, while the rest of said clause is referred to as the rheme (1985). William Vande Kopple (2003) further comments on Halliday's method of analyzing prose in regard to analysis of scientific texts. He clarifies that Halliday works in a continuum, where one end of the spectrum is

attic/synoptic (something planned, careful, something that emphasizes product over process, such as academic writing), while the other is characterized as doric/dynamic (more spontaneous, unconscious, prioritizing the process over the product, such as speech). Vande Kopple applies Halliday's characterizations of theme and thematic development to various scientific texts.

Theme, as defined by M.A.K Halliday (1993) is considered to be the starting point of the message, which generally contains some form of given information (information with which the reader is familiar) and the rheme is the remainder of the message (which often contains new information). The identification of a theme and successive rheme of a clause can be somewhat dependent on the type of clause in a semantic sense, although they remain the same structurally. For example, a declarative clause and a passive clause may have different themes; the choice of clause made by the author will emphasize different perspectives. (Bloor & Bloor, 2004). Variation in theme is indicative of higher proficiency in an L2 provided the themes throughout a text are interwoven as is standard in academic writing. For example, young children and beginner L2 learners favor simpler patterns, and rely on reiterating a theme throughout a piece of writing whereas more experienced writers use nominalizations and more discipline-specific theme/rheme patterns. As Len Unsworth (1999) discusses, theme and rheme work together to form a chain of reasoning and pattern of development throughout a piece of writing. In more advanced works, he notes that there are generally fewer clauses which are more complex; they often feature the use of nominalizations, or the use of nouns as a way to convey processes, something usually accomplished by using verbs. This is different from what Biber



and Gray discuss in their work, as they point to phrasal complexity and certain phrasal structures (such as preposition phrases) being the marker of academic writing as they are less explicit in nature. Regardless, both parties agree that there are many uses of nominalizations in texts: they are essential in the creation of language regarding highly specialized knowledge; they allow ease in the definition of technical terms, especially in defining events as things; and they facilitate the aforementioned “chain of reasoning” in a technical paper.

Nominalizations allow for complexity in clauses. Through this process, new information that is presented as a series of events of actions at the end of one clause can be summarized and presented as given information at the beginning of the next, which creates a smooth and interwoven connection between one clause to the next (Unsworth, 1999). Take the following example:

“... both ethyne and nitrogen oxide are kinetically stable...

The kinetic stability of nitrogen oxide shows...”

The second sentence starts with a summary of the events in the previous sentence, and those events are presented as a single thing (a single noun phrase). It takes the new information of the previous statement, and turns it into the given information, which is also the theme, of the new sentence. As Unsworth notes, this kind of nominalization is crucial in developing a chain of reasoning, because it allows for a summary of a previous point which can serve as a kind of jumping off point for the next part of the argument (513).

The idea of theme and rheme as components in thematic development are elements of systemic functional linguistics. This view suggests that the syntactic choices made by a use of language is more than just a way to convey meaning, but

that meaning can be made through those choices. In other words, language is “a principle resource for making meaning” (Fang 2004). In SFL, language is “a part of reality, a shaper of reality, and a metaphor for reality” (Halliday 1993, p. 8). This is one of the reasons why proficiency in L2 writing and its grammatical structures (or writing in any language for that matter) is so important; understanding the structures of academic writing and their application allows for the ability to properly convey one’s thoughts in an understandable and discipline-appropriate way.

### **2.3 Affective Factors in Second Language Acquisition**

Two concepts essential to growth in second language development are those of self-efficacy and self-confidence, both of which have been studied extensively in regard to their relationship with L2 growth. Self-confidence is of course one’s trust in their own abilities, while self-efficacy is one’s belief in their ability to properly perform an action something inextricably linked with confidence. Self-efficacy theory (that a person’s belief in their ability to complete a task is linked to their confidence and can be used as an indication for their motivation, performance, accomplishments, etc.) was first developed by Albert Bandura, but research concerning this topic has since expanded far beyond the original scope of research. Schunk (1991) examined it with regard to academic motivation, finding that there are many ways to raise a person’s self-confidence and thereby self-efficacy in academic tasks. For example, allowing students to set their own goals, the use of self-modeling (observing oneself on video), the proper use of effort feedback (such as “you’ve been working really hard”), and the use of

rewards have all been shown to raise students' efficacy, and therefore their success in academic tasks.

Even more relevant, many studies have been made linking self-efficacy to second language acquisition and the plethora of factors that influence a student's proficiency and growth in their L2. Saeid Roofi, Bee Hoon Tan and Swee Heng Chen (2012) developed an overview of studies conducted between 2003 and 2012 with this topic in mind. A majority of that research has centered on a select few variables, including learning strategies, language anxiety, performance, and causal attributions. Self-efficacy was found, throughout the many studies, to be quite important in L2 learning, and is something to be enhanced in the classroom. Classrooms that enhance students' self-efficacy and self-confidence facilitate environments that allow students a better chance at success in their L2. This can be done in multiple ways, such as by not calling out students directly and shaming them when answering incorrectly, creating ways for students to connect and bond with each other, and making the language classroom separate from their realities outside of the classroom.

In contrast to self-efficacy and self-confidence, self-conscious emotions such as shame or guilt also play a major role in L2 classrooms and L2 learning. Instances that involve shame and/or guilt in the L2 classroom are frequent, and those involving shame are a hindrance to L2 progress (Teimouri 2018). When students are shamed in a classroom, or feel shame, it has a negative impact on their overall self-efficacy and confidence, which therefore leads to resistance in learning. Shame and anxiety in SLA are linked, as anxiety seems to be a byproduct of the former (Galmiche, 2017), as the presence of shaming in a

learning environment can lead to feelings of anxiety in language use, both of which can be detrimental to progress in an L2. Zhang and Head (2009) attempted to remedy this problem and sought to improve their students' overall confidence in speech by allowing them more control over their lessons as a whole. A lot of the choices students made in regard to their L2 class were based on a critical look at their own motivation for learning a language in conjunction with brainstorming classroom activities through which they could achieve the goal of proficiency in their target language.

Self-efficacy and self-confidence in the L2 environment are an integral part of SLA. A lack in these areas can negatively impact one's ability to learn an L2; a variety of other factors, such as shame and motivation can also impact the presence (or lack thereof) of self-efficacy in the classroom. It is something that needs to be cultivated in the classroom. Ideally, students' confidence in their growth will be reflected in some way through the progress they make throughout WR 121/WR 122.

#### **2.4 The Present Study**

In light of the plethora of previously completed research, the current study pursues an application of various concepts such as thematic development and vocabulary, in conjunction with affective factors, such as self-confidence, to examine writing growth of international students. The methodology and overview of the study are established in the next section, while the results and successive analysis appear later.

To clarify, I do not intend to make any definitive claims about writing and writing growth. I merely seek to observe and document the progress made by the current first year international students in their academic writing.

## **3 Methodology**

### **3.1 Research Questions**

There are three main questions that this thesis focuses on:

1. In what ways do the international students grow in their academic writing over the course of two terms?
2. What do the students perceive to be academic writing?
3. How is their growth over time tied to their perceptions of their own writing? Are there significant connections between the two?

### **3.2 Overview of the Study**

This project collected data in two ways, qualitatively and quantitatively. The data was collected from international students enrolled in the international sections of writing 121 and 122 (INTL WR121/INTL WR122). There were 12 students enrolled in WR121 (which took place during the fall term of 2019), and 16 students in WR122 (which took place during winter term of 2020), although in WR122, there were two domestic students who were therefore not included in this study. The students varied in age and ethnicity, but were generally between the ages of 18 and 23 and consisted mainly of Chinese students in addition to a few Japanese and Saudi students.

A majority of the students had been studying English for upwards of ten years in a variety of ways including both public and private schools and intensive language programs. However, this was the first time most had been in the United States for an extended period of time; at the end of WR 121, they reported that they'd been in the US for about three months, and at the end of WR 122, they

reported between 6 and 7 months of residence (depending on who had returned home for the break between terms).

I examined three examples of the students' work, which consisted of three finished papers concerning various topics. In addition, I assigned the students two different surveys regarding personal and academic writing-related questions.

### **3.3 Quantitative Data**

Each student provided six samples in total, three per term. Out of both classes, there were ten students who appeared in both classes, and therefore only their papers were considered as they would give the most indication of long-term growth. The papers were first run through Laurence Anthony's AntWordProfiler in order to analyze vocabulary level, and type/token ratio. AntWordProfiler categorizes words in a given document based on four previously existing word lists: the top 1,000 most frequently used words in English (level one); the second 1,000 most frequently used words in English (level two); the academic word list (level three); and all words not appearing on the other lists (level four).

AntWordProfiler also calculated the type-token ratio, which is the number of unique words in a text (or the "type") divided by the total number of words (or the "token"). While vocabulary is not the most crucial element to analyzing writing level or growth over time, it can certainly be indicative of the amount of progress a student has made.

After analyzing the vocab level of the texts, the thematic structure was charted throughout each paper. The papers were divided up by sentence, and each sentence was divided in "marked theme," "(unmarked) theme," and

“rheme.” They were then categorized further into type of marked theme (such as non-finite clause, adverbial clause), and examined for a) the type of marked themes presented, b) variation among types of marked theme, and c) variation and progression in the themes throughout the papers themselves, and the terms.

The works were also run through the Flesch-Kincaid Readability Calculator to give an indication of the reading levels of the student’s works. After running a text through the calculator, the Readability Calculator indicated the Flesch-Kincaid Grade Level and the Reading Ease Score, both of which indicate the level of education a person would need to easily understand the text. This Calculator also provided the average number of words per sentence, average number of syllables per word, the number of total sentences, and the total number of words for each text run through this software.

### **3.4 Qualitative Data**

The surveys were administered at the end of each term to gauge the range of various responses to a set of questions. Students self-reported their own progress over both terms and gave a self-assessment of their language skill. Each question on the surveys addressed one of three main categories: basic demographic information, in order to contextualize the student’s following responses; personal goals or motivations for learning English, and specific steps taken to ensure academic success; and personal thoughts about writing, and what makes a text “academic”. Seven out of ten questions were the same across both surveys.

The first survey (Appendix A), administered at the end of WR 121, was originally given for a separate purpose. The first three questions sought



demographic information to contextualize the current skill of the students and to see how long the students had been in the United States. For many, this was their first time in the US, or at least their first long term stay, and therefore constituted the highest amount of exposure to English speakers and an English-speaking environment that they may have had. The fourth question asked why the students wanted or needed to learn English, to give some indication of their motivation. Motivation is key to success in language learning, and I used this question to hypothesize the type of motivation each student had for learning their L2 (such as intrinsic or extrinsic motivation). Questions five through asked the students to rank their writing skill on a scale of one to ten at the beginning and end of term, and to provide reasoning for their ranking. Question ten asked them to state if they felt they'd improved over the course of the term, and again asked for reasoning as to why they felt the way that they did. These five questions were designed to see how the students felt about their progress, and potentially gauge levels of their self-confidence and self-efficacy. Finally, question nine asked for any activities outside of class that they completed in order to elevate their writing ability; this question was asked to see if the students were motivated to put in extra work to improve their English.

The second survey (Appendix B) was administered at the end of WR 122, for the purpose of this project. Questions 1-3 again asked for basic demographic information. Questions four and five differed from the first survey, as they inquired about where students learned to write academically, and what they know about the register. Questions six through again asked the students to self reflect upon and rank their progress; the only difference is that question ten

asked about their improvement since the beginning of the year as opposed to merely the beginning of the term.

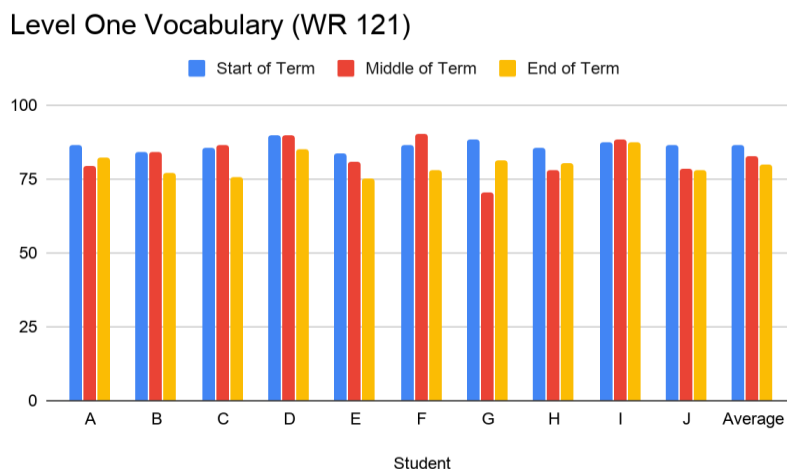
These results were compiled to find general patterns and trends in regard to motivation, view of academic writing, and perceived growth over an extended period of time.

The surveys and the samples combined give a somewhat complete picture as to the trends and path of academic writing growth over the course of two trimesters.

## 4 Results and Analysis

### 4.1 Vocabulary

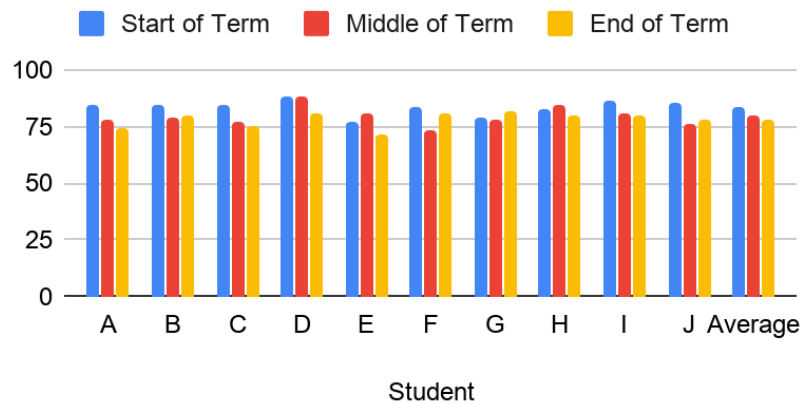
The students' works were run through AntWord Profiler in order to categorize vocabulary usage throughout both terms. Level one vocabulary refers to the top 1,000 most frequently used words in English, which includes words like pronouns, “be,” and “have (see <http://www.newgeneralservicelist.org/> for a complete list of words on this list, and the other level lists)”. Growth is shown through a decreased usage of level one words over time; using words found on other lists means that available vocabulary is expanded. The following charts are a visualization of this data:



Throughout WR 121, all students showed some decrease in level one vocabulary usage from the start-of-term to the end-of-term. Some students (for example, student F) showed an initial increase from their start-of-term paper to their middle-of-term paper but showed an overall decrease in usage of level one vocabulary from the start of term to the end of term. On average, students showed a 3.78% decrease in level one usage from the start of term to the middle

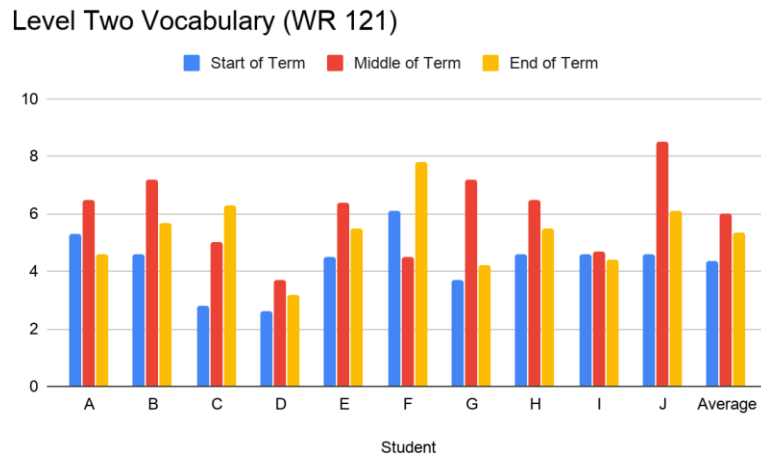
of term, a 2.63% decrease from the middle of term to the end of term, and a 6.41% decrease in total.

### Level One Vocabulary (WR 122)



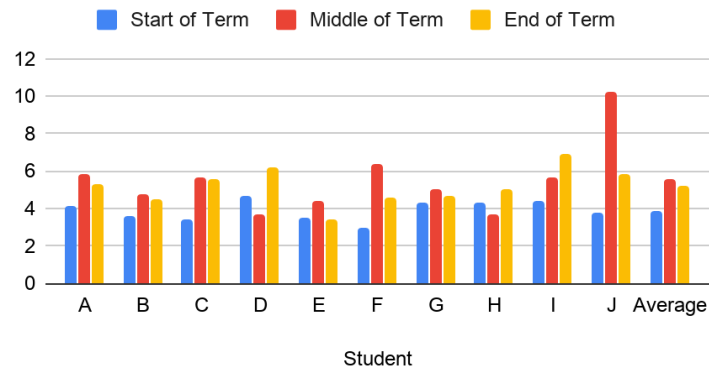
In WR 122, students showed the same pattern of overall reduction of level one vocabulary usage. On average, students decreased 3.97% from the start of term to the middle of term, 1.46% from the middle of the term to the end of the term, and 5.43% from the beginning to the end. Although WR 122 class had a smaller drop in level one vocabulary usage, the average started lower than in WR 121; while the WR 121 class started with an average 86.39% of their papers being made up of level one vocabulary, the WR 122 class started with 83.72% average (a difference of 2.67%). Additionally, the WR 122 ended the term with a lower average of level one vocabulary usage; the WR 121 class ended with an average of 79.98, while the WR 122 class ended with an average of 78.29% (a difference of 1.69%). Overall, this is a 8.1% decline in level one vocabulary usage from the start of WR 121 to the end of WR 122. The smaller drop may be in part due to the type of papers the students wrote, which may have featured higher volumes of common English words. However, the actual reasons are not clear.

Level two vocabulary refers to the second 1,000 most frequently used words in English. This level includes words such as “independent,” “announce,” “appropriate,” and their collocates (again, see <http://www.newgeneralservicelist.org/>) Any growth in this category over time represents the ability to use a wider variety of words in context.



All students increased their level two vocabulary usage from the start of term to either the middle or end of term during WR 121. Many students made a larger jump in usage from the start of term to the middle of term, although most made some increase from the start of term to the end of term. On average, students increased in usage by 1.68% from the start of term to the middle of term, and decreased by 0.69% from the middle of term to the end of term. However, as a whole, the students increased in usage from the start of term to the end of term by 0.99%.

## Level Two Vocabulary (WR 122)

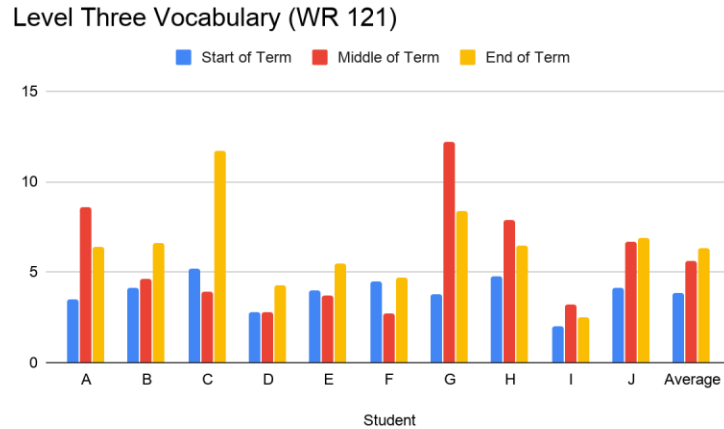


Throughout WR 122, the students increased in usage even more, with all students individually increasing by some amount from the start of term to the end of term, although some students (for example, student J) increase by a higher amount from the start of term to the middle of term than from the start for term to the end of term. On average, the students increased in level two vocabulary usage by 1.63% from the start of term to the middle of term, decreased by 0.34% from the middle of term to the end of term, and increased by 1.29% overall from the start of term to the end of term.

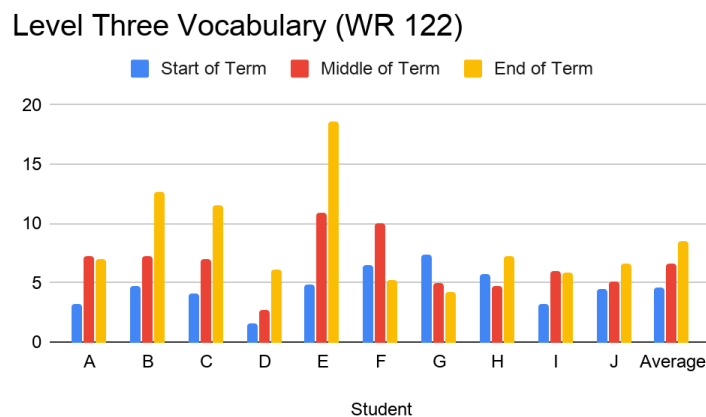
In general, students increased in level two usage by a similar percentage each term. At the beginning of WR 121, level two vocabulary usage made up 4.34% of the words used, while in WR 122, 3.91% of the words used were level two vocabulary at the beginning of the term. At the end of WR 121, 5.33% were level two vocabulary while in WR 122, 5.20% of the words were level two vocabulary. In total, this is an 0.86% increase in level two vocabulary usage from the beginning of WR 121 to the end of WR 122.

Level three vocabulary refers to the academic word list, which is a list of words and their collocates that most frequently appear in academic writing.

Words on this list include “biology,” “coefficient,” and “scholarship,” among others. An increase in this area indicates both overall growth, and growth in academic writing specifically.



All students made an increase in level three vocabulary usage from the start of term to the end of term in WR 121. On average, students increased by 1.73% from the start of term to the middle of term, and by 0.72% from the middle of term to the end of term. This is a 2.45% total increase from the start of term to the end of term.

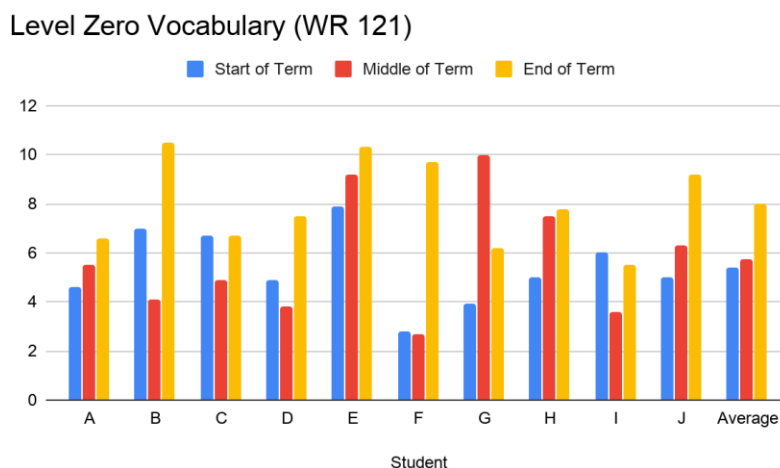


As for WR 122, most students made another increase in level three vocabulary usage. On average, students increased by 1.99% from the start of term

to the middle of term, 1.98% from the middle of term to the end of term, and 3.98% in total from the start of term to the end of term.

Overall, students made a 4.6% increase in usage of level three vocabulary from the start of term in WR 121 to the end of term in WR 122. They started out with 3.9% usage of level three vocabulary at the start of term of WR 121 and ended WR 122 with 8.1%.

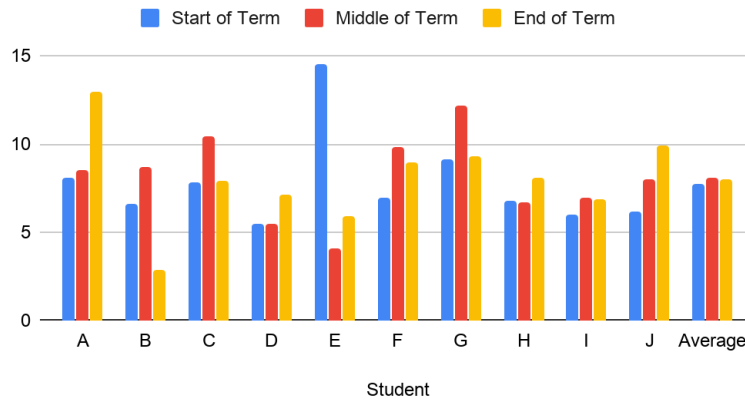
Level zero vocabulary comprises all of the words that are not found on the other three lists (i.e. top 1,000 most frequently used words, second 1,000 most frequently used, and academic word list). Similar to level two and level three vocabulary, an increase in usage of this level of vocabulary indicates overall writing growth.



Throughout WR 121, students increased in their level zero vocabulary usage. From the start of term to the middle of term, they increased on average by 0.36%, and from the middle of term to the end of term they increased by 2.24%, a 2.6% in total from the beginning to the end of term.

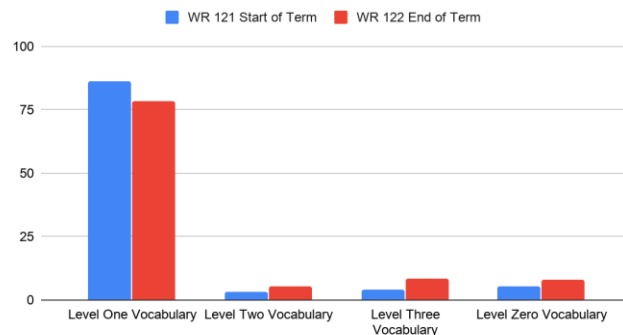


### Level Zero Vocabulary (WR 122)



On average, students in WR 122 increased their level zero vocabulary usage by 0.33% from the start of term to the middle of term, and decreased by 0.09% from the middle of term to the end of term. Overall, they increased in usage by 0.24% in total from the beginning of term to the end of term. From the beginning of WR 121 to the end of WR 122, the students increased in their level zero vocabulary usage by 2.6%, as they started WR 121 with 5.4% of their papers being made up of level zero vocabulary and ended WR 122 with 8.0% of their papers made up of level zero vocabulary.

### Average Growth from WR 121 to WR 122

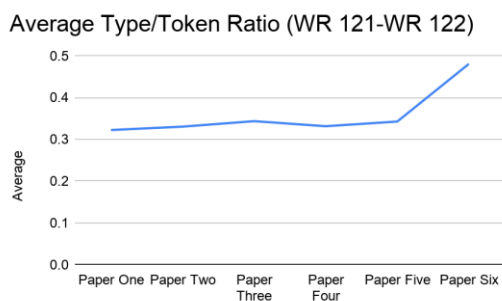
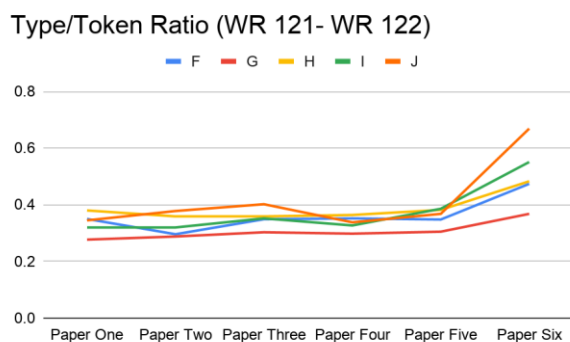
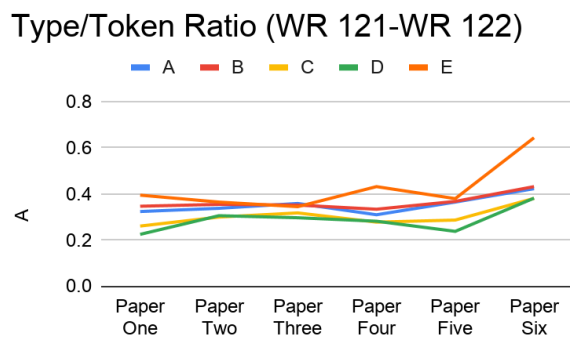


Throughout both terms, students showed an increase in vocabulary from levels two, three, and four, while showing a decrease in level one vocabulary. As

students grow as writers and as language users, it is expected that their vocabulary would expand as well. In this particular circumstance, the students have been exposed to new words, and new uses of words in their lives, both in and out of classes. The more words and writing skills they learn in class, and use outside of class, the more likely they are to use them again in their writing. This is in no way the quintessential factor in measuring writing progress, but it is certainly indicative of some growth that has taken place over the two terms.

#### **4.2 Type/Token Ratios**

In a text, the type is the number of unique words (for example, if the word “and” is used 20 times in a given text, it is only counted as one type). The token is the total word count in a given text, and together they form the type/token ratio. Texts with a greater lexical density have a TTR closer to 1. TTR also gives an indication to the type of diversity in a student’s writing, which is also important. Students with a lower TTR use the same words over and over again, likely more commonly used ones, whereas students with a higher TTR use a more diverse array of words in their works, which indicates a larger, functional vocabulary. Appropriate sentence structure is essential to a well written paper, but it is nothing without the right vocabulary to accompany it.



In general, students maintained TTR between 0.20 and 0.35, which are relatively low ratios. However, most students experienced an average increase of 0.14 from the fifth paper to the sixth paper, while the overall change from the beginning of WR 121 to the end of WR 122 was 0.16. It is likely due to the nature of the final project in contrast to the earlier works, as earlier word counts exceeded 1000 words while the final work ranged between 100 and 500 words depending on the student. For the most part, TTRs change minimally throughout both terms, suggesting minimal change, if any, in lexical density.

### 4.3 Thematic Development

The third parameter examined was thematic development. This is important because theme is tied to the structure of each paragraph; clear development ensures clear thematic progression and cohesion throughout a piece of writing. To analyze theme, each sentence was analyzed into three parts: marked theme, unmarked theme, and rheme. In this case, the unmarked theme of the sentence correlates with subject, while marked theme refers to information appearing before the theme, and rheme refers to the part of a clause that gives information about the theme (i.e. verb and onward). To clarify, the analysis was done at the sentence level instead of at the clause level.

Many students used the same kind of syntactic structure for their themes, choosing pronouns such as “it” to connect with information from the previous statements. Consider the following example about plagiarism on campuses:

“Because plagiarism is a controversial topic, it can be considered risky writing. As we all know, plagiarism in academic is bad behavior. Most seriously, it constitutes a crime. The text said constituting plagiarism as a disease. It uses a new concept to explain why authors think so; the new concept is metaphor.”

This short excerpt features six themes, three of which are marked themes. One of the marked themes, “because plagiarism...” is an adverbial clause of cause, creating a logical sense of cause and effect throughout the phrase (because of point A, point B is valid). The second marked theme, “as we all know,” which is another adverbial clause, detailing cause in order to create a logical flow between

the first and second constructions. However, the latter three sentences use unmarked themes as the jumping off point for the message, creating a much less cohesive line of thought, and vague, repetitive references (including a dummy “it”). It tends to read like a list, with the writer listing one statement after another, something more common in narrative writing as opposed to academic prose; the lack of unmarked theme in between constructions would likely prevent this, and allow the writer to imbibe their writing with a bit more of their own perspective as opposed to simply repeating facts. The following excerpt from a student’s work on technology and developing products shows a similar instance of unmarked themes creating a less clear cohesion:

“It may not matter at first, even if the audience experience is good. But as time goes by, the problems will come up one after another, the audience’s favor degree of the product will drop sharply, and the number of complaints will decrease. That’s when the social pressure starts to build, but the challenges are much bigger than the ones developers face when they’re building a product. It ended up in bankruptcy. However, this is the end developers do not want to see.”

In this case, the student has five unmarked themes, and two marked themes. The first sentence—“but as time goes by,” includes two themes, the coordinating conjunction ‘but’ followed by an adverbial clause of time, which is used to show the relation between time and problems, and, consequently ties together the first theme, and the second, creating that necessary progression. However, the latter themes are unmarked, which do not create the same cohesive ties from one

sentence to another. This example, while relatively clear and understandable, is somewhat harder to comprehend in terms of the vague unmarked themes, as the pronominal references, which double as theme for four of the five constructions, do not allow the reader to clearly identify the different pieces of information throughout the paragraph. Essentially, through an abundance of unmarked theme and lack of marked theme, lacks some of the cohesion necessary to academic writing, and is harder to comprehend than it should be.

Consider the following example about the use of ethos, logos, and pathos in an article about language:

“I am fascinated by language in daily life. I spend a great deal of my time thinking about the power of language—the way it can evoke an emotion, a visual image, a complex idea, or a simple truth. Language is the tool of my trade. And I use them all—all the Englishes I grew up with. I totally agree with her point about language.”

This student uses her own experience to qualify and validate the author she is discussing, and this is punctuated by the high presence of “I” themes. This passage includes only one marked theme—the coordinating conjunction ‘and’; four of the five unmarked themes are identical and are the personal pronoun ‘I’.

As students progressed throughout the term, they began to use a more balanced mix of marked and unmarked themes while also varying in the type of marked theme they used. Adverbials seemed to be the most common (such as “in my opinion,” “for example,” and “thus,”), although not all adverbials provided

contextual framing. The following example has a higher volume of adverbials in between sentences, which serve as a way to connect one thought to the next:

“Thus, that will lead them to academic failures because so any students face have failed, and the main reason was the addiction of using phones. For example, there are so many students who use their phones during class and distract other students, so that is one problem. This problem does not shorten only on students, but also the problem expands under the umbrella of social issues. In fact, the Smartphones problems is a very broad topic, we can talk about a lot of things under that topic. What we did, my group and I, is that we narrowed the topic to only talk about the usage of smartphones and its impact on academic performances. Furthermore, smartphones can also impact people’s personality, and as we know, the personality is very important in job interviews. Thus, if someone whose personality was impacted because of the addiction to smartphones usage and decided to do a job interview, then her/his application will be refused.

Of the seven sentences of this extract, five feature a marked theme. Those marked themes were able to help create a more cohesive throughout the paragraph. For example, the phrase “for example” allowed for a direct connection between a problem, and some of the direct causes of the problem. The following example shows the presence of circumstantial adverbial in the place of marked theme:

“But when we further try to look around me, remove those stereotypes, and look at our immersed words from a basic perspective, we will be horrified to find that George Orwell's words warning us are everywhere.

In George Orwell's view, when we think about a specific object in our brain,  
our thinking has nothing to do with words. But when we tried to describe  
thinking, we began to search around for appropriate and accurate words.  
Writers often struggle about which words or phrases are more  
appropriate?”

In the above passage, three of the four sentences feature marked themes that give information about the circumstances, the “when” as it would be. They could all theoretically be moved to different parts of the sentence without changing the meaning and provide some complexity to the sentence structures.

One reason for the problems with cohesion as seen above relate to the use of unmarked theme. Unmarked theme is defined by Halliday (1994) as “an element that occupies the point of departure position of the clause and conflates with the grammatical subject” (44), which essentially means that the grammatical subject (in many of the previous examples, “it”) and the point of departure of a message are the same. This can be a problem with beginning writers as repetitive use of unmarked themes can cause both syntactic and semantic confusion and does not allow for a message to be woven throughout the text, as Unsworth describes it. These students often lack marked themes, which is something other than the subject (such as a circumstantial adverbial) that is used as the departure point for the message. As seen in their texts, students’ use of marked themes increases as the term progresses. As seen in later examples, students start to use more of them, such as “but when we began to describe thinking,” suggesting



some form of development in this area (moving to add more marked themes in writing, as opposed to the high volume of repetitive unmarked themes).

The issue of theme and rheme is a much more complicated issue in writing, and often students learn it much later in their L2 education. This would suggest that students pull from other areas of L2 knowledge to complete writing tasks, as there is no evidence from the students themselves that the ideas of theme and thematic development was addressed in class (at least not explicitly). For many novice writers with limited writing experience, they might take aspects of conversation, or simpler writing forms and apply them to larger, more extensive pieces of writing. As Biber, Gray, and Poonpon (2011) suggest, conversation is acquired first in first language acquisition and often second language acquisition (although even if a student does not study oral communication, they still learn less complex written forms first). This means that students need to learn how to use certain conventions of academic writing, including phrasal complexity over clausal complexity, thematic progression, and how to write cohesive texts. Additionally, there are different kinds of constructions that can be used as marked themes; students need to be explicitly taught how to use them, and how those marked themes can be used to create cohesive texts. Essentially, students show growth in regard to thematic progression, but their lack of experience (and therefore need to pull from other aspects of their second language) and lack of metaknowledge about the subject may be contributing to the high volumes of unmarked themes and lack of cohesion throughout entire texts.

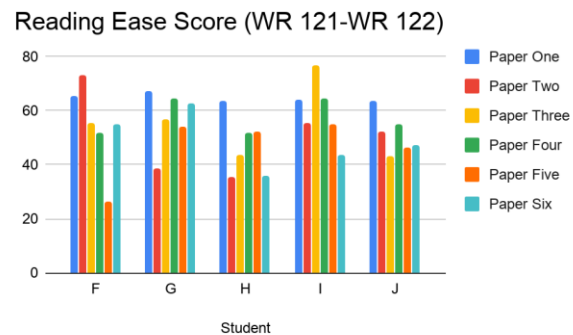
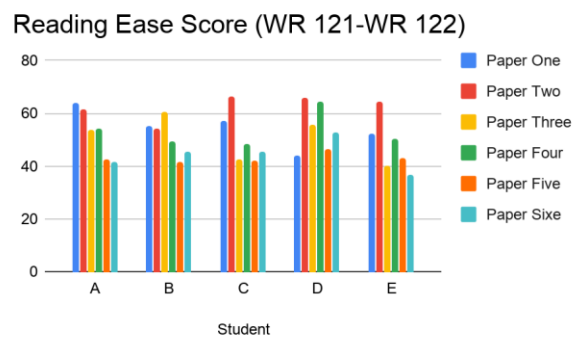
As a whole, the students seemed to increase marginally in the type of constructions and diversity of their themes, and with the number of marked themes. It appears that, rather than a dramatic shift, students increased little by little, much of which can be connected to the types of prompts and types of assignments that they were given. If their writing from the last term of their study abroad year was analyzed, it is possible that further progress can be seen.

#### **4.4 Reading Levels**

Each paper was also analyzed via the Flesch-Kincaid readability calculator to assess grade level. Reading level is an important measure of progress, because it can give a numerical indication of growth (such as by grade levels). Additionally, complex structures and appropriate grammatical choices do not necessarily mean much if the vocabulary that accompanies them is unreadable; it's the combination of both aspects that make something clear enough to be read. However, readability calculators have their limitations. They can only give scores based on what they've been programmed to do (such as matching up a sample to a database), and cannot necessarily account for more pragmatic and semantic aspects of writing.

Through this calculator, texts are given a score between 0 and 100 with the number corresponding to the estimated grade level needed to read that specific text. A score that falls between 90 and 100 is equivalent to a fifth grade reading level; a score between 80 and 90 is equivalent to a sixth grade reading level; a score between 70 and 80 is equivalent to a seventh grade level; a score between 60 and 70 is equivalent to a eighth/ninth grade reading level; a score between 50

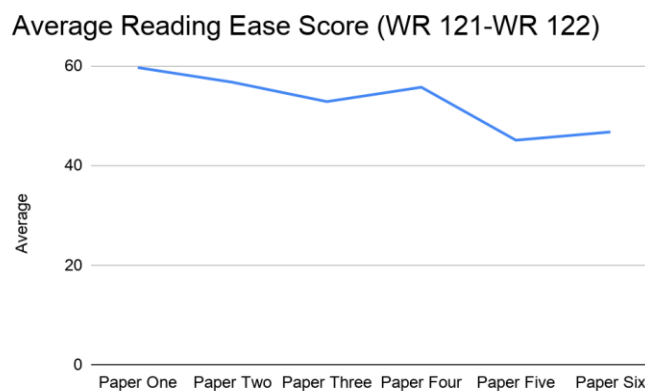
and 60 is equivalent to tenth-twelfth grade reading level; a score between 30 and 50 constitutes the collegiate level; and a score under 30 suggests college graduate. Essentially, a higher score indicates a lower reading level is needed to comprehend a specific written work while a lower score shows the opposite. This is one measure of progress that indicates specific benchmarks. Ideally, the students would decrease over the two terms, no matter what reading level they started at. To clarify, while the following graphs show the reading ease score for each paper, progress is measured more holistically in that decreasing overall in reading level is more indicative of progress than change from paper to paper.



Nine out of ten students showed some overall decrease from the first paper to the last in terms of reading level. The most prominent decreases were from student A (22.5 point decrease), student H (27.4 point decrease), and student I (20.2 point decrease). One student (student D) experienced an overall increase

from paper one to paper six by 8.6 points. The other students showed a range of overall point decreases between 4.7 and 16.2

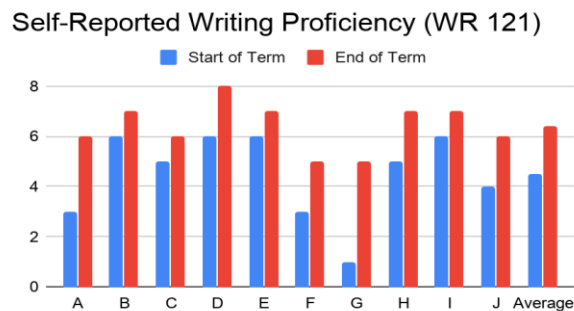
Six out of the ten students started WR 121 with papers receiving an eighth/ninth grade estimation. Of the remaining four, three received a tenth-twelfth grade estimation, and one received a college estimation. By the end of WR 122, seven out of the ten students had papers receiving a college reading level, two with a tenth-twelfth grade reading level, and one with an eighth/ninth grade reading level. As a whole, most students progressed significantly, with more than half of the students moving up between 3 and 5 grade levels over two terms.



On average, students decreased by 12.93 points from the beginning of WR 121 to the end of WR 122. Initially, the average grade level was on the low end of tenth-twelfth, with an average score of 59.62 (a score quite close to the eighth/ninth grade level). By the end of WR 122, students achieved an average score of 46.69, putting them solidly in the college reading level. This suggests significant overall progress, despite the variations in level throughout the two terms from student to student.

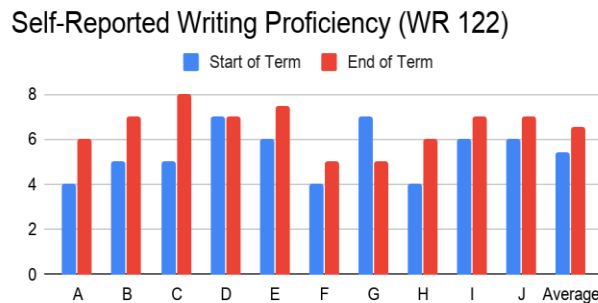
## 4.5 Surveys

Other than asking for demographic information, the qualitative surveys mainly functioned as a way for students to assess their own progress, similar to self-efficacy surveys. They were asked to rate their academic writing abilities on a scale from one to ten with one being “needs improvement” and ten being “proficient.” During both surveys, students were asked to rank their writing abilities at the beginning and end of each term, and provide validation as to why they felt that way. They were then asked if they felt they had improved since the beginning of the year and to elaborate as to why/how they felt they had improved.



At the end of WR 121, all students noted that they had improved by some amount. The average ranking for the beginning of the term was 4.5, while the average end of term ranking was 6.4, which is a 1.9 increase over time. Most students only said that they had improved by one or two points over the term. There were a variety of reasons as to why they put relatively low scores at first, including low grades, the presence of grammatical mistakes, lack of actual English writing experience, and general feelings of self-doubt (one student rated themselves at a three at the beginning of the term because “I think that my writing skill is not well”). The students felt they had improved at the end of term due to

the actual writing class and the skills they'd learned, and the fact that they had been able to practice their English.



At the beginning of WR 122, students ranked their writing abilities at 5.4, on average. This was a 0.9 increase from the beginning of WR 121, but a 1.0 decrease from the end of WR 121. At the end of WR 122, they ranked their writing abilities at 6.6 (on average), which is a term increase of 1.15, and a total increase (from the beginning of WR 121 to the end of WR 122) of 2.1. Many students cited insufficient practice and exposure to English as the main reason for their struggles at the beginning of the term. Some felt they had a better grasp of the language and structure, but they lacked the vocabulary to express themselves, and often turned to translation software for help. By the end of WR 122, students felt more comfortable with English academic writing, and nine out of ten rated themselves as having improved. One student wrote “I would not say perfect, but I am comfortable now,” while another said “Now I have a basic understanding of how to do academic writing and I can write academic prose for my assignments.” For the most part, those who rated themselves lower seemed to pick out grammar and vocabulary problems, as opposed to problems with style and structure. The one student who rated herself lower at the end of WR 122 than at the beginning said “I still need to learn more academic words for my writing

project to describe what I doing for. And I need to make my writing style more strong so my readers can understand what I am saying.” A different student wrote something similar, saying “I think I am do not well. I am not familiar on the grammar and form. I always have some mistake.” However, most students felt they’d improved.

The preoccupation with grammar (specifically form and structure, such as verb conjugation) and vocabulary connects to their ideas about academic writing. The second half of the survey administered during WR 122 asked the students to underline the parts of an abstract that they thought made the piece academic. Four students underlined individual words that seemed to be important aspects of the piece- words like “implication,” “prospect,” “comprehension,” and “undeniable” were what made the sample abstract academic. Three other students underlined phrases that introduced pieces of evidence, or quotes, including constructions such as “the research shows,” and “the current article reviews.” One student felt that the first sentence- the hook that introduces the article- was important. The last two students underlined multiple pieces, including vocabulary, signal phrases, and complex noun phrases. As a whole, students seemed to gravitate towards vocabulary as an indicator of academic prose. Collectively, they seemed to be less concerned with structural elements and grammatical structures.

As a whole, students projected some of their own opinions about their academic writing onto the sample. Those who were focused on grammatical and vocabulary mistakes noted those elements to be most important in both their own writing and in the academic sample. Others who felt that they’d learned

about structure and how to formulate arguments thought that those elements were more instrumental in crafting academic prose. However, all students felt that they had grown throughout both terms, even if that growth seemed marginal.



## 5 Discussion

For the most part, overall growth was most notably seen via vocabulary and general reading level. Vocabulary saw a definitive growth, specifically in the increase of vocabulary levels two, three, and zero, in addition to a general decrease in level one vocabulary. Additionally, reading levels on average went from a low tenth-twelfth grade reading level to a decidedly college level.

Thematic progression and development as well as lexical density, on the other hand, steadily progressed through both terms at a similar rate. These are elements that are more related to style and structure, in that clear and cohesive writing requires proper development of theme. They are also more difficult to progress in especially when students lack the proper vocabulary and knowledge to express themselves the way they intend to. Indeed, students often noted that they felt their lack of vocabulary and presence of grammatical mistakes made it difficult for them to properly write academically in English.

Many students often nitpicked their own grammar (whether or not their constructions were correct) and vocabulary (whether or not they were using the right kind of words, or if they had enough words with which to communicate their point), which may stem from the culture of Eastern Asian countries. Ten out of the twelve students were Chinese, and many EFL classrooms in China are very focused on drilling grammar, and having perfect structures. It follows that students who ranked themselves lower and were particular about the number of mistakes they made would be heavily influenced by the attitudes and classroom cultures that they grew up with.

Despite any negative feelings students may have had towards their progress, they certainly progressed in their writing, specifically in vocabulary, in thematic development, and in writing pieces that are generally comprehensible. Many second language learners lack sufficient writing practice in school, and these students were no different. Concerns about their ability seemed to stem in part from lack of exposure and practice with longer, multi-page works. East Asian countries, and EFL students in general often need to be able to pass TOEFL (Test of English as a Foreign Language) or IELTS (International English Language Testing System), neither of which require long, well written essays; three hundred words or less is expected. Despite all of this, the students progressed from lack of exposure and lack of confidence, to the ability to write multiple essays on varying subjects consisting of between 1,000 and 2,000 words.

Additionally, this was the first extended time in the United States for most of the students. Some had visited in the past, but most had not lived in the US, nor studied at university. Their home countries were not ones in which English was particularly salient, hence why it was studied as a foreign language. However, it is likely that the increased amount of exposure to English (in classes, extracurriculars, media, etc.) would have contributed in some way to their overall growth, specifically vocabulary (as these students would have heard many words they had not learned before arriving for their study abroad). Additionally, some students noted that they visited the writing center, or English tutoring centers on campus; this additional exposure to academic English coupled with specific help on problem areas would also have increased their overall skills.

Overall, students seemed to have the most self-perceived trouble with issues of grammar (such as conjugations and sentence structure) and vocabulary (or lack thereof). Vocabulary, however, seemed to be one of the areas that showed the most long term growth. Further, many students perceived structure and especially the presence of academic vocabulary to be indicators of successful academic writing. Their beliefs about academic writing come from their teachers before their study abroad experiences, and it would make sense that they most harshly judge their own shortcomings in those particular areas. Limited practice with longer academic writing is potentially one reason why students experienced less growth in other, more sophisticated areas of writing, that is, thematic development. Part of that may be due to the actual subject matter and general L2 level, but properly formulating an argument takes a lot of exposure and a lot of practice. Students may not have had enough exposure at this point in time, but did show a promising and steady incline of Type/Token Ratios and an increased use of more complex and varied. structures in the position of theme. Of course, more practice and exposure would show even more improvement over time.

## 6 Conclusion

This study examined the academic writing of twelve international students in their introductory writing classes. There were three main questions that guided the study:

1. In what ways do the international students grow in their academic writing over the course of two terms?
2. What do the students perceive to be academic writing?
3. How is their growth over time tied to their perceptions of their own writing? Are there significant connections between the two?

The students grew in all areas that were measured, most notably in vocabulary. However, they also put the most pressure on vocabulary and grammar, which seem to be the areas that caused them to give themselves lower ratings, or were areas they thought they needed to improve in. Consequently, these are also the areas perceived to be most important in academic discourse.

A longer, more extensive study could give more insight into how thematic development and lexical density actually improve. In this case, they should steady improvement, but not enough numerical data nor patterns of improvement to be deemed significant.

Overall, the students have grown throughout their time in the United States in regard to their academic writing.

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## Appendix B

Ling 410 Research Project Survey: International Student's Writing Growth Over Time

Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Age: \_\_\_\_\_

For my Linguistics research project, I've decided to analyze international student writing over the course of one term, and chart writing growth with the motivation for learning a second language. While your names are needed to connect each survey to each student's work, your data and responses will be kept anonymous in in final report. Thank you for your participation!

Please respond to the questions as you see fit.

1. How long have you been in the US?
2. How long have you been studying English?
3. What reasons do you have for wanting or needing to learn English?
4. What is your understanding of academic writing? What types of language are you expected to use in your academic work?
5. Where did you learn how to do academic writing?
6. On a scale of 1 to 10, with 1 being "needs improvement" and 10 being "proficient", rate your academic writing abilities at the beginning of the term.
7. Why did you rate yourself that way?
8. On a scale of 1 to 10, with 1 being "needs improvement" and 10 being "proficient", rate your academic writing abilities now.
9. Why did you rate yourself that way?
10. Do you feel that you have improved in your writing skills since the beginning of the year? Why or why not?

Please underline the language features that you think make the following text academic.  
The prospect of speed reading—reading at an increased speed without any loss of comprehension—has undeniable appeal. Speed reading has been an

intriguing concept for decades, at least since Evelyn Wood introduced her Reading Dynamics training program in 1959. It has recently increased in popularity, with speed-reading apps and technologies being introduced for smartphones and digital devices. The current article reviews what the scientific community knows about the reading process—a great deal—and discusses the implications of the research findings for potential students of speed-reading training programs or purchasers of speed-reading apps. The research shows that there is a trade-off between speed and accuracy. It is unlikely that readers will be able to double or triple their reading speeds (e.g., from around 250 to 500–750 words per minute) while still being able to understand the text as well as if they read at normal speed. If a thorough understanding of the text is not the reader’s goal, then speed reading or skimming the text will allow the reader to get through it faster with moderate comprehension. The way to maintain high comprehension and get through text faster is to practice reading and to become a more skilled language user (e.g., through increased vocabulary). This is because language skill is at the heart of reading speed.