The IEA Study of Written Composition II:
Education and Performance in Fourteen Countries

Edited by

A. C. PURVES
State University of New York at Albany, USA

Published for the International Association
for the Evaluation of Educational Achievement by

PERGAMON PRESS

OXFORD • NEW YORK • SEOUL • TOKYO

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Pupil Perception of Writing Instruction in Schools

Sauli Takala and R. Elaine Degenhart

In the preceding chapters, some data have been presented reflecting the reported opportunity to learn particular types of writing in the classroom and the teaching approaches and methods of instruction employed. The sources of these data are the Teacher Questionnaire and reported curriculum and examination items. This chapter will examine an aspect of the International Study of Written Composition that was designed to analyze what students have to say about writing as a school subject.

The data on which this chapter is based come from the writing task described in some detail in the first international report volume (see Bauer & Purves, 1988). The form of the assignment was a letter of advice to a younger student in which students write freely about their perceptions of writing instruction in their schools. When the idea for this task was discussed at the first International Study Committee meeting in 1981, the task was felt to be unusual and too unfamiliar to the students, and so it was not included in the first set of tasks piloted by National Centers. As experiences accumulated in the project, however, it became clear that researchers in the past have not asked students themselves about learning to write. It is possible that students receive very different messages about what is important than their teachers realize -- or intend. In order to examine this question, the original idea for a "letter of advice" task reemerged. (Since the decision about the task was made, the study of pupil conceptions, misconceptions and perceptions of specific school subjects has considerably increased throughout the world.)

This task was designed to serve two functions in the study. In addition to its function as a means of evaluating achievement in a particular type of writing, it was also intended to be "a composition about composition, thus providing information about what students in the various systems of education knew and thought about school writing" (Bauer & Purves, 1988, p. 100). The expectation was that such an exercise would complement and enhance various questionnaire data that would emerge from students and teachers. In particular, the task would provide "the students' perspectives on the criteria for good writing; how they perceived the school and the teacher, and what values the school and the teacher place on various aspects and textual features

of writing" (p. 100). The task instructions were given as follows:

> Letter of Advice to a Younger Student
>
> Write a letter of advice to a student two years younger than you who is planning to attend your school and who has asked you to tell them how to write a composition that will be considered good by teachers in your school. Write a friendly letter and describe in it at least five specific hints as to what you think teachers in your school find important when they judge compositions.

The task was presented to all students in the sample population who were at the end of compulsory schooling, that is, that stage where the majority of the age cohort were still in school (Population B). It was also presented to half of the students in the pre-university year sample population (Population C). There was a specified audience, a slightly younger student, to whom the writer was to present specific information in a friendly manner from previous experience. Presumably the information to be given was such that the writer should be able to extract it from memory, although it would not have been information that had been specifically studied. The information was then coded for its content and analyzed in respect to national and international perspectives on the activity of writing and on the texts produced.

The development of a coding system that could be applied as uniformly and as quickly as possible by coders at all National Centers was a major task for the Steering Committee. The coding scheme was constructed on the basis of earlier conceptual work done in the project and was pilot tested and revised several times on the basis of comments from some of the participating National Centers. The final version of the coding scheme makes a distinction between the process of the writing product, and behavior tactics in class as major sources influencing success in getting good grades.

Content Coding

The theoretical basis for the coding scheme comes from the domain specification of the study (Purves, Soter, Takala, & Vahapassi, 1984; Vahapassi, 1988), which sets forth both cognitive and communicative dimensions of writing tasks. It also comes from the curriculum analysis reflected in the Teacher Questionnaire as set forth in Kadar-Fulop, Pezeshkpour, and Purves (1982). In addition, the scheme is partially derived from the scoring scheme of the study (Purves, Gorman, & Takala, 1988), which identified several dimensions that teachers and other raters attend to

when scoring compositions (content, organization, style and tone, grammar, spelling and orthography, handwriting and neatness, and interest).

An examination of sample responses to the task indicated that most of the responses do indeed refer to these categories, although the students generally do not use terms like "reader" or "audience" but "teachers" or "they" when discussing what will be interesting. Interest on the part of the rater may, in fact, be considered the result of audience awareness on the part of the writer.

However, students added categories of their own as well. The compositions turned up two additional types of advice. The first of these concerned the processes involved in writing, which in great part refer to both the generally accepted stages of writing (planning, drafting, revising, and editing), and also to the cognitive operations underlying these processes as well as underlying the domain of writing itself. The students told how to succeed, not merely what success was. The second concerns what one might call tactics, and arises from the fact that many of the students interpret their teachers' judgments to refer to broader aspects of school work and behavior than composition. They believe that success in composition depends on other matters such as dress or behavior in class. The fact that they include advice on these broader aspects means that in order to report accurately, one should code these items even though they do not necessarily fit theoretically into the domain of composition.

From these considerations, then, three broad categories emerged for coding: Product, which includes content, organization, style and tone, and presentation (including grammar, spelling, and punctuation); Process, which includes consideration of audience, prewriting, writing, and postwriting; and Tactics, which includes behavior and personality. It was decided, however, that these categories were too general, and that a more specific coding scheme should be developed. From an examination of a sample of the National Centers' pilot test compositions, a final three-digit coding scheme was developed. The first digit indicates the general area (e.g., 1 for Content); the second indicates a subarea (e.g., 11 for Content/Information); and the third the specific topic within a subarea (111 for Content/Information/Keep to topic). The most specific level codes are cast in the form of sample statements. Table 5.1 lists the major and subcategory levels. The full scheme is given in Takala (1987).

Table 5.1.

Coding scheme for the major category and subcategory levels of coding.

1(00) CONTENT
- 11(0) Information
- 12(0) Approach to content
- 13(0) Variety
- 14(0) Details

2(00) ORGANIZATION
- 21(0) Overall structure
- 22(0) Introduction
- 23(0) Body
- 24(0) Paragraph level
- 25(0) Conclusion

3(00) STYLE AND TONE
- 31(0) Uniformity
- 32(0) Clarity
- 33(0) Elaboration
- 34(0) Personality
- 35(0) Lexical choice
- 36(0) Syntactic choice
- 37(0) Paragraph or discourse choice
- 38(0) Set style of school/teacher

4(00) PRESENTATION
- 41(0) Appearance
- 42(0) Length/format
- 43(0) Grammar
- 44(0) Spelling and punctuation

5(00) PROCESS
- 51(0) Selection of audience and preparation for it
- 52(0) Selection of topic/task
- 53(0) Advance preparation
- 54(0) Planning
- 55(0) Drafting
- 56(0) Revision/editing
- 57(0) Use of feedback
- 58(0) Punctuality and time

6(00) TACTICS
- 61(0) Dress/physical appearance
- 62(0) Participation/behavior
- 63(0) Attitude toward teacher
- 64(0) Attitude with peers
- 65(0) Honesty
- 66(0) Time/use of resources

800 UNCLASSIFIABLE

An attempt was made to determine the relative importance of the items recommended by the students. However, pilot test experience showed that it greatly increased the level of inference and the coding time required. In a great number of cases it was virtually impossible to ascertain. For example, students might list several items as being "most important." For international purposes it was therefore decided simply to note the presence or absence of an item. Furthermore, many students listed more than the five items suggested. It was decided to record all of the items listed by each student.

The procedure required the coders to first mark the items listed by the student. These items were usually contained in a proposition, or "*t*-unit". Text that did not contain any advice about writing or classroom behavior was disregarded.

Although the *t*-unit was usually a good indicator of new advice, there were three major exceptions:

> Take care of your spelling; a large number of spelling errors irritates the teacher.

Although this example contains two *t*-units, the second does not contain a piece of separate advice but gives the rationale or motive for the advice. The two propositions are coded as a single piece of advice.

> Take care of your spelling and your grammar too.

This single *t*-unit contains two categories of advice. Therefore it would be coded as two separate pieces of advice rather than coding the whole proposition at a more general level.

> Take care of your spelling. You really should check your spelling. Good spelling, is important in this school.

Here there are three *t*-units that say the same thing. They are contained in a single unit of advice. Although each could be coded, the coding would be redundant.

After identifying the items to be coded, the code number was entered on the code sheet provided. An attempt was made to indicate as specific a subcategory as possible. Raters were urged not to use code numbers that ended in zero unless the student's phrasing was ambiguous or the student gave a specific piece of advice not having a separate subcategory and the rater judged it to be so rare as not to deserve a new code number. Although illustrative samples were provided, raters were warned to evaluate the sense of what the student wrote since identical matches should not be expected. In the international analysis, only the first two digits of the code are used.

> Hello!
>
> Well then here is a letter from me. You had asked me if I would write to you about that essay writing.
>
> So let me start with that. First of all you have to [sort out a title]*(1)* which really appeals to you. When you have found that [start to think the whole story over first and make some notes]*(2)* (that is always easy for writing). Personally [I usually write in the first person]*(3)* and [past tense]*(4)*. That is incredibly easy, because then you will never get confused between the present and the past tense. When you write in the first person it is also much easier to write and you don't get confused either. Do please [write stories which contain some substance]*(5)*. [Suspense and excitement are much appreciated]*(6)* at our school. So no flannel stories! Well, furthermore [it is of course a question of good imagination]*(7)* and [spelling]*(8)*. Spelling especially counts very heavily in your total mark for the essay. And ... also take into consideration that you should [write clearly]*(9)*. I believe that this is just about the most important. Furthermore I hope that you will like it a bit at our school (it will be alright I think) and I'll see you in two weeks.
>
> Greetings...

Figure 5.1. Example of student composition marked for coding.

Figure 5.1 illustrates the coding process. Nine different coded categories are found in this letter and are marked between brackets ([]). The

following annotation of the codes given illustrate the use of the system:

1. **52** This point has been categorized as process (5), selection of topic (2).

2. **54** This point has been categorized under those aspects which deal with the process (5) of planning (4) a composition.

3. **35** This point is categorized under that aspect of style and tone (3) which deals with the writer's use of the personal (5-lexical).

4. **37** This point is thought to refer to the writer's choice of syntactic structure rather than that of grammatical correctness, and is therefore categorized under the aspect of syntactic choice of style and tone (3-style and tone; 7-paragraph or discourse choice). This analysis is borne out by the writer's qualification of this point in the next sentence.

5. **11** The fifth point is categorized under that aspect of content (1) which deals with the amount of information (1) the writer includes in the composition.

6. **14** The sixth point is categorized under that aspect of content (1) which deals with the writer's expression of his/her personal experience in the composition (4-details).

7. **12** The seventh point is categorized under that aspect of content (1) which deals with the writer's use of his/her imagination in an essay (2-approach to content).

8. **44** The seventh point is categorized under that aspect of how the composition is presented (4) in terms of spelling (4-spelling and punctuation).

9. **80** The last point mentioned is categorized as "unclassifiable" as it is uncertain whether the writer is referring to that aspect of style and tone which deals with clarity, or that aspect of presentation which deals with handwriting neatness.

The Sample

The original proposal and planning of the IEA Study of Achievement in Written Composition included extensive background searches, questionnaire data and achievement scores on at least three actual compositions per student

in the sample. The additional exercise of content coding for one of these compositions was not proposed until after many of the National Centers had secured and fixed their budgets for the project. Therefore, although this new activity was enthusiastically accepted by the members of the International Study Committee (i.e., representatives from each participating National Center), some were financially unable to do this coding.

For the centers that did participate, it was recommended that they code a sample of the Population B (final year of compulsory schooling) compositions. In this population, all pupils wrote this particular task, giving the largest available representation of the age group. Each center was asked to select from each classroom in the Population B international sample of 100 classrooms the compositions from the first rotation. (See Gorman, Purves, & Degenhart, 1988, Appendix A for an illustration of the task rotation system.) This would yield twelve compositions per classroom, or approximately 1200 compositions per country/system. For those countries who would find this number too burdensome, a minimum number of six compositions per classroom was recommended.

Nine of the twelve Population B countries completed the content coding exercise. In addition, this international analysis includes Thailand which only tested the pre-university students (Population C). Although similar in age, these students have a more academic background than their counterparts in Population B. Table 5.2 lists the countries/school systems participating in the exercise. With the exception of Wales, all centers coded at least 600 compositions.

Table 5.2.

Countries/school systems reporting the content coding of the letter of advice and the number of compositions coded for Population B (plus Thailand, Population C)

Country	No. of Compositions
Chile	600
England	1001
Finland	1670
Hamburg	2332
Italy	896
Netherlands	1252
New Zealand	1108
Sweden	663
Thailand (Pop C)	659
Wales	278

Reliability of Coding

To check the reliability of coding, double coding was recommended for at least every fifth paper. Raters were urged to strive for total agreement at the major category level (first digit); 85% agreement at the subcategory level (second digit); and 75% agreement at the item level (third digit). However, consistency at the item (third digit) level proved to be too difficult and the final analyses are based on only the major category and the subcategory levels.

Specific reliability information is available only from Finland, The Netherlands, and Sweden. Two coders were used in the Netherlands. Each rescored 30 of their own scripts for intracoder stability and 60 scripts from the other coder for intercoder agreement. Cohen's *K* was found to be .85, a fairly satisfactory level of agreement. In Sweden, 20 compositions were recoded both for Population B and for Population C. Coder agreement was computed as a percentage of agreement at three levels from the more general to the more specific: primary category (100-800), secondary category (110, 120, etc.), tertiary category (111, 112, etc.). The degree of agreement for the three categories was 96%, 88%, and 84% for Population B and 93%, 89%, and 87% for Population C, respectively. In Finland, 30 compositions were double-coded for Pop B. The percentage of agreement at the most detailed (three-digit) level was high: 95%.

Written information and talks with coders in England and Italy suggest that coding was done in a careful manner. In Italy, for example, teams were set up to check the applicability of the category system and to do the coding (for a detailed description, see Fabi & Pavan de Gregorio, 1988). Thus, even though all National Centers were not able to double code or check the reliability of coding statistically, we have no reason to suspect that their coding reliability differs considerably from the rest.

Main Results

Although the test instructions only asked for five items of advice from each student, the actual per student national averages were higher (see Table 5.11). The remaining tables in this chapter will report percentages based on the total number of coded items in each country, not the percentage of students mentioning a particular category. In many cases, especially at the major category level, students have included more than one item from a single category in their advice.

Only Population B compositions were used for this analysis, with the exception of Thailand where only the pre-university year (Population C) was

tested. The Welsh-language schools are not included. The results are first reported using the main categories of the coding scheme to give an overview of the distribution of student advice (Table 5.3). Each category is then presented in greater detail.

Table 5.3 shows some uniform patterns across the nine countries reported. The numbers represent the percent of all coded advice that fall within each general category for each country. The categories are shown in descending order of frequency across countries, with presentation clearly being mentioned most often and tactics and unclassified the least.

Table 5.3

Percentage distributions of student advice in nine countries/school systems broken down by main categories of the coding scheme

Category	CHI	ENG	FRG	FIN	ITA	NET	N-Z	SWE	THA
Presentation	49.1	40.0	39.0	34.9	36.0	47.5	31.4	33.9	22.2
Content	9.6	15.0	23.2	20.6	24.0	9.2	20.5	14.1	12.3
Process	20.8	15.0	4.3	11.4	12.0	11.0	18.5	19.6	17.6
Organization	4.1	15.0	14.0	18.3	10.0	17.0	14.5	12.9	33.3
Style/tone	14.0	13.0	18.2	13.0	15.0	7.8	13.5	15.4	14.
Tactics	1.1	2.0	1.3	1.5	3.0	1.4	1.7	0.0	0.1
Unclassified	1.3	0.0	0.0	0.3	0.0	6.1	0.0	4.1	0.3

Students in all countries/school systems, with the exception of Thailand, most frequently mentioned points related to the presentation of composition: the general appearance, length/format, grammar, spelling, and punctuation. Least frequently mentioned was advice related to tactics or advice that could not be classified. Between these two extremes there is less

agreement in the order of frequency. For example, when the rank order of the major categories is averaged across countries, content appears second in frequency. However, in Chile, The Netherlands, Sweden, and Thailand, content is ranked fourth or fifth. The differences between the averaged percentages of these four categories (content, process, organization, style/tone) are relatively small.

Presentation

Features related to presentation not only rank first in eight of the nine countries, but they account for a significant portion of the total advice given in each country. Almost half of the items coded in Chile (49.1%) and The Netherlands (47.5%) fall in this category. Even in Thailand, where this category was ranked second, 22.2% of the total responses are found here. Across countries the mention of spelling and punctuation is considerably greater than the remaining subcategories. The only exceptions are in Italy, where there is a stronger perceived emphasis on grammar (14.7%), and in Thailand, where unspecified national options are stronger (9.5%).

Table 5.4.

Percentage distribution of student advice within the presentation category, broken down by the main subcategories

	CHI	ENG	FRG	FIN	ITA	NET	N-Z	SWE	THA
Total %	49.1	40.0	39.0	34.9	36.0	47.5	31.4	33.9	22.2
Spelling/ Punctuation	26.0	19.0	18.9	13.1	10.7	21.5	16.1	17.4	4.7
Appearance	18.2	11.0	7.9	9.8	6.4	11.7	7.9	8.1	3.8
Length/format	4.6	8.0	5.8	9.5	4.2	8.6	5.5	6.4	3.0
Grammar	0.3	2.0	6.4	2.5	14.7	5.7	1.9	2.0	1.2
National options									9.5

In the national report for England and Wales, Gubb, Gorman and Price (1987) suggest two possible reasons for the prominence of presentation items among student advice. First, teachers' marking practices continually alert students to these easily marked and least time-consuming aspects of their compositions. It is likely that the red marks are more firmly planted in the students' memories than the less concrete oral discussions of the finer points of organization and style. As a result the students may be unintentionally led to overestimate the importance of this category.

The second point raised in the English report suggests that "the various aspects of presentation come easily to mind and can be listed without a great deal of thought" (p. 59). This point seems to be supported by the observation that poorer writers tend to concentrate more on presentation than do better writers, who tended to see presentational features as "servicing agents to the more substantive aspects of writing" (p. 59).

The examples from student compositions used throughout the remainder of this chapter are not meant to convey any representative sample of pupil advice, but simply to illustrate the way pupils phrase their advice. The original spelling, punctuation, and grammar have been preserved as much as possible, even in examples translated into English from other languages. The following excerpts illustrate how pupils phrased their advice on presentation. (The numbers in parentheses represent the subcategory level codes as shown in Table 5.1.)

> The purpose of my letter is to give you advice of here in the school regarding composition one of the details that is mostly taken into consideration is orthography, so I personally advise you that you prepare yourself. (440)

> That is enough but the most important thing in writing is to be neat. (410)

> Also when you write a story try to make it quite long about six pages. So this gets you better marks and teachers do not like short storys of about a page. (420)

Content

Presentation accounted for 37% of the student responses across countries. The next four categories together contain just under 60% of the remaining responses with less than one percentage point separating any pair.

As a result, there is no clear agreement of the order of importance (as interpreted by rank order) among countries for these four aspects. There is also a sharp drop in the number of responses in each category, with second-ranked content features accounting for only 16% of the total. Within countries, these responses ranged from 9.2% in the Netherlands to 24.0% in Italy (Table 5.5).

Table 5.5

Percentage distribution of student advice within the content category, broken down by the main subcategory

	CHI	ENG	FRG	FIN	ITA	NET	N-Z	SWE	THA
Total %	9.6	15.0	23.2	20.6	24.0	9.2	20.5	14.1	12.3
Information	4.4	3.0	8.1	12.5	7.4	6.6	6.5	4.2	6.4
Approach	4.4	5.0	4.1	4.0	6.8	1.2	11.8	5.6	3.5
Details	0.4	2.0	2.0	0.7	2.6	1.0	1.3	4.1	0.5
Variety	0.4	1.0	2.8	3.4	2.5	0.4	0.9	0.2	1.0
General (100)		4.0			4.7				
National options			6.2						0.9

Advice related to the information to be included in a composition dominated in most countries, and featured especially prominently in Finland (12.5%). This subcategory consisted of advice on the amount of information (relevant points only vs. everything), keeping to the topic, and the acceptability of fiction vs. only facts. Advice related to the general approach to the content was most frequent in New Zealand (11.8%). This would include originality and imagination, objectivity, and interest. In the main category of content, both Hamburg (FRG) and Thailand made use of national coding, while England and Italy found a number of items that did not fit the suggested

subcategories and were coded on the most general level. The following examples illustrate the aspects of information, approach to content, and the use of details:

> If you want it can be fictitious that is to say unreal. (110)
>
> Make sure your essays are exciting. If your essay has lots of imagination it brightens up thirty boring essays so you'll get good marks for that. (120)
>
> She likes to read long composition which includes some background and advantural events of the writer. (140)

Process

The process category includes most of the prewriting activities of selection and planning as well as revision and use of feedback. Pupils' references to the processes of writing are noticeably fewer in Hamburg (4.3%) than in the other countries. For students in Chile (20.8%) and Sweden (19.6%), on the other hand, the process of writing was second only to presentation in the total number of responses. However, much of the advice in Chile (9.4%), and to a lesser extent in the Netherlands (2.4%), did not fit within the international subcategories.

With eight identified aspects to this category, the advice is spread fairly thinly without great differences between them. It is clear, however, that prewriting activities such as planning with the aid of lists, brainstorming sessions, drawing up outlines, and drafting are familiar concepts to pupils. Although the choice of topic is seen as important, the choice of audience is less so. Revision and editing of drafts does not seem to be prominent in the pupils' awareness.

> [S]start to think the whole story over first and make some notes (that is always easy for writing). (540)
>
> Firstly, when presented with some essay topics, it is important to select a topic which suits you best. (520)
>
> [G]o over what you have written several times and correct as many mistakes as you can. (560)

If it involves research do some (then at the end have a page showing what books you used, or information obtained and where did it come from). (550)

Table 5.6

Percentage distribution of student advice within the process category, broken down by the main subcategory

	CHI	ENG	FRG	FIN	ITA	NET	N-Z	SWE	THA
Total %	20.8	15.0	4.3	11.4	12.0	11.0	18.5	19.6	17.6
Planning	2.4	4.3	1.1	1.8	2.1	1.7	5.0	5.9	6.2
Topic/task choice	3.9	2.0	0.3	4.7	3.0	2.3	3.5	5.6	3.4
Revision/editing	1.3	3.0	1.0	1.8	3.9	1.2	4.7	4.9	0.8
Advance prep.	1.4	1.0	1.0	1.8	0.6	1.2	1.1	0.6	2.8
Drafting	0.9	2.0	0.4	0.1	1.9	1.1	2.0	2.1	1.3
Audience choice	1.1	2.0	0.4	0.4	0.2	0.7	1.1	0.2	1.3
Use of feedback	0.2	0.4	0.0	0.5	0.1	0.2	0.6	0.2	0.0
Punctuality & time	0.2	0.3	0.1	0.3	0.2	0.0	0.5	0.1	0.3
General (500)	9.4					2.6			
National options									1.5

Organization

References to organization in pupils' letters of advice ranged from 4.1% in Chile to 33.3% in Thailand. With the exception of these two extremes, the countries show a relatively uniform pattern with frequency of advice on aspects of organization ranking third or fourth among the six main

categories and within a short range of 10% to 18% of the total responses.

It is interesting to note that in a preliminary analysis of student performance on the writing tasks, Chacon, Jury, and Carrasco (1989) concluded that Chilean students' written communication was "deficient in organization" (p. 27). The students did not report it as an important aspect for getting a good grade and their performance suggests that they are not conscious of it when they write.

At the other extreme, the students in Thailand considered organization to be the most important aspect with one third of the total responses falling in this category. In fact, organization and presentation together account for 55.5% of the total responses in the Thai sample. It should be remembered that the students in this sample were in the pre-university year and therefore a more select and academically oriented population than the other countries in this analysis. It should also be noted that almost half of the Thai responses (16.0%) were coded using national codes.

Table 5.7

Percentage distribution of student advice within the organization category, broken down by the main subcategory

	CHI	ENG	FRG	FIN	ITA	NET	N-Z	SWE	THA
Total %	4.1	15.0	14.0	18.3	10.0	17.0	14.5	12.9	33.3
Conclusion	0.5	2.0	2.8	3.0	2.4	2.8	3.7	3.1	5.4
Introduction	0.4	3.0	3.1	3.0	2.5	2.6	3.3	3.0	3.9
Paragraph level	0.8	5.0	1.0	5.7	0.2	0.7	4.2	4.5	1.7
Body	1.0	2.0	2.8	2.9	1.6	1.3	1.7	1.5	6.0
Overall structure	1.4	3.0	0.1	3.7	1.5	6.9	1.6	0.8	0.3
General (200)			4.2		1.8		2.7		
National options									16.0

The subcategories of organization are self-explanatory. It should be noted, however, that the overall structure refers to the ordering of ideas and information and should not be confused with matters of physical placement on the page which would be coded under presentation (format). Comments on conclusions, introductions and use of paragraphs are almost equally frequent across countries. Within countries, the paragraph level is mentioned either most frequently (England, Finland, New Zealand, and Sweden) or least frequently (Hamburg/FRG, Italy, the Netherlands, and Thailand).

> Second, a good composition should have an introduction to persuade readers to be interested in our composition. (220)

> They are also very keen on paragraphs - each one must begin with its theme sentence, which is like a mini-introduction to that paragraph. If you can't tell what a paragraph is going to be about by reading its theme sentence - then the theme sentence has failed!! (240)

> After allowing one paragraph for the introduction, you should then launch into the body of the essay. (230)

> And again as you've always or have often been told make sure it begins, carries, and finishes properly. (210)

> The most basic ingredient that they insist on is the general shape of the composition. It must have, in some form or other, a beginning, middle and end. They drum this idea into from the very first day! -You start your composition with a brief introduction, saying 'What you are going to say', followed by you actually saying it, and rounding it off with a nice conclusion saying what you have first said!

Style and Tone

Although aspects of style and tone are infrequently mentioned in The Netherlands (7.8%), this category appears to have the highest degree of agreement across countries. The number of responses is low, however, falling within a narrow range from 13% (England and Finland) to 15.4% (Sweden), with Hamburg at 18.2% only slightly higher than the others.

Table 5.8

Percentage distribution of student advice within the style and tone category, broken down by the main subcategory

	CHI	ENG	FRG	FIN	ITA	NET	N-Z	SWE	THA
Total %	14.0	13.0	18.2	13.0	15.0	7.8	13.5	15.4	14.2
Lexical choice	5.2	4.0	3.0	4.2	4.2	0.5	6.4	6.6	5.9
Clarity	5.5	2.0	4.2	3.1	3.5	0.7	2.2	0.5	0.9
Elaboration	0.8	1.0	2.0	0.7	2.6	2.6	1.2	1.0	1.8
Syntactic choice	0.8	1.0	2.4	1.3	2.1	0.1	1.1	5.3	0.2
Personality	1.1	1.0	0.0	1.4	0.6	0.4	1.8	0.6	0.1
Uniformity	0.4	1.0	0.3	0.8	0.1	0.4	0.6	0.2	0.3
Paragraph/ discourse choice	0.1	1.0	0.0	1.4	0.1	1.5	0.1	0.1	0.1
Set style	0.1	0.0	0.0	0.1	0.1	0.0	0.1	0.0	0.5
General		2.0	6.3		1.7	1.6		1.1	
National option									4.4

Pupils seem to understand style and tone mainly in terms of making lexical choices and using a rich and expressive vocabulary. This category presented difficulties for the raters as well since the general, unspecified sub-category was used in more than half of the countries. In Hamburg fully one third of the total advice given on style could not be placed within the international subcategories. Thailand also found it necessary to use national codes for almost one third of the Thai student responses pertaining to style

and tone. When giving advice on aspects of this category, students were more likely to illustrate their point with examples, as can be seen in the following excerpts:

> I must tell you that many teaches like descriptions, especially if they are interesting. You should put descriptive adjectives into a sentence. I will give you an example. "The boy walked up the road." This is just a basic sentence with no details of how the boy walked and no descriptions of the road. This sentence could be composed as: "The miserable boy walked slowly up the steep road." Please remember this point, it is very important. (330)

> [You] should not make erroneous repititions of words, which make nothing more but to extend and make your composition boring. (350)

> Personally I usually write in the first person and past tense. That is increadibly easy, because then you will never get confused between the present and the past tense. When you write in the first person it is also much easier to write and you don't get confused either. (340)

> It is best to select your favourite style when writing, because you will probably do your favourite style best. (370)

Tactics

As mentioned earlier in this chapter, the category of tactics has no real basis in the theory of composition writing. Some students, interpreting the task instructions literally and in a broad sense, revealed that "to get a good grade" did not depend entirely, in their perception, on academic features. Advice of this nature does not constitute a large portion of responses in any country, but it does appear in all countries often enough to be noted. It is this category, more than any of the others, where the "unintended curriculum" of the classroom is revealed.

Table 5.9

Percentage distribution of student advice within the tactics category, broken down by the main subcategory

	CHI	ENG	FRG	FIN	ITA	NET	N-Z	SWE	THA
Total %	1.1	2.0	1.3	1.5	3.0	1.4	1.7	0.0	0.1
Participation/ behavior	0.3	1.0	0.6	0.9	1.1	0.3	1.1	0.0	0.0
Attitude w/teacher	0.1	0.4	0.6	0.3	0.4	0.7	0.2	0.0	0.0
Honesty	0.3	0.0	0.1	0.1	0.7	0.1	0.0	0.0	0.1
Dress/physical appearance	0.1	0.2	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.2	0.3	0.0	0.0
Time/use of resources	0.1	0.3	0.0	0.0	0.6	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
Attitude w/peers	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.1	0.0	0.1	0.0	0.0
General (600)	0.2	0.1			0.1	0.1			

Pupils are aware that the quality of their writing may not be the only factor that determines their marks. It pays to know what kind of behavior can also contribute to getting a good mark. Participation and classroom behavior are especially prominent in Finland and Hamburg. In The Netherlands and Hamburg the student's attitude toward the teacher is important. Honesty and the use of time and resources are mentioned in Italy. The almost total absence of references to tactics in Thailand (only honesty is mentioned) might be a result of the more select, academic sample of students.

> When writing research essays never copy straight from a textbook, as the teacher can usually tell the difference between published material and the written work of a year eleven student. (650)

> One important point is that you should dress yourself neatly because it can also help you. (610)
>
> It is like most schools I suppose, the odd teacher likes this or that while others forbid it. You have to bend to fit the teachers attitude. (630)

Relationship of Performance and Student Perceptions

An interesting point to pursue is to study how the advice given by pupils is related to their own performance. To do this, students were divided into three groups according to their achievement on the writing tasks. (See Gorman, Purves, & Degenhart, 1988, for descriptions of the writing tasks and the scoring scheme.) For each country, the mean of the summed overall impression scores was used as the standard. Then the sum of each student's overall impression scores was compared to that mean. Students who scored one standard deviation or more below or above the country mean were assigned to the "poor writers" group or the "good writers" group, respectively. Students falling in between were classified as "average writers." Finally, the number of coded items of advice given by the students within each of these groups was averaged and the correlation with performance was calculated. The following table presents the results of this exercise. For each country, the average number of items of advice, the standard deviation, and the number of students for each ability group are given together with the correlation and significance level.

The data show two consistent trends in all countries. First, the total number of advice given showed a linear correlation with the level of performance. The good writers gave the most advice (on the average 7-9 items), average writers gave 5-6 items of advice and poor writers 3-4 items. Second, the variability of the amount of advice given was also linearly related to the level of performance: good writers varied most in terms of the number of advice and poor writers least.

When broken down by coded main category, the same pattern of a linear correlation between level of performance and the number and variability of advice was found. However, the strength of this correlation varies between categories. In the content, organization, and style/tone categories, the correlation was strong and uniform across countries ($p = <.00$ in all cases). The trend was the same in the presentation and process categories, that is, good writers always gave the most advice, but there was less agreement across countries. In the presentation category the differences were smaller (in Finland and Italy, $p = <.10$) and the linear variability was

evident in only 4 out of 8 cases. In the process category, the *p*-values in Hamburg and Italy did not reach the level of significance (p = .17 and .16, respectively) and the variability in Italy was greater among the average writers than the good writers.

Table 5.10

Number of Total Advice on Writing Given by Poor, Average, and Good Writers: Population B

		Poor	Average	Good	Total	*F*	*p*
Chi	Mean	4.39	5.33	7.34	5.60	62.81	.00
	STD	1.46	1.82	2.54	2.13		
	N	70	417	113	600		
Eng	Mean	3.53	5.75	7.94	5.74	140.21	.00
	STD	2.11	2.38	2.59	2.69		
	N	163	653	161	977		
Ham	Mean	4.26	5.50	6.42	5.49	50.94	.00
	STD	1.76	2.00	2.13	2.08		
	N	156	801	196	1153		
Fin	Mean	4.44	6.51	9.10	6.61	208.33	.00
	STD	1.69	2.25	2.84	2.65		
	N	197	808	200	1205		
Ita	Mean	4.91	5.69	7.32	5.81	42.48	.00
	STD	1.86	2.04	2.38	2.18		
	N	116	553	114	783		
N-Z	Mean	3.53	5.72	7.66	5.58	143.71	.00
	STD	2.34	2.41	2.82	2.77		
	N	230	693	179	1102		
Tha	Mean	4.00	5.57	7.79	5.65	50.59	.00
	STD	2.04	2.68	3.34	2.90		
	N	107	449	98	654		
Wal	Mean	3.37	5.92	7.17	5.84	42.84	.00
	STD	1.78	1.81	2.24	2.17		
	N	33	182	53	270		

The tactics category diverges clearly from the pattern. Poor writers tended to give the most tactical advice, but statistically significant differences were found only in England, Hamburg, and Italy. The trend was also evident in Finland and New Zealand, but the differences were so small that they did not reach the level of statistical significance. No difference was found in Chile and Thailand. In Wales alone the good writers gave the most tactical advice, but the differences were not statistically significant.

The Dutch Analysis

Less proficient writers tended to emphasize classroom tactics, presentation, and writing process. By contrast, the more able pupils tended to refer to the importance of audience awareness, stylistic considerations, content, and organization.

The Dutch data were coded in a slightly different way from the international coding scheme. Even so, in their national analysis, Schoonen and DeGlopper (1987) found the same overall pattern as in the other countries. That is, in absolute terms, better writers gave more advice in general with an emphasis on all product categories as well as the prewriting and composing categories.

Table 5.11 shows the distribution of advice as percentages within each ability group. For example, even though the poor writers have been shown to give less advice in absolute numbers, a higher percentage of the advice they do give falls within the mechanics/grammar and presentation categories. Proportionally less advice from this group concerns organization. The better writers also acknowledge the importance of mechanics/grammar, but stress aspects of organization as well. There was very little difference between the three groups concerning style/tone and none for content and the writing process categories (prewriting, composing, and revision).

Spelling, punctuation, grammar, and handwriting were scored nationally and were not a part of the international data. However, Schoonen and DeGlopper analyzed these aspects of the Dutch pupils' performance in relation to the advice they gave in these categories. They discovered that there were no differences between poor, average, and good writers in their advice on grammar and handwriting relative to their performance. However, the pupils who were poor in punctuation gave much more advice on punctuation while it was the good spellers who gave somewhat more advice on the importance of spelling. There were no differences with regard to grammar.

Table 5.11

Relative frequencies (in %) of types of advice for poor, average and good writers (data from the Netherlands).

	GENERAL MERIT							
	Poor		Average		Good			
	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD	*F*	*r*
Mech. & Grammar	32	27	28	22	24	18	5.8	.00
Presentation	25	21	20	16	17	15	12.4	.00
Organization	13	18	22	20	25	18	19.6	.00
Style & Tone	10	17	9	14	13	15	3.8	.02
Content	10	17	10	14	10	13	0.2	.84
Prewriting	6	13	7	12	7	13	0.6	.58
Composing	2	6	2	5	2	5	1.0	.38
Revision	1	3	1	5	1	4	1.7	.19

Conclusion

This chapter has presented results from nine countries concerning the advice that students wrote to an imagined younger pupil who was coming to the writer's school and needed help in learning how to get good marks in writing in that school. There were some patterns which appeared consistent in all or most of the nine countries/school systems concerned.

Most pupils made reference to matters of presentation in their advice to a younger pupil, stressing the importance of correct spelling and punctuation, neat handwriting and clear lay-out as major determinants of their teachers' assessment of composition writing. The authors of the English national report point out, however, that while better writers tended to only catalogue the features of presentation in passing, their less competent classmates tended to make these aspects central items of advice. An interesting further study would be to explore the generalizability of this finding across the languages and cultures of this data set.

The differences between the amount of advice given for the aspects of content, process, organization, and style/tone are small. The data show that only the more proficient writers appear to be concerned with the latter two aspects especially. Comments and advice on classroom tactics tended to be given by the less competent writers.

The analyses reported here confirm the view that pupils are valuable sources of information about the teaching of composition in school. Although the task was "unusual and unfamiliar," as was suggested at the outset of this paper, students are conscious of what is expected of them and are able to write about their experiences.