In the Shadow of Covid-19: SurveyMonkey as an Illuminating Path Towards Process Writing and Formative Assessment

コロナの影で:プロセスライティングにおけるアセスメントのためのプラットホームとしてのサーベイモンキーとその成功例

Richard Marsh, マーシュ リチャード

Tamagawa University, Center for English as a Lingua Franca, Japan

r.marsh@lab.tamagawa.ac.jp

ABSTRACT

Adopting a process approach to writing and summative method of assessment can potentially be daunting without the appropriate classroom resources and experience. This is particularly true in an online teaching environment in the shadow of Covid-19. This paper hopes to provide a comprehensive and practical task to remedy these fears. Grounded in ELF pedagogy and designed for a Japanese university level context, the task can be easily adopted, and with flexibility and adaptability, make a smooth transition to any similar online or face-to-face educational environment. Learners choose a topic and write up to 10 questions to distribute among their peers. In this sense, it is learner-centered as the topics and ideas emerge from the learners themselves. This results in a great diversity of themes where the author of the questionnaire will often be surprised to find an unexpected plurality of opinion present in their respondents. This SurveyMonkey task encourages a wider breadth of vision and a more explicit awareness of the different stages of the writing process. This paper is perfectly compatible with teaching and assessing a process approach to writing and hopes to inspire others to take a similar path.

KEYWORDS: SurveyMonkey, Learner-centered, Process writing, Formative assessment

1. INTRODUCTION

I agree wholeheartedly with a formative approach to assessment and the use of process writing tasks, which give learners an opportunity to critically reflect, reconstruct and reformulate their final piece of assessed writing. It is a great pleasure to be a part of CELF and a privilege to work with an institution, which gives me the encouragement to utilize a process approach to writing assessment in the classroom. It is encouraging and

rewarding to be part of a department, which shares my pedagogical outlook and gives me the freedom to be creative and express myself as a teacher. However, it is often left to ourselves as teachers to create the concrete classroom reality where these ideals come to fruition. The SurveyMonkey writing task presented in this paper is something I have been developing and using in class to great effect and I feel it fully satisfies the criteria espoused by our esteemed department and I hope it can be inspirational and find a home in many other classrooms.

While we expect learners to complete a process writing assignment (in the CELF curriculum it accounts for 20% of their final grade), there are not many specific examples of how this can be practically implemented. As Lacina and Block (2012) state, 'there is very little data on what writing instruction looks like in schools' (p. 10). While this is a general quote about US schools, it is also true to suggest there is a paucity of research in tertiary education in a Japanese English as a Lingua Franca (ELF) context. As such, there is a clear need for purpose-built assessment tasks, which reflect the values of process writing and an ELF conception of English (Harding & McNamara, 2018). This has been further exasperated by the recent Covid-19 pandemic as the immediacy with which we have been forced to 'move online' has resulted in, 'many non-expert online teachers opting to focus on the materials/resources they would use anyway to teach their course contents, independently of its format being face-to-face or online' (Rapanta et al., 2020, p. 927). It has been a trying time for educational institutions struggling with the shifting reality we currently inhabit. Providing consistency, training and support for students and teachers alike in such an unprecedented climate has not been easy. As such, 'bad assessment practices can have a potent effect on students', with regards to potential loss of student and teacher confidence, motivation and time (Crusan et al., 2016, p. 43). This paper hopes to bridge this gap and suggest a practical method of online writing assessment. The task is sensitive to many core ELF concerns and offers the opportunity for reflexivity and redrafting compatible with a process approach to writing. It is also student-centered and aims to boost learner autonomy in the sense that it views the teacher as a facilitator and scaffolder rather than a lecturer and all-powerful judge in the teaching and assessment process.

The purpose of this article is to reinvigorate the teaching of process writing in a Japanese ELF setting. Initially, some of the key theories underpinning the task will be discussed including concerns relating to ELF, formative assessment and remote teaching. The subsequent section of this paper will elucidate how to conduct this SurveyMonkey writing assessment task in detail. Lastly, some student feedback will be presented, before concluding with some potential scope for further study and some final thoughts

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

As ELF educators we want to move past viewing English as a static and native-normative phenomenon and be sensitive to the reality that the 'language in its global contexts has become relatively fluid, flexible, contingent, and often non-native-influenced' (Jenkins & Leung, 2013, p. 8). As such, the major challenge is to devise assessment tasks that reflect this viewpoint and dispense with a preoccupation on native-like correctness. We

must also strive to be authentic in the sense that our assessment tasks are, to as large an extent as possible, grounded in the learners' real-world lives and interests. An effective process writing assessment task should be strongly student-centered with the teacher, even more so in an online environment, supporting and facilitating the students to increase the ownership of their learning process (Rapanta et al., 2020). As explained in the next section of this paper, the SurveyMonkey writing task is certainly suitable with all of the above criteria and is highly adaptable to a face-to-face environment or, the seemingly new normal, synchronous and asynchronous online method currently enforced upon us. The task provides an important opportunity for reflection and self-paced learning. It is also compatible with formative assessment as it allows for continuous assessment and evidence-based learning. We are lucky that the CELF curriculum affords us the chance to teach in such a fashion. In other institutional settings, perhaps this method would be hampered by conflicting departmental demands. Therefore, the rest is up to us, to our own ideas, confidence, professionalism and knowledge. As such, 'the recent attention to classroom-based teacher formative assessment is not surprising, given the key role it is meant to play in the teaching and learning process' (Leung & Lewkowicz, 2006, p. 226).

As detailed in the next section, the SurveyMonkey writing task has a plethora of different stages, which provide a chance for learners to reflect and improve their work. There is also a great many opportunities to formatively assess the learners in other areas such as class participation, not only writing. It often becomes so obvious by being in the classroom, or being aware of their online participation, who has really put in a lot of effort and has a real passion to improve. While consequently it is also clear when identifying those who have merely done the bare minimum to pass the course and not been as receptive to feedback or really taken the opportunity to reflect and improve. As Lee identifies, 'while previous second-language writing research has focused on certain aspects of assessment, such as teacher feedback, error correction and peer review, there is little research that investigates teachers' systematic attempts to implement formative assessment' (2011, p. 100). I hope that this paper can contribute to this important body of research. There is currently an on-going paradigm shift away from a product-focused, summative style brand of formal assessment towards a formative view of assessment (Harding & McNamara, 2018; Lee, 2011; Leung & Lewkowicz, 2006). These on-going developments aim to provide students with new learning opportunities, encourage different ways of fulfilling the task requirements and raise awareness of the processes that underpin it. This paper aims to catalyse this process still further. It also hopes to achieve this with conscious effort applied to the core concerns of ELF advocates. For example, as an 'emphasis on grammar and examinations may function as a demotivating factor for Japanese learners of English' (Kikuchi & Sakai, 2009, p. 198), it would be more desirable to adapt the criterion for marking grammar from that of formal accuracy to one of effective and appropriate conveyance of meaning (Harding & McNamara, 2018). Overall, the ambition of this paper, like the journal in which it appears, is to encourage a whole-school approach, share good practice and disseminate ideas. As Lee (2011) summarises neatly, we need to 'work collaboratively, to reflect critically on practice, and to engage in continuing professional development so that formative assessment will become a pivotal element of our repertoire' (p. 110).

3. PROCEDURE

While teaching and assessing the SurveyMonkey task completely online brought some challenges, there were also immense benefits to conducting this task in the current Covid-19 era. It requires a paradigm shift to successfully adapt to the new realities of being a solely online teacher (Martin et al., 2019). It is useful to aim to be more of a facilitator than an instructor when carrying out the procedure of the SurveyMonkey task. I feel it is very important to have an online presence, in the sense that you are always available to support learners, provide on-going feedback and have a clear, transparent way of checking their understanding and progress. Yet also be malleable and know when to be hands-off and allow learners the freedom to be independent and work at their own pace. There is a lot for students to take on-board during the procedure of this task, most obviously the fact that the vast majority of learners are not familiar with the SurveyMonkey website itself and have often never written their own questionnaire or conducted such a lengthy research-based piece of writing. However, ultimately it should be a journey of exploration where students are granted a great deal of autonomy to create a mini-research project of their own. As such, giving learners access to new platforms such as SurveyMonkey and granting them a great degree of creative freedom will hopefully play a significant role in reinvigorating our, 'educational community as a whole—and in the end, the students themselves are transformed into better writers' (Lacina & Block, 2012, p. 16).

The following section will explain the various different stages involved in carrying out the SurveyMonkey task. Bear it in mind that there is certain flexibility here and, depending on the size of the class, level of the learners, etc. parts could be amended or adapted, or even a more parsimonious procedure could be taken, depending on time constraints, class time, etc. Initially, each learner must think of a suitable topic, some examples include, Japanese culture, differences of men and women, learning English, do Japanese people need English, part-time and future jobs, alcohol, plastic surgery, smoking, music, sports, computer games, etc. The class must then learn how to use the SurveyMonkey website, through a mixture of teacher-guided instruction, trial and error, peer review, and write between 6-10 open and closed questions. Experimentation is crucial, however, 'Matrix/Rating Scale' questions (which is a specific category on the SurveyMonkey website) usually work best as it is easy to add an extra question for additional insightful comments and it produces easy to use graphs for analysis. There is a very simple function built into SurveyMonkey where students can pilot their survey as they write it, ensuring they will receive their results in the desired format once they begin gathering real data. It is important to make learners aware of this and demonstrate its function clearly. The next step is to start collecting data. It is flexible, but I would suggest more than 20 respondents should be the minimum requirement and above 40 or 50 would be excellent. Through online lessons, it is probably best if students use a web link, which they can email or send via Zoom/MS Teams, etc., or share using a class Line group if they are comfortable with this. I actually never suggested the last method, although many classes chose to gather their results this way on their own volition. Once we return to the classroom, in my opinion, the best way is to save a unique QR code, they can generate through SurveyMonkey, and show it to other students face-to-face. Often, I have the group

go into another classroom, with permission from their teacher of course, and while it is mostly a reading and writing exercise, it usually produces a highly interactive atmosphere. Additional homework could be to collect further data from friends and family. This would increase their number of respondents and expand the diversity of their comments and information they can use to construct the final piece of writing.

Lastly, they should analyse the data and plan, draft and write a 5-paragraph essay (introduction, 3 body paragraphs and conclusion) of between 300-600 words, depending on the level of the learners. Some stimulating questions to introduce at this stage are, why were you interested in the topic and questions? What were the most interesting/surprising results? What were some unique/insightful comments? What is the author's (your) opinion, did you agree or disagree with the class? What questions did not work very well, what could be improved? Ideally, these questions should stimulate a more critical, reflective piece of work, rather than mere description or regurgitation of the answers to their questions. I would also encourage the use of visual data, with the inclusion of tables or graphs a welcome bonus. Overall, the multiple stages of production, not to mention the many chances for feedback, revision and redrafting are perfectly compatible with an online working environment. Independent learning is encouraged and the whole process can be done at the learners' own pace, potentially suiting different learning styles. Through this process, it could be expected that learners would improve their IT skills and gain familiarity with new applications and programs. They also gain the opportunity to learn a great deal about their classmates and develop a more conscious sense of reflection and criticality about the strengths and weaknesses of their questionnaire, and the process through which they develop their writing in general.

Some final points to be aware of is that SurveyMonkey can also be used in Japanese, or in many different languages in fact, which sometimes can be an advantage for lower-level learners. I would always encourage them to try to design their questionnaire in English first, but sometimes alternate between English and Japanese if they become uncertain, as it would be a shame for them to make a mistake in this early stage of the process as it could potentially affect the quality of their results later. Although, through clear guidance, on-going teacher support and peer assistance, this kind of issue should be relatively rare. However, it must be made clear that it is essential that their questions and answers should be written in English. Finally, please make it clear that learners only require the free version of SurveyMonkey. The website, like many similar services, often offers additional options or encourages you to purchase the paid options. It must be made very clear that learners do not need to spend any money nor do they require any additional features whatsoever. The free option offers a maximum of 10 questions and up to 100 respondents to answer their questionnaire for free, this is more than enough to complete the above process adequately.

4. METHODOLOGY

I have been teaching this SurveyMonkey research and writing assessment for over three years now. I conducted a 10-question survey with two lower-intermediate level classes (Tamagawa equivalent 200s) using SurveyMonkey (http://www.surveymonkey.com/) to

gauge their feedback to a variety of questions. There were a total of 38 respondents (20 men and 18 women). The findings and results will be reported in the below section of the paper. While there was mostly positive feedback and many instructive comments, I perhaps felt that it did not work as well in the shadow of covid-19. There could be many factors for this and the next section will cover this in more detail.

5. FINDINGS AND RESULTS

Initially, learners were asked what topic they chose for their questionnaire. While I do provide some examples and elicit as many fruitful topics as possible, ultimately students have full control over the content of their surveys. As such, there is always a diverse plurality of topics. For example, some of the topics chosen were, travel, convenience stores, clothes shopping, exercise, theme parks, sleep etc. The next question was regarding how many surveys the students collected. Eleven learners collected less than 20, 22 students collected between 20 and 40 and impressively five people collected more than 40. It was more difficult to collaborate with neighbouring classes as I was teaching this course online, so perhaps when regular face-to-face lessons resume it could be expected that these numbers would be even higher. While it is not desirable to extrapolate the exact correlation between sample size and the final grade the students received for the task. It is certainly a useful barometer for how much effort the learner put into that particular stage of the process, and how many additional respondents they sought outside formal class hours. As shown below in Table 1, the group of learners I surveyed largely found the task to be stimulating, with almost 70% (68.42%) finding it to be 'quite interesting' or 'very interesting'. While I am happy with the results, I perhaps expected a slightly more positive response as there is no denying that, while online teaching has some advantages, it misses a certain spark when compared to face-to-face interaction. I would be interested to see the results of the survey if it was repeated once we return to the classroom. It is clear that teaching in an online environment requires additional competencies from us as educators (Martin et al., 2019), and demands a re-thinking and fine-tuning of our pedagogical practices (Rapanta et al., 2020). This is an on-going, reflective process. I have made adjustments to my teaching practice and, in the implementation of the task described above, it can, and should, be tailored to suit your specific class and their and learning requirements.

Table 1

Question 4: Was your Survey and Essay Interesting?

It was boring	Quite Boring	Medium	Yes, quite Interesting	Yes, very Interesting	Total
0	2	10	19	7	38
0%	5.26%	26.32%	50%	18.42%	

As you can see from Table 2 there was a similarly positive response regarding learners' perceptions of their own topics and questionnaires. Many positive comments reflected

this and highlighted a sense of creativity and discovery, e.g. 'I could hear everyone's real voice', 'I can think more about food and I want to add some questions to a new survey'. Although it must be acknowledged that the screen share function on MS Teams and Zoom etc. is a fantastic asset to an online learning environment, I do not feel it was quite as effective as actually having learners in a room with their laptops and being able to support them directly. However, it must be said that overall I feel the task was successful and I would have to agree that, 'the design of effective learning environments and embedding online technologies can serve as catalysts for teachers to experiment new things, explore creative alternatives and reflect on their own practice' (Rapanta et al., 2020, p. 942). The next question (Table 3) drew more of a polarised response, with a large percentage of respondents (65.79%) enjoying their classmates' surveys, while others felt less positive as perhaps they found the repetitive nature of the exercise to be somewhat of a chore. Again, I anticipate that this is slightly different from the face-to-face interaction of the classroom where students can build rapport and clarify misunderstandings more easily, or even visit a new class and get to know other students. I feel this is neatly reflected in the following comments, 'because the questions were interesting and answering is fun', 'because everyone has many ideas different to me so I enjoyed it', 'other people survey is interesting, but all questions answering is bother'.

Table 2
Question 5: Did you think your topic and questions worked well for the Survey and Essay?

Not at all	Not really	Medium	Yes, quite well	Yes, very well	Total
0	2	11	18	7	38
0%	5.26%	28.95%	47.37%	18.42%	

Table 3
Question 7: Did you enjoy other class members Surveys and Questions?

Not at all	Not really	Medium	Yes, quite interesting	Yes, very interesting	Total
2	4	7	15	10	38
5.26%	10.53%	18.42%	39.47%	26.32%	

Lastly, there was some positive feedback regarding whether the learners felt they had improved their overall English writing and computer (IT) skills (Tables 4 and 5). While this is subjective and relatively anecdotal, it is pleasing nonetheless and many of the positive comments pertain to a distinct sense of gratitude for the opportunity to take part in the task and an increased sense of motivation to do something similar in the future. For example, 'I was able to write with the structure in mind, 'my English vocabulary has improved, thank you!', 'I can use it when I want to ask a questionnaire in another class' etc.

etc. It was also noteworthy that some respondents commented that they practiced some digital literacy skills they had previously seldom had the chance to demonstrate, e.g. 'I was able to put together some graphs in English for the first time'. There is not enough scope in this current paper to discuss the results or further comments in more detail, but I will just conclude with some brief examples. E.g. 'I wrote this essay after thinking a lot, I want to use SurveyMonkey in the future', 'this is my first time to do a survey, it is great experience for me, but next time I can do it better' etc. Overall, there are many pleasing aspects to this, albeit relative small-scale, study and potentially in the future there could be scope for a more in-depth study or one that accounts for a repeat performance of the task to gauge if the learners made any adjustments to their survey design, plan or overall writing process. Perhaps, once we return to the classroom, it may also be instructional to repeat the survey to compare a remote versus a face-to-face learning environment to further fine-tune its delivery.

Table 4
Question 9a: Do you feel the Survey and Essay helped improve your English writing skills?

Not at all	Not really	Medium	Yes, a little	Yes, very much	Total
0	3	6	15	13	37
0%	8.11%	16.22%	40.54%	35.14%	

Table 5
Question 9b: Do you feel the Survey and Essay helped improve your Computer (IT) skills?

Not at all	Not really	Medium	Yes, a little	Yes, very much	Total
2	1	8	16	11	38
5.26%	2.68%	21.05%	41.11%	28.95%	

6. CONCLUSION

This paper has described how to conduct a SurveyMonkey writing assessment and outlined some of the major benefits for it to be utilized when adopting a process approach to writing and making the transition from summative to formative assessment. While a degree of flexibility and adaptation must be applied, when carrying out the task in an online teaching environment, the compatibility and applicability to an ELF Japanese university syllabus have hopefully been comprehensively accounted for. Teaching writing should not be a chore, nor should it be a demand for strict native-normative adherence. It should be a journey of exploration and self-reflection with the opportunity for learners to take ownership of their work and their overall learning process. By the time learners complete this task they will hopefully have produced something they will be proud of and

the final piece of writing will be a structure built on a solid foundation, which will stand them in good stead for their future academic writing careers.

REFERENCES

Crusan, D., Plakans, L., & Gebril, A. (2016). Writing assessment literacy: Surveying second language teachers' knowledge, beliefs, and practices. *Assessing Writing, 28*, 43–56. https://doi:10.1016/j.asw.2016.03.001

Harding, L., & McNamara, T. F. (2018). Language assessment: The challenge of ELF. In J. Jenkins, M. J. Dewey, & W. Baker (Eds.), *Routledge Handbook of English as a Lingua Franca*. Routledge. https://www.routledgehandbooks.com/doi/10.4324/9781315717173.ch45

Jenkins, J., & Leung, C. (2013). *English as a Lingua Franca*. In A. J. Kunnan (Ed.),*The Companion to Language Assessment* (pp. 1607-1616). John Wiley & Sons. https://doi.org/10.1002/9781118411360.wbcla047

Kikuchi, K., & Sakai, H. (2009). Japanese learners' demotivation to study English: A survey study. *JALT Journal, 31*(2), 183-204. https://doi.org/10.37546/JALTJJ31.2

Lacina, J., & Block, C. (2012). Progressive writing instruction: Empowering school leaders and teachers. *Voices from the Middle, 19*(3), 10-17.

Lee, I. (2011). Formative assessment in EFL writing: An exploratory case study. *Changing English, 18*(1), 99-111. https://doi:10.1080/1358684x.2011.543516

Leung, C., & Lewkowicz, J. (2006). Expanding horizons and unresolved conundrums: Language testing and assessment. *TESOL Quarterly, 40*(1), 211-234. https://doi.org/10.2307/40264517

Martin, F., Budhrani, K., Kumar, S., & Ritzhaupt, A. (2019). Award-winning faculty online teaching practices: Roles and competencies. *Online Learning, 23*(1), 184-205. https://doi:10.24059/olj.v23i1.1329

Rapanta, C., Botturi, L., Goodyear, P., Guàrdia, L., & Koole, M. (2020). Online university teaching during and after the Covid-19 crisis: Refocusing teacher presence and learning activity. *Postdigital Science and Education, 2*, 923-925. https://doi:10.1007/s42438-020-00155-