A CASE STUDY OF SELECTED ESL STUDENTS’ EXPERIENCES
WITH WRITING PORTFOLIOS IN COLLEGE COMPOSITION COURSES

DISSERTATION

Presented in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for
the Degree Doctor of Philosophy in the Graduate
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By

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* * * * *

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ABSTRACT

Leki’s review (2001) on L2 (Second Language) students’ experiences in writing classes exposed a lack of L2 students’ voices in professional literature about their experiences and perspectives. This study aimed at presenting L2 students’ voices in a qualitative study of their experiences with portfolios in college composition classes. The study focused on ESL (English as a Second Language) students’ experiences with writing portfolios in college composition courses, and especially their experiences with and views about the reflective writing component of their portfolios.

This study followed a case study methodology to describe ESL students’ voices relative to their experiences with writing portfolios. Specifically, seven students’ experiences were explored and analyzed. Study participants shared similarities as well as differences from each other, allowing each of them to serve a specific purpose within the overall scope of the inquiry (Yin, 1989). Major data sources were student interview transcripts and reflective writings contained in portfolios. Additional data were collected through teacher interviews, classroom observations, and document analyses such as course packets and syllabi.
Data analysis revealed that the case study students reacted differently to their portfolio assignments. Study findings suggested that students’ attitudinal differences might be related to the amount of time and effort they invested in completing their portfolio assignments. In the cases of some students in the present study, an apparent lack of interest, might have led to their reported low motivation to spend much time and effort working on their portfolio assignments. On the other hand, students in this study who expressed positive opinions over their portfolio experiences tended to be those who reported having spent considerable time and effort on their portfolio assignments.

Reflective writings were contained in students’ submitted portfolios. Different types of foci were found in the study students’ reflective writings. This difference might have been related to different teacher emphases during discussions with students. Some students tended to focus their reflective writing discussions on what the teachers had mentioned or commented both inside and outside of the class.

Students’ self-reported attitudes towards portfolio reflective writing generally seemed consistent with their overall attitudes about their portfolio assignments. Again, attitudinal differences might be partially explained by the amount of time and effort spent by these students on the reflective writing tasks.

Various factors might have caused these student reactions towards their portfolio experiences and portfolio reflective writing, such as the amount of weight that portfolios contributed to their final course grades and possibly, the relatively short duration of an academic quarter (ten weeks). Further study is needed to confirm these impacts.

The results of this study highlight the complexities inherent in different settings of portfolio use in college composition courses in this study, as well as the wide range of
possible student responses to their experiences with writing portfolios. The study and its findings help to establish a knowledge base for understanding college ESL students’ experiences with writing portfolios. This type of knowledge base can be used to stimulate further research and reflection among ESL composition teachers and program administrators. The dissertation also includes a bibliography and related appendices.
Dedicated to my parents and

Scott, my best friend, companion, and my love forever.
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CHAPTER 1

BACKGROUND OF THE PROBLEM

Introduction

Portfolios have become a popular alternative or supplement for evaluating students (Camp, 1996; Elbow, 1991; Elbow & Belanoff, 1997; Tierney, Carter, & Desai, 1991; Wiggins, 1989). More traditional forms of assessment tend to focus on limited goals for learning and often cause the separation of teaching, learning, and assessment, while portfolios link them by emphasizing not only students’ achievement but also their effort and improvement (Tierney, Carter, & Desai, 1991). In addition, portfolios encourage students to reflect on and take responsibility for their own learning (Herman, Gearhart, & Aschbacher, 1996; Tierney, Carter, & Desai, 1991; Yancey, 1998). Portfolios have been regarded as an assessment tool that will “right the wrongs of traditional measurement practice; assessments that will help, not hurt or subvert the instructional process; assessments that will provide bridges, not barriers, to students accomplishment” (Herman, Gearhart, & Aschbacher, 1996, p. 27).

Portfolios have been introduced in a variety of educational settings to evaluate writing and other subjects: primary and secondary education (e.g., Paulson, Paulson, & Meyer, 1991; Tierney, Carter, & Desai, 1991); higher education (e.g., Elbow, 1991); professional teacher evaluation (Lyons, 1998; Shulman, 1998). In addition to
being used in individual classrooms, portfolios have also been used for large-scale assessment purposes. At the K-12 level, Vermont started the first statewide writing portfolio project in the United States in the early 1990s (Murphy & Underwood, 2000). Almost at the same time, Kentucky implemented a writing portfolio system across the state to provide a small portion of the data that would be used in the Accountability Index, and also to impact writing instruction in Kentucky schools (Murphy & Underwood, 2000). At the college level, in the early 1980s, Pat Belanoff and Peter Elbow started experimenting with portfolios as a substitute for proficiency exams in a freshman composition course at State University of New York at Stony Brook. This initiative was the first large-scale writing portfolio proficiency project in the U.S. (Belanoff & Dickson, 1991). After this, many universities across the nation began using portfolios in their composition programs; for example, University of Michigan (Condon & Hamp-Lyons, 1994) and Kansas State University (Smit, Kolonosky, & Seltzer, 1991).

Some researchers (e.g., Hamp-Lyons 1996; Hamp-Lyons & Condon, 2000; Koelsch & Trumbull 1996) have advocated the use of portfolios with nonnative English-speaking students or "ethnolinguistically non-dominant" students. Portfolios include multiple samples of different types of student work and also provide contexts for understanding student performance. In addition, portfolios eliminate the pressure of time in the timed writing tests, which has been suggested to discriminate against nonnative students (Hamp-Lyons 1996; Hamp-Lyons & Condon, 2000). Hamp-Lyons and Condon (2000) have noticed that in portfolio assessment, ESL writers have more time to revise and are more motivated to focus on ideas, content, and text structure instead of correcting their language.
With increasing numbers of international students coming to the United States to pursue education, U.S. educational settings are becoming more culturally and linguistically diverse (Belanoff, 1994). These students often belong to the category of ESL (English as a Second Language); their first language is not English, and they are being taught and assessed in English. The ESL category of students includes immigrant students as well as visa students who have been in the United States for different periods of time. These students come into contact with portfolios at different levels of schooling. Examples of portfolio programs in ESL settings include the ESL writing electronic portfolio project (Al Kahtani, 1999), Intercultural Competence Portfolios for international students in the Iowa Intensive English Program at the University of Iowa (Jacobson, Sleicher, & Maureen, 1999), and Academic Task Portfolios (ATPs) required in adjunct classes for selected freshman ESL students enrolled at San Diego State University (Johns, 1995).

**Problem Statement**

Culture plays an important role in shaping the process of education and students’ preferred learning styles (Eliason, 1995; Oxford, 1996). Learners may face challenges when they transfer from one educational system to another where normally shared cultural assumptions no longer hold true (Ballard & Clanchy, 1991). This can happen when international students come to the U.S. to continue their education or when ESL students move to a higher level academic institution. College education in the Western society tends to emphasize students becoming independent and autonomous learners, with “the competence to analyze, to question, to criticize, to evaluate” (Ballad &

With increasing use of portfolios in college writing programs and emphasis on self-reflection through portfolios, more international students are exposed to this newer type of instructional and assessment tool, which they might have never encountered prior to enrolling in an American university or college, and which could be very different from instructional and assessment systems they were exposed to in their schooling in other countries. These students come from countries where the educational emphases and practices might be different from those in the U.S. It is possible that these students might not be fully aware of the differences in academic expectations. Important questions include: What are these students’ attitudes towards the use of portfolio assessment in writing courses as part of their college studies? How do these students view the reflection component that has been regarded as a significant part of portfolio practice by teachers and educational researchers?

An extensive literature review yielded few data-based studies addressing these two basic questions with regard to ESL students in college settings. The present study explored and described the interactions of seven ESL students with college writing portfolios and how they reacted to reflective writing required as part of their portfolios.

**Significance of the Study**

According to the U.S. Digest of Educational Statistics (2002), within the last two decades there have been increasing numbers of foreign students enrolled in institutions of
As more and more composition programs in universities and colleges across the U.S. use portfolios in their writing courses, ESL students are more and more likely to encounter portfolios. Some portfolio assignments are specifically designed for ESL students while others are not. Teachers must be prepared to address the needs of diverse students found in their classrooms and be aware that these students might be different in terms of their own cultural assumptions, preferred learning styles, and expectations of instructional and assessment patterns. Innovations such as portfolios might be well received or rejected at the initial stage. Teachers also need to be cautious about making generalizations about students from different cultures.

Writing portfolios submitted to teachers provide only part of a picture of the whole story. This study contributes a detailed and comprehensive description of seven Asian ESL students’ experiences with writing portfolios via their own voices. Personal characterizations were, as revealed by this study, frequently hidden beneath the portfolios these students actually submitted to their teachers. Voices from students themselves can provide teachers with a revealing and valuable picture of the range of possible ESL student responses to writing portfolios. These underlying student perspectives can be used to stimulate further reflection among teachers on how to use portfolios in ways that are more valuable and meaningful for students. This study also provides insights into how writing portfolio programs can benefit the college curriculum.
Research Questions

The purpose of this study was to have selected ESL students tell, in their own voices, their experiences with writing portfolios in college composition classes. Through the portrayal of students’ voices, it was anticipated that answers could be found for the following research questions:

1. What attitudes did selected ESL college students hold toward writing portfolios?
2. What were the characteristics of these ESL students’ portfolio reflective writings?
3. What features did selected ESL students tend to focus on in their portfolio reflective writings?
4. What attitudes did selected ESL students hold toward the portfolio reflective writing?
5. To what extent could selected ESL students describe their writing improvement in their portfolio reflective writings?
6. What aspects of these ESL students' previous educational backgrounds impacted their reported learning to write via portfolio instruction?
7. What programmatic and instructional implications does this study have for the use of writing portfolios in college ESL composition programs?
Basic Assumptions

In addition to the methodological assumption that the students and their instructors were honest during interviews, this study was also based on two theoretical assumptions:

1. It is assumed that teaching, learning, and assessment are not separate but are all interrelated in a college composition class.

2. It is assumed that ESL students bring to their American studies previous educational experiences that should be taken into consideration when these students enter American universities. To the extent that their previous study is tapped as part of their continuing study, innovations such as writing portfolios, may be received or rejected by these students.

Methodological framework

Leki (2001), in a study on L2 students’ experiences with writing classes, emphasized uncovering the “hidden transcripts” of L2 students’ experiences. Originally brought forward by James Scott (1990), the hidden transcript described the discourse that “takes place ‘offstage,’ and beyond direct observation by power holders” (Scott, 1990, p.4). Scott also insisted:

whatever form it assumes — offstage parody, dreams of violent revenge, millennial visions of a world turned upside down — this collective hidden transcript is essential to any dynamic view of power relations (p. 9).

For James Scott, the purpose of exploring the hidden transcripts was to reach dynamic views of any power relations. Scott’s discussion focused on power, the power holders, and the disempowered. Even though this study does not specifically focus on
investigating the power relations that occurred in the composition classrooms, the notion of “hidden transcripts” was borrowed to refer to ESL students’ voices in describing their opinions about and experiences with writing portfolios. These voices, in a teacher-centered classroom, are often ignored by those in power, the teachers. Even in a student-centered classroom, these voices could still be outside the reach of teachers. This could happen for various reasons. For example, some students might be concerned that honesty with their teachers might harm their grades, even though teachers encourage them to be express their opinions. Or, in certain cases, busy schedules simply make it impossible for students to engage in an open discussion with teachers on how they feel about portfolios.

In response, this study aimed at providing students an opportunity to tell, in their own voices, their experiences with and opinions about writing portfolios in the college composition courses in which they were enrolled. The descriptive nature of this study warranted a qualitative approach. Specifically, the design of the “case study” was adopted to investigate in detail the “hidden transcripts.” Seven students from different Asian countries were selected for study. The amount of time that each study student had been in the U.S. prior to this study varied. Some of the study students completed high school in the U.S.; some of the study students were exposed to portfolios in previous schooling. Some study students had neither previous U.S. schooling nor portfolio experience.

For this study, multiple types of data were collected throughout a sustained period of time: transcribed interviews with both college ESL students and their teachers; students’ portfolios along with their reflective writings; other types of documents that provided information about the contexts where the study was carried out (e.g., course
syllabi, course packets, teacher handouts, and online course and program information); and multiple observations by the researcher of classroom activities related to portfolios.

**Definitions of Key Terms**

The following operational definitions of terms are presented as they are to be understood in this study:

**College Composition Course**: College composition courses are designed to help college students meet requirements for the writing component of the General Education Curriculum (GEC). Some ESL students are placed into writing courses designed specifically for the ESL population before they can advance into the composition courses required of all college students. In this study, three different college composition courses were considered: ESL Composition 107, ESL Composition 108.01, and English 110. Courses 107 and 108.01 were offered by the School of Teaching and Learning in the College of Education. Course 110 was offered by the English Department.

EDU T&L 107 was designed to “acquaint students with the conventions of academic prose through a combined focus on academic reading and writing skills” and EDU T&L 108.01 was designed to “help students evaluate and represent the opinions and arguments of others and to respond to these in their own persuasive writing” (see Website of ESL Composition Program, The Ohio State University). English 110 “asks students to consider their own literacy practices and beliefs, to analyze what it means to be literate in
a university community, and to examine critically rhetorical strategies of public discourse” (see Website of First Year Writing Program, The Ohio State University).

**ESL student**: This term refers to students who learn English as a second language in a context where English is the predominant societal language (e.g., in a North American university). For the purpose of this study, ESL student refers to both immigrant students, i.e., those who immigrate to the United States at different stages of their lifetimes, and visa students who come to the U.S. on student visas.

**Portfolio**: Systematic collections of writings and work by both students and teachers. Portfolios can serve as the basis to examine effort, improvement, processes, and achievement as well as to meet the accountability demands usually achieved by more formal testing procedures (Tierney, Carter, & Desai, 1991).

The participants in this study were located in different classes taught by different instructors. Since teachers might interpret portfolios in different ways, the content and purpose of portfolios were not necessarily the same among different cases in this study. The usage here is referring to the collection of students’ work completed at certain stages of an academic quarter for a writing class as well as a reflective essay or introductory letter students composed.

In all cases, the portfolio accounted for a certain percentage of students’ final grades. There were two types of portfolios in this study: assessment portfolio and self-assessment portfolio. Assessment portfolio accounted for major percentages (such as
75% or 80%) of students’ final grades. Self-assessment portfolios contributed small percentages (less than 10%) of students’ final grades and were mostly used for student self-assessment.

**Reflection:** Reflection is regarded as one of the most important features distinguishing portfolios from simple work folders (Yancey, 1998). Reflection is defined as “the dialectical process by which we develop and achieve, first, specific goals for learning; second, strategies for reaching those goals; and third, means of determining whether or not we have met those goals or other goals” (Yancey, 1998, p.6). Reflection generally includes three processes: “projection, retrospection (or review), and revision” (Yancey, 1998, p.6). More specifically, for writing, the processes are:

1. “goal setting, revisiting, and refining
2. text-revisiting in the light of retrospection
3. the articulating of what learning has taken place, as embodied in various texts as well as in the process used by the writer” (Yancey, 1998, p.6).

In this study, reflection referred to both the *processes* by which ESL students knew what they accomplished, including how they articulated their accomplishments, and the *products* of those processes, that is, the reflective writings students completed at different points of an academic quarter. Depending on students’ cognitive development and teachers’ requests, the reflections that student participants engaged in were varied and did not necessarily involve all three processes listed above. Processes #2 and #3 were usually included.
Reflective writing: Reflective writing is an important component of portfolios. Reflective writing refers to the writing in which students reflect on their effort, progress, and their multiple written products. The participants in this study were located in different classes taught by different instructors. Reflective writing completed by students in EDU T&L 107 and 108.01 was in the form of an “Introductory Letter;” students in English 110 completed a “Reflective Essay.” In each case, the Introductory Letter or Reflective Essay was placed in the completed portfolio.

Limitations of the Study

Readers of this study should be aware that it is not appropriate to generalize the results of this study to ESL populations situated in other settings. This study was aimed at describing the interactions of college ESL students with writing portfolios in a single public U.S. university where an established ESL composition program has existed for more than ten years.

The descriptive nature of this study warranted a qualitative approach. Different programs and different teachers might interpret writing portfolio assessment in different ways and thereby focus on different aspects of portfolios in writing courses. Because this study only investigated seven Asian ESL students studying in one North American university, it is unsafe to assume that the same responses or reactions would come from other populations, such as ESL students at pre-college levels, ESL students from other countries or regions, ESL students enrolled in other universities, or English as a Foreign Language (EFL) students learning English in contexts where English is not the predominant societal language (e.g., in China, Japan, or Turkey).
There was no way to predict whether or how portfolios would be used in future courses the student participants would enroll in, therefore, it was impossible to follow-up on their future interactions with portfolio assessment and reflection.

A third limitation lies in the fact that some student participants had limited oral proficiency in English, which prevented them from expressing certain complicated thoughts or opinions in English during the interviews.

Summary

In summary, the purpose of this study was to explore how ESL students interacted with and responded to writing portfolios and reflective writing in a single college setting. To accomplish this task, writing portfolios were operationalized as purposeful collections of students’ written work completed at certain stages of an academic quarter. Reflective writing was an integral and important part of a portfolio. Reflective writing was specifically defined as an “Introductory Letter” or “Reflective Essay” that students were required to compose and place in their submitted portfolios. A qualitative research approach was employed for studying selected students’ experiences with writing portfolios in college composition courses. Specifically, this study followed a case study format in the portrayal of ESL students’ voices describing their experiences with writing portfolios.
CHAPTER 2
REVIEW OF LITERATURE

The review of literature was drawn from multiple areas believed to be relevant to this study. The review started briefly with indirect writing assessment, direct writing assessment, and the process approach for teaching writing. These literary areas provided a background for entering portfolios into the writing assessment arena. Subsequent consideration involved a review of portfolio theories, portfolio programs in practice, and problems with portfolio pedagogy. The topic of reflection was then specifically considered from multiple perspectives, including theory and praxis as well as problems. Finally, the distinctive features of L2 writing were reviewed for purposes of investigating and interpreting students’ reflective writings.

**Traditional Types of Writing Assessment**

For more than fifty years, the standardized multiple-choice test was the dominant testing pattern (Calfee & Freedman, 1996). In writing assessment, the prevailing formats were the multiple-choice test, impromptu writing samples, or a combination of the two (Camp, 1993). One contemporary example is TOEFL, the Test of English as a Foreign
Language, required of all international students who intend to study in North American universities. TOEFL has two parts: (1) a multiple-choice section that consists of Listening Comprehension, Vocabulary and Grammar, and Reading Comprehension; and (2) a Test of Written English (TWE) section in which test-takers are given thirty minutes to compose an essay on a randomly assigned topic.

**Indirect Writing Assessment**

The format of the multiple-choice test played a dominant role in measuring students' academic achievement or language proficiency. The test format was designed to provide the best match possible between test items and what was perceived to be the typical curriculum at a specified grade level. This test format offered the advantages of greater content coverage, efficient and economical scoring, and accessibility for statistical comparison of one test against another (Camp, 1993). Multiple-choice tests that were designed to assess learners' writing skills were actually testing a subset of skills that were assumed to constitute components of writing ability (Camp, 1993; Grabe & Kaplan, 1996; Tierney, Carter, & Desai, 1991). In most cases, this subset consisted of vocabulary, sentence grammar, and points of writing usage.

Some researchers contended that writing was not a set of discrete skills that could be assessed through the “atomized testing” that multiple-choice tests provided (Yancey & Huot, 1997); others contended that knowledge of sentence grammar did not, in and of itself, lead to the ability to write (Kaplan, 1987) and that standardized tests did not provide as valid a measure of writing ability as holistically scored writing samples did (Wauters, 1991). Because of factors such as cultural bias, norm-referenced tests of
literacy skills placed minority and ESL students at disadvantage (White, 1994b). In fact, educational researchers and practitioners long argued that student writers should demonstrate their knowledge and skills by creating their own texts, not by just filling-in blanks for choices provided or recognizing correctness or errors in provided texts —— as was required for multiple-choice tests of writing ability (Camp, 1993; Hamp-Lyons, 2001; Tierney, Carter, & Desai, 1991; Yancey & Huot, 1997). Some researchers also warned that over-reliance on multiple-choice tests could cause the curriculum to be narrowed and fragmented (Haertel & Calfee, 1983; Tierney, Carter, & Desai, 1991). A major concern was that teachers, under pressure to raise student scores on proficiency tests, might spend large amounts of class time drilling students in order to make them more comfortable with the test format, rather than the subject matter.

**Direct Writing Tests**

With direct writing tests that relied on impromptu writing samples, students could demonstrate both their subskills for writing (e.g., grammar and vocabulary) and their higher-order skills involved in writing, such as, “generating and developing ideas, organizing, establishing connections within the text, and finding a tone and rhetorical stance appropriate to the topic and audience” (Camp, 1993, p.49-50).

Beginning in the 1970s, writing assessment turned to the production of controlled student writing samples (Grabe & Kaplan, 1996). Graves (1992a) made the observation that twenty-seven out of fifty states in the U. S. used one-prompt writing tests, in which students were asked to write within a limited amount of time (e.g., forty minutes) on given prompts such as “something significant in your life” (Graves, 1992a).
Many commercial tests used writing prompts as well (Graves, 1992a). One of the largest direct measures of writing ability was the Test of Written English (TWE) developed by Educational Testing Service as part of the TOEFL test. TWE used a single-topic essay prompt on which test takers wrote for thirty minutes. In Britain, the International English Language Testing System (IELTS) examination required the production of a holistically scored writing sample. An earlier version of the examination requested a single essay; the revised version requested two essays (Grabe & Kaplan, 1996).

These types of tests came with disadvantages in that they were usually administered under timed conditions, and test takers were forced to respond to artificial topics that might not have been significant in their own lives. The consequential writing practices involved were often not similar to the usual practices of good writers (Graves, 1992a; Stygall, Black, Daiker, & Sommers, 1994a; Tierney, Carter, & Desai, 1991). Students were not given opportunities to read about the topics they were required to write about, discuss the topics with others, or give them some thinking space (Belanoff, 1994; Wauters, 1991). A rigid time frame for writing assessment was considered especially disadvantageous to minority students and ESL students (Wauters, 1991). Furthermore, one piece of writing in a single mode or for a single purpose was long known to be inefficient to represent the variety of modes and purposes for writing (Belanoff, 1994; Camp, 1993; Grabe & Kaplan, 1996; Hamp-Lyons, 1991b). Topics assigned by outsiders, such as testing agencies, could also be potentially biased against students from economic or ethnic backgrounds that differed from majority culture (Wauters, 1991).
Researchers discovered that a given student’s scores on such tests varied significantly, and seemed dependent on the topic, writer’s state of mind, particular situations, and other factors (Belanoff, 1994). So, whether one could produce an effective piece of writing was very much dependent on multiple factors. Simmons (1990) noticed that most students who scored the lowest on timed writing tasks did significantly better when classroom writing was graded. Hamp-Lyons (1997) conducted a small-scale study on non-mainstream writers’ ways of handling stresses of an essay test. She found that students’ expectations, strategies, and success/failure rates on the essay test differed among various cultural and educational backgrounds. In her study, minority writers were found to fail at a higher rate on essay tests.

Another issue that researchers drew attention to was the frequently missing link between reading and writing in the direct writing tests (Tierney, Carter, & Desai, 1991). Even though reading and writing were often taught together, the writing tests usually did not require students to read in conjunction with their writing. Instruction and assessment thus became two separate entities. Tierney et al. (1991) suggested that neither teachers nor students seemed to benefit much from such tests that were generally anxiety producing and relatively non-informative.

**Writing as a Process**

Camp (1993) argued that neither the multiple-choice test nor the impromptu writing sample provided a sound basis for obtaining information about metacognitive aspects of writing — information that was essential to instruction and to the writer’s development. Neither approach provided much information about the ways in which
writers monitored the processes and strategies they employed in writing. The impromptu writing sample test was suggested to only allow for “the most constrained processes and strategies” (Camp, 1993, p. 58). Three major reasons that led to this result were: (1) time limitation; (2) limited, if any, resources; and (3) test anxiety.

Starting in the 1970s, the writing-as-a-process movement shifted classroom focus from written products to writing processes for the purpose of improving writing instruction (Belenoff, 1994). Grabe and Kaplan (1996) claimed that the writing-as-a-process approach might help with the elimination of certain constraints that were believed to impede writing instructions. The list of constraints they summarized was as follows:

- the three- or five-paragraph model;
- simplistic assumptions about the organization and ordering of information;
- the typical one-draft writing assignment;
- the assumption that each student should be working alone, or only with instructor on summative feedback;
- reliance on grammar/usage handbooks and lectures;
- the linear composing model based on outlining, writing, and editing;
- imposed, artificial topics (p. 86).

This writing-as-a-process approach encouraged:

- self-discovery and authorial ‘voice’;
- meaningful writing on topics of importance (or at least of interest) to the writer;
- the need to plan out writing as a goal-oriented, contextualized activity;
- invention and pre-writing tasks, and multiple drafting with feedback between drafts;
- a variety of feedback options from real audiences, whether from peers, small groups, and/or the teacher, through conferencing, or through other formative evaluation;
- free writing and journal writing as alternative means of generating writing and developing written expression, overcoming writer’s block;
- content information and personal expression as more important than final product grammar and usage;
- the idea that writing is multiple recursive rather than linear as a process — tasks are repeated alternatively as often as necessary;
• students’ awareness of the writing process and of notions such as audience, voice, plans, etc. (Grabe and Kaplan, 1996, p. 87)

The process teaching approach emphasized the role of purpose, situation, audience, and feedback. Frequently, classes based in process theory involved students in recursive writing processes, which meant that “writers move from one stage to another, return to an earlier stage, jump to another, and so on, rather than moving systematically and sequentially through the stages” (Hamp-Lyons & Condon, 2000, p. 48).

As reported in Connolly (1986), many college writing programs shifted away from the “assignment-product-rating” cycle of writing instruction to the process approach, where teachers supported students through a multiple-draft revision of writing that was informed by reading, peer responses, and conferences. Researchers (Hamp-Lyons & Condon, 2000; Roemer, Schultz, & Durst, 1991) pointed out that portfolio assessment of writing originally grew out of the process writing movement. Roemer et al. (1991) argued that the widespread use of portfolio assessment “dovetails neatly with process theories about writing” (p.455).

The process approach, however, did not go unchallenged. Delpit (2001) pointed out that advocates of process approaches sometimes might have created situations in which students were held responsible for knowing rules about which they were not directly informed. As an example, she described the experience of a Black doctoral student who became infuriated with the approach that his professor used in dealing with a writing class. As reported by the student, the professor mainly had students write essays and then arranged them into groups to edit each others’ papers. It was not until after the author told him that his teacher was actually using the process method of teaching writing
that he responded: “Well, at least now I know that she thought she was doing something. I thought she was just a fool who couldn’t teach and who didn’t want to try” (Delpit, 2001, p. 90, emphasis in original).

Delpit (2001) also cited Siddle’s (1988) research which examined the results of various kinds of interventions in a primarily process-oriented class for Black students. Siddle’s research found that the intervention that produced the most productive changes in students’ writing was a “mini-lesson” that consisted of direct instruction about some standard writing conventions; the second highest number of changes in students’ writing were produced by student-centered conferences with the teacher; and the least number of changes in students’ writing were produced by peer conferences.

Although Delpit’s study was focused primarily on Black students, other researchers noted that learners from other cultural backgrounds might feel discomfort with peer conferences and reject it as a procedure of writing process (e.g., Nelson & Carson, 1998; Tsui & Ng, 2000). In East Asian countries, such as Korea, Japan, and China, social values were heavily influenced by Confucianism, which placed great emphasis on fixed hierarchical relationships in which respect was shown for age, seniority, and rank (Hyun, 2001; Nelson, 1995; Park & Cho, 1995; Yum, 1987). East Asian learners tended to show more respect towards teachers’ opinions. Among learners themselves, who were peers of the same level or “rank” in the same learning environment, East Asian learners tended to aim at establishing “warm feelings” for each other, avoiding conflict and confrontation, and trying not to elevate themselves above
others; they tended to show reservation in commenting on their peers’ work. Hu and Grove (1999) studied Chinese learners’ group work behavior. They found three general patterns, listed as follows:

1. Good learners did not want their fellow classmates to lose face by pointing out weaknesses in their work for fear of being looked upon as show-offs;
2. Learners who thought of themselves as not very capable also worried about losing face for fear of saying something stupid;
3. Average learners felt there was no point in speaking unless they had something really valuable to say.

**Portfolio Assessment**

**Theory**

A portfolio approach to writing assessment constituted a major recent direction in assessment, both in large-scale and classroom contexts (Grabe & Kaplan, 1996; Hamp-Lyons & Condon, 2000). The idea of portfolios was not new. Artists, photographers, and architects long used portfolios to showcase the range and quality of their work (Calfee & Freedman, 1996; Camp & Levine, 1991; Jordan & Purves, 1996; Tierney, Carter, & Desai, 1991). The use of portfolios as an assessment and instructional tool was widely investigated and adopted by a growing number of school districts and universities and colleges across the United States (Jordan & Purves, 1996; Smith, 1991; Tierney, Carter, & Desai, 1991; Yancey, 1992). The Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development identified portfolios as one of the three current major trends in curriculum
development (Roempler, 1995). According to Stygall, Black, Daiker, and Sommers (1994a), the American Association of Higher Education moved to publish a pamphlet that listed institutions where portfolios were used; the ERIC system Clearinghouse for High Education Assessment Instruments recognized portfolios as an independent assessment tool, and it also published a pamphlet listing articles that explored portfolios.

Portfolios emphasized process, multiple drafting, reflection, and collaborative learning. In addition, portfolio evaluation encouraged instructors to “become respondents to student writing rather than error-seeking proofreaders" (Burnham, 1986, p.126). Research on portfolios described many positive outcomes from using the portfolio process (Calfee & Perfumo, 1996; Paulson, Paulson, & Meyer, 1991; Tierney, Carter, & Desai, 1991). Portfolios allowed students to gain some control over the assessment process, to demonstrate more completely and in their own terms what they could do, and to set their own goals. Portfolios encouraged students to assess their own progress and development in relation to standards, to reflect on the work included in their portfolios, and to compare and contrast their earlier efforts with more recent work. Through reflective statements, students learned to evaluate their academic performance by explaining what was important about the evidence that was included and what it said about them as learners. Reflective statements also revealed changes in attitudes, feelings that student had about their ability to succeed in an academic environment, or goals for future development. As a result, portfolios encouraged students to take more responsibility for their own learning and to become autonomous learners. From students’
perspectives, opportunities for reflection, self-awareness, ownership, and self-assessment were important assets of portfolios (Murphy & Camp, 1996; Tierney, Carter, & Desai, 1991).

A related benefit often cited was that portfolios provided more opportunities for revision — one of the most important skills taught in writing classes (Hirvela & Pierson, 2000). White (1994a) suggested that one important reason why some students did not revise their writing was because they did not see anything wrong with their first drafts. A great strength of portfolios was that they could be used to teach students how to revise, because portfolios provided an environment that encouraged and facilitated students’ self-awareness and self-assessment of their products, processes, and strengths and weaknesses.

From teachers’ perspectives, portfolios provided multiple samples that made it possible to evaluate a learner’s development over a period of time. Portfolios also provided a basis for teachers to develop insights into strategies and processes that writers employed and to keep track of how writers developed awareness of these strategies and processes (Tierney, Carter, & Desai, 1991). Teachers were thus able to guide students to examine strengths and errors in their writing and to explore the causes.

In a portfolio classroom, the role that the teacher played was more of a facilitator than an absolute authority. Portfolios helped build learner-centered classrooms where students were not just waiting for teachers to give out orders but where they could take the initiative in enhancing learning. Portfolios could be used to serve the development of an increased sense of democracy, in that teachers and students worked together to read, respond, and understand student texts (Yancey, 1998). Teachers were also able to
encourage students to engage in portfolio discussion groups where students exchanged ideas and gave feedback to each other. Portfolios thus provided an environment to form a collaborative community of learners.

In addition, portfolios encouraged collaboration among teachers in that teachers could work in teams in evaluating students' work and exchange knowledge about their students. This was thought to be very significant in situations where teachers had ESL students from cultural traditions they were not very familiar with. When teachers discussed ESL writers in their own classes in general portfolio meetings and in meetings of their portfolio teams, they talked about various issues such as how significant ESL writers’ problems were in comparison to the level of their ideas, level of their ability to provide appropriate support for ideas, and so on. In most composition programs, where there were a small number of ESL students and maybe only a few ESL-trained teachers, it was important that teachers shared skills and knowledge with each other (Hamp-Lyons, 1996).

Portfolios brought teaching, learning, and assessment together as mutually supportive activities (Belanoff, 1994; Tierney, Carter, & Desai, 1991; White, 1994a), as opposed to traditional standardized testing that oftentimes caused the isolation of teaching and learning from curriculum and assessment.

Starting from the mid-1960s, portfolios were used to assess student writing in composition classes at different levels, from elementary schools to colleges and universities, and for different purposes, such as classroom assessment or large-scale assessment (Fulwiler & Young, 1997). The collecting of multiple pieces of writing in different genres into portfolios for evaluation happened for more reasons than the
questioning of objective standards used for multiple-choice tests that were supposed to test students’ writing skills (Belanoff, 1994). With increasing numbers of ESL students enrolled in both ESL and regular classes, school populations in the U.S. cut across language lines. This phenomenon was more obvious in colleges and universities with ever-increasing numbers of students coming from countries other than America. Portfolios, that allowed multiple samples and focused on both processes and products, were considered to be better at accommodating this diversity in the student population. In addition, they provided a site for students to demonstrate their strengths instead of just weaknesses that might be detected by multiple-choice tests or one-prompt, timed writing tests (Hamp-Lyons, 1991a; Hamp-Lyons & Condon, 2000). Specifically, Hamp-Lyons and Condon (2000) pointed out that a portfolio-based assessment would be less intimidating than the timed writing tests because the students would have more freedom to choose the subjects they wrote about and the condition under which they wrote. Koelsch & Trumbull (1996) studied a cross-culture portfolio project that linked Navajo student culture with district and state education accountability requirements. They suggested that portfolios could be especially appealing for use with "ethnolinguistically non-dominant" students.

ESL students also benefited from the fact that portfolios emphasized reflection and self-assessment, because reflection and self-assessment would help learners develop awareness about the processes and strategies they employed in their writing. This aspect was especially important for ESL students who were not aware of the standard discourse framework and rhetorical conventions used in the U.S. academic community. In addition,
Hamp-Lyons (1996) also pointed out that with portfolios, L2 writers were not at disadvantage owing to time constraints or weakness in one particular aspect such as limited vocabulary.

Praxis

There was a lot of research conducted on writing portfolio programs. Even though most of the research did not focus on ESL writers, and a few projects listed here were not situated in the college context, it was still worthwhile to review some of them because they had significant implications for college composition portfolio programs that involved ESL learners.

Elbow and Belanoff (1986) began using portfolios in 1984 as a method of assessment for the required English Freshman composition class at the State University of New York at Stony Brook. Students created portfolios with samples of their writing to be evaluated at the end of the course. Samples included three revised pieces and one in-class piece. For each piece of writing, students were required to have an introductory cover sheet that explained what they wanted to accomplish and described their writing processes. The researchers argued that the portfolio system appropriately reflected the complexities of the writing process: planning, discussion with teachers and peers, revising, and copyediting. As reported by these two researchers, students realized that thinking and writing were improved through conversation with teacher and peers; students’ audience awareness was also developed to a higher level in that they realized that writing was usually for more than one reader and often for readers who did not know them personally. Elbow and Belanoff (1986) argued that this portfolio project featured a
significant departure from simple writing folders in multiple aspects. First, close
collaboration between students and their instructors throughout the development of
portfolios led to ongoing evaluation and instruction, which focused on individual
strengths and needs and facilitated student growth over time. Second, writing assessment
was not based on a single piece of writing completed under constrained testing situations.
Finally, the instructional setting encouraged student reflection on their learning.

A number of other universities developed portfolio assessment programs,
including City University of New York, University of Michigan, Northern Arizona
University, University of Louisville, and Purdue University. Most of these programs were
similar to the portfolio program developed at State University of New York in that they
required collections of different kinds of writing and provided a comprehensive record of
the writing a student did in a particular class. The multiple writing samples provided a
range of rhetorical and linguistic tasks to be assessed, which reduced the possibility of
showing favor for or bias against certain students. The multiple samples also
demonstrated students’ growth over a specific period. Another similarity was that most of
these writing portfolios encouraged student learning by asking them to reflect on what
they did and what they learned.

The Miami University (of Ohio) Writing Portfolio program, started in 1990,
encouraged each new student to submit a collection of their best high school writing in
order to earn college credit and advanced placement in composition (Daiker, Sommers, &
Stygall, 1996). Students were asked to place four pieces of writing into their portfolios: a
reflective letter; a story or a description; an explanatory, exploratory, or persuasive essay;
and a response to a written text. One hope for this portfolio program was focused on the idea of assessment equity. That is, assessment that would allow all students the greatest range and opportunity for the best possible performance in writing.

Arts PROPEL was a Rockefeller-funded project aimed at developing assessment related to instruction in music, visual arts, and imaginative writing in Grades 6 to 12 in the Pittsburgh public schools (Camp & Levine, 1991). Students were required to keep writing folders, called “process-folios,” to display their work at various stages of completion and to show evidence of the processes and tools employed in their creation (e.g., outlines, reference lists, early drafts, final drafts, and written reflection on the process). The end-of-course portfolio design also characterized the work as “in progress” (Murphy & Underwood, 2001, p. 286) by asking students to identify one piece they were not satisfied with and explain how they might improve it.

Working with researchers from the Educational Testing Service, teachers and researchers from the New York City Writing Project established a model of portfolio assessment that aimed at building on students’ strengths rather than focusing on their weaknesses. The underlying principles of this model fell into four categories: “using writing to find meaning, using writing to communicate, being aware of the processes one uses to write, and creating a context for learning through writing” (Camp & Levine, 1991, p. 202).

Grusko (1998) reported that, in her portfolio class (which was part of the Hudson Valley Portfolio Assessment Project), all students that were involved in the “real portfolio culture” began to realize that learning was a journey, and that making mistakes was sometimes unavoidable. Grusko was initially worried that, with portfolio projects,
students were writing fewer new essays since they spent much of their time and effort on
multiple revisions. Later, she realized that “writing revisions is more efficacious than
simply creating new writings” (p. 108).

Song and August (2002) conducted a quantitative study that compared the
performance of two groups of ESL students in ENG 22, a second semester composition
course in Kingsborough Community College, City University of New York. Both groups
had been enrolled in ENG C2, a compensatory version of Freshman English for students
whose scores were one level below passing on the City University of New York Writing
Assessment Test (WAT). At the end of ENG C2, one group was only assessed with the
WAT while the other group was assessed with both portfolios and the WAT. Comparable
percentages of students in both groups passed the WAT at the end of ENG C2. Students
from the portfolio group, with passing portfolios, were allowed to advance into ENG 22
regardless of their performance on WAT while students in the non-portfolio group
advanced only if they passed the WAT. It was found that the portfolio group was twice as
likely to pass into ENG 22 from ENG C2 than the non-portfolio group. At the end of
ENG 22, the pass rate and grade distribution for the two groups were nearly identical.
The study concluded that the portfolio approach seemed an appropriate alternative
assessment for ESL students because it was able to identify more than twice the number
of ESL students who later proved successful in the next English course. It was also found
that students and teachers held positive views about portfolio assessment.

Hamp-Lyons (1996) reported that after the introduction of portfolios into writing
assessment at the University of Michigan, more ESL students tested out of “Practicum”
(the lowest-level mainstream writing class) than had been the case when the exit
assessment used a timed essay. She suggested two reasons for this: (1) students had more time to revise; (2) students were encouraged to make efforts to improve their ideas, content, text structure, and so on, instead of just focusing on their language problems. Portfolio assessment seemed to provide an appropriate alternative for evaluating ESL students’ writing in this context as well.

In spite of the positive results produced by portfolio assessment in eliminating bias in some contexts, researchers (e.g., Linn, Baker, & Dunbar, 1991) cautioned against the tendency of thinking of certain types of assessment as contributing to the complete elimination of bias or unfairness in assessment. Linn, Baker, and Dunbar (1991) argued that, in addition to unfair assessment, gaps in performance among different groups of students could also be caused by other factors attributable to familiarity, exposure, and motivation. This assertion was also applicable to the use of portfolios for writing assessment in different contexts.

Problems

After reviewing the literature, one could be tempted into elaborating the advantages of portfolio assessment over traditional approaches of writing assessment. Reported studies on the use of portfolios for L1 writing assessment and L2 writing assessment supported this temptation. Nevertheless, several problems surrounding portfolio assessment were also reported.

Grade. In using portfolios, one of the most frequent problems instructors confronted was the difficulty many students had in adjusting to an ungraded system (Weiser, 1992). The evaluation systems with which students were most familiar placed great emphasis on
grades. Students had long been accustomed to having grades to “motivate, threaten, or reassure them” (Weiser, 1992, p. 97). Many students felt lost or insecure about their performance if their work was not graded. This was true of native English speaking writers as well as ESL writers that came from other cultures —— probably to a greater extent for ESL writers. Two reasons might have explained ESL writers’ discomfort when no grades were provided for their work. First, the anxiety brought about by writing in a second language might have made the grades seem more necessary in terms of providing reassurance. Second, especially for ESL students who came from some Asian countries (e.g., China and Korea), where there was intense competition for educational or job opportunities, grades seemed to be a more objective, less controversial, and more economical index for the gate-keeping function (Hu & Grove, 1999; Hyun, 2001). Students who grew up in such grade-oriented cultures were likely to exhibit grade dependency, and to suffer anxiety when work was ungraded.

To help students handle grade anxiety in a portfolio classroom, Weiser (1992) had three recommendations: (1) giving students clear and specific feedback on their papers, (2) giving a tentative grade to one paper of the student’s choice, and (3) holding midterm conferences with individual students to talk about performance and progress and giving a tentative grade. Even though these strategies were not designed specifically for ESL students, they had important implications for teachers working with ESL students in a portfolio context.

Another potential problem was related to the importance of each kind of writing and the fairness of basing grades on a selection that did not represent the range of abilities students were expected to develop (Weiser, 1992). At Purdue University, one group of
freshman composition instructors tried to solve this problem by assigning a grade to student work in each discourse type, making students’ final grades a composite of all grades students had received (Weiser, 1992).

**Portfolio vs. ESL learner expectations.** There might have been some potential conflicts between what portfolio assessment approaches emphasized and what ESL learners’ cultural traditions valued. As mentioned earlier, a mismatch could have existed between certain aspects that the process approach advocated and some cultural values that dominated Asian countries such as China, Japan, and Korea (Hyun, 2001; Park & Cho, 1995; Yum, 1987). It was found that under the influence of Confucianism, which placed great emphasis on fixed hierarchical relationships, the teacher was an authority figure; the teacher-student relationship was much more hierarchical than in American society (Nelson, 1995). It followed then, that students of Chinese, Japanese and Korean origin might have been more comfortable with a teacher-centered approach, where they knew clearly what was expected of them by the teachers; they might not have been accustomed to the concepts of learner ownership and self-assessment, emphasized by portfolios. Accustomed to having teachers decide the goals and then assess their progress, these students might have been feeling lost or confused when told to set their own goals and self-assess achievement and progress.

Graves (1992b) pointed out that some teachers tended to lose sight of the importance of student self-evaluation; instead they evaluated students’ portfolios and, at the same time, talked about students’ inability to judge and improve their own work. Such teachers chose what work students were supposed to include in their portfolios.
Since ESL students might not have been used to self-assessment, and they were still in the process of learning a new language to express themselves, ESL teachers might have had an even stronger tendency to take over all of the responsibilities. Thus students might have had little opportunity or motivation to engage in active thinking and evaluation of their own work. When students did have the right to make their own selections, the reasons that they provided for their decisions often seemed to lack deep and careful thinking (Graves 1992b). Graves (1992b) suggested that teachers should encourage public sharing among students, which could help students develop awareness of the elements that made up good writing. By sharing their work and their thoughts with their peers, students could gain insights into themselves and their learning that they would not have explored in isolation. Many researchers and classroom practitioners talked about the importance of peer group responses in writing, e.g., Porter and Cleland (1995), Grabe and Kaplan (1996). Portfolio projects often emphasized peer responses too (e.g., Elbow & Belanoff, 1986; Tierney, Carter, & Desai, 1991). However, there was no consensus among researchers as to whether ESL students could equally benefit from peer response activities in writing (Nelson & Carson, 1998; Tsui & Ng, 2000).

Portfolio assessments could have represented different social and cultural values to learners from countries such as China (Fu, 2000). Fu described the Chinese educational system as stressing “nothing but standardized tests” (p. 105). She argued that in China everything was standardized: the textbooks, the teaching approaches, the curricula for every grade level, and the opinions that teachers were supposed to pass on to their students. Memorizing the book knowledge was the key to learning every subject. Uniformity was highly stressed in Chinese culture. According to Fu (2000), to conform to
a standard was the way that Chinese people lived. The same observation was also made about Japanese and Korean societies (Hyun, 2001; Nelson, 1995; Yum, 1987; Tsujimura, 1987).

In addition to these potential conflicts between what portfolios emphasized and the social and cultural traditions held by certain ESL students, there were other difficulties with portfolio implementations for teaching and assessment. For some students, it took time to become familiar and then comfortable with a new concept. Portfolios, being a comparatively newer concept in the assessment arena, might have seemed confusing to some students, especially those ESL students who had never encountered portfolios prior to enrolling in American universities. Jacobson, Sleicher, and Maureen (1999) noticed that some students were frustrated with the Intercultural Competence Portfolio Assessment that was used in the Iowa Intensive English Program at the University of Iowa. One international student, Bob, expressed the following concern:

When I do this portfolio, I still hesitate about what the meaning of portfolio, so I’m not sure what I do, what I presented at the time, is really portfolio. I really not sure what’s context of portfolio, what’s the meaning of the word portfolio, so I just try (p. 487).

To ESL students who were overwhelmed with new standards and adapting to a new language in a new environment, innovations such as portfolios could have been an additional burden that produced anxiety and frustration, rather than being the valuable learning tool they were designed to be.

As reported in Hamp-Lyons and Condon (2000), a study by Hamp-Lyons (1995) found that some ESL writers were not particularly motivated and did not take advantage
of the opportunities brought by a portfolio-based assessment. Some of them did not make efforts to improve their written products. Some submitted portfolios did not even conform to the requirements of the portfolio. In addition, it was found that some portfolio readers tended to “make the same kinds of allowances for nonnative writers that some essay reader have been found to make” (Hamp-Lyons & Condon, 2000, p. 62).

As pointed out earlier by Linn, Baker, and Dunbar (1991), students’ performance in assessment could be influenced by factors such as familiarity, exposure, and motivation. Little research was found that investigated how these factors might have influenced ESL students’ performance in and attitudes toward writing portfolios.

**Summary**

Even though the multiple uses of portfolios for writing instruction and assessment were explored and investigated to a great extent, there was very little research available on how ESL students responded to writing portfolios (Hamp-Lyons, 1996). It was argued that portfolios could be especially suitable for use with ESL students (e.g., Hamp-Lyons, 1996; Murphy, 1994). This argument was based on the belief that portfolios provided a broader measure of what students could do. In addition, because portfolios eliminated time pressures in the writing context, students could take the time to get tutorial help with problems of expression as well as finding and correcting their language errors. These strategies seemed to be available to writers in normal writing situations, but were denied in traditional examination situations. In this sense, portfolio assessment was thought to be able to take ESL students out of a disadvantageous position created by timed writing
tests. However, factors like motivation and familiarity and certain cultural values, such as the hierarchical teacher-student relationship, might have created difficulties for ESL learners to adapt to writing portfolios.

**Reflection**

**Theory**

One common feature of college writing portfolios was that students were asked to reflect on their portfolios, their writing processes or history, or themselves as writers (Daiker, Sommers, & Stygall, 1996). Educational researchers further asserted the significance of reflection to learning (e.g., Conway, 1994; Johnston, 1983; Yancey, 1996; Yancey, 1998).

Dewey (1910) defined reflective thought as “active, persistent, and careful consideration of any belief or supposed form of knowledge in the light of the grounds that support it, and the further conclusions to which it tends” (p. 6). Reflective thought was “a conscious and voluntary effort to establish belief upon a firm basis of reasons” (p. 6). He argued that reflective thinking involved two stages: “(1) a state of perplexity, hesitation, doubt; and (2) an act of search or investigation directed toward bringing to light further facts which serve to corroborate or to nullify the suggested belief” (p. 9).

Modern researchers perceived reflection from varied perspectives. As summarized by Yancey (1996), interpretations of reflection included: revision of one’s work or goals (Camp, 1993); self-assessment (Conway, 1994); analysis of learning that took place in and beyond the writing class (Paulson, Paulson, & Meyer, 1991); goal-setting that provided a baseline against which development could be evaluated (Tierney,
Carter, & Desai, 1991); or all of these things together (Tierney, Carter, & Desai, 1991). All of these belonged to metacognitive strategies that included three strategy sets: “Centering Your Learning, Arranging and Planning Your Learning, and Evaluating Your Learning” (Oxford, 1990).

Oxford (1990) pointed out that for second language learners, it was very important to be able to consciously use metacognitive strategies. It could help L2 learners regain focus amidst their confusion caused by unfamiliar vocabulary, a new approach of instruction or assessment, or different writing systems. L2 learners sometimes had problems in monitoring their errors. They could fail to realize that errors were sometimes unavoidable; so they became over-anxious and forgot that errors were not necessarily bad if they could learn from errors and improve. Students also had difficulty in judging their own proficiency or pinpointing their strengths and weaknesses. This problem could have been made worse by the prevalent academic grading system since it generally rewarded discrete-point rule-learning rather than communicative competence. Consciously employing metacognitive strategies of self-monitoring and self-evaluating could have helped ameliorate these problems. However, even though metacognitive strategies were important, learners mostly used them sporadically and without much sense of their importance. According to Oxford (1990), several studies of second and foreign language learners reported that these students were often engaged in little self-evaluation or self-monitoring. Portfolios provided L2 learners with valuable opportunities of self-assessment and reflection, which potentially led them into the habit of using metacognitive strategies and gradually developing awareness of these strategies.
Researchers contended that it was in part through reflection that folders or collections were transformed into portfolios (D’Aoust, 1992; Grusko, 1998; Hamp-Lyons & Condon, 2000; Yancey, 1996). Reflection was also thought to increase the validity of portfolio assessment — that is, the extent that the assessment measured what it purported to measure — because it required students to narrate, analyze, and evaluate their own learning and their own texts (Yancey, 1996). In this way, portfolios connected assessment with learning (Yancey, 1996; Yancey, 1998).

Many researchers or classroom practitioners considered students’ reflective writings as the most significant entries in writing portfolios (e.g., Camp & Levine, 1991; Weinbaum, 1991), because composing meaningful reflective essays or letters forced students to take responsibility for their writing (Conway, 1994). Reflection required students to portray a conscious awareness of what they did and did not do in their papers (Camp & Levine, 1991). Reflection made visible the learning process that was otherwise hidden, even from the student writers themselves. Through reflection on individual pieces of writing and/or on changes observable over time, teachers and students were able to discover how students negotiated their way through the process of creating texts, what they saw as their own purpose in a piece of writing, and how they looked at their work and at themselves as writers. Reflection not only required looking backward, it also required looking forward; for example, students could be asked to set new goals in light of past achievements. Based on their experiences of reading and responding to students’ reflections, Porter and Cleland (1995) summarized a list of what reflection allowed their students to do:
• examine their learning process.
• take responsibility for their own learning.
• see “gaps” in their learning.
• determine strategies that support learning.
• celebrate risk-taking and inquiry.
• set goals for future experiences.
• see changes and development over time. (p. 36)

In addition to providing learners with insights into their learning processes, students’ written reflections also had the potential of benefiting the evaluation process. Tsang (1989) pointed out that evaluators might make decisions that were culturally biased without being aware of how their backgrounds determined their judgments. From reading students’ reflections on their processes and strategies, teachers or evaluators were able to develop more insights into students’ writing processes and probably into the cultural factors that were working to make a difference, so that they could have the potential of becoming more aware of not only the students’ cultural preferences but also their own. This increased awareness would help increase the fairness of the evaluation processes.

**Praxis**

As portfolio programs were introduced into large numbers of classrooms and schools, they varied in emphasis and focus with different student populations, programs of instruction, and teachers’ preferences. Some approaches emphasized reflection more
than others did. The activities used to stimulate reflection also differed from one to another. The next section would illustrate how different portfolio programs incorporated the reflection component into students’ learning.

**Ohio State University and St. John’s University ESL Writing Portfolios.** In the writing portfolio pedagogy employed in the ESL composition program for undergraduate students at The Ohio State University and St. John’s University, what was central was the portfolio cover letter that students wrote to their instructors (Hirvela & Pierson, 2000). Students, through explaining their selected samples in their portfolio cover letters, reflected on their efforts and progress as second language writers. Reflection provided students with “significant self-awareness and knowledge of their learning” (Hirvela & Pierson, 2000, p. 123). The researchers noticed that, in the beginning, some students were puzzled about the sample selection and the cover letters; but, overall, based on the analysis of students’ cover letters, the researchers concluded that the cover letter strategy worked well. Based on their four-year experience using portfolios in their ESL writing programs, the researchers concluded that students seemed to have learned a lot from the “freedom given to them and have acquired personal insight about how they write and under what conditions they do their best work” (Hirvela & Pierson, 2000, p. 124). In addition, students were also able to “depart on a positive note after reflecting on and describing their learning and their achievements” (Hirvela & Pierson, 2000, p. 125).

**Arts PROPEL Program.** The Arts PROPEL program was a portfolio program built around reflection. Both teachers and researchers involved in this project had noticed that the reflective activities helped students develop awareness of strategies and processes
they had used in writing. At the same time, they had also realized that students needed help to engage in authentic reflection that could help them become autonomous learners (Camp & Levine, 1991).

As reported in Camp and Levine (1991), the first step that teachers took was to engage students in simple forms of reflection while providing support and building a climate of trust. Students started with oral reflection when teachers provided modeling questions that student writers and their peer listeners could ask of one another as well as possible responses that each student might give in return. When students began to internalize a focus on strengths and goals, rather than just errors and correctness, they were deemed ready for more demanding forms of reflection. Classroom interactions and students’ responses to peer and teacher comments were also indicators of students’ readiness to move to the next level of reflection — written reflection in which students answered two or three evaluative questions about one piece of writing. This practice provided students with opportunities to, “internalize the practice of reflection and to create a frame of reference for the writing when they look back at it later in the year” (p. 67). Following this step, the students began their first written perceptions of themselves as writers, which stimulated the students to develop insight into their own use of processes and strategies for writing and awareness about both their strengths and weaknesses.

When students looked back on their work and articulated what they saw and what they valued, they provided a strong basis for their own learning, for richer response to their peers’ writing, and for comparisons with their peers that led to expanded awareness of strategies for writing and criteria for evaluating writing. Students’ reflections were
reported to not only have provided their teachers with information that could direct instruction, but also have resulted in much benefit to their own learning (e.g., Camp & Levine, 1991; Porter & Cleland, 1995).

**New York Writing Project.** Researchers from the New York Writing Project agreed on one point: the reflective student letters were the most significant entries in many of the portfolios. The process of reflecting helped students expand and explore their horizons. It was also significant for teachers since they allowed teachers to see beyond the printed pages of students’ work (Camp & Levine, 1991). It was also argued that reflection could be especially critical for young adolescents, who were attempting to make sense of the world and their places in it, to understand themselves and the nature of their relationship with others, and to clarify values and establish habits of mind.

In similar ways, reflection might also turn out valuable for ESL learners. Reflection might help ESL learners establish their identities with unique cultural backgrounds and different learning styles and strategies. In this sense, their first language and culture might have had the chance to become an asset instead of a burden to their second language writing. However, literature review revealed little research in this aspect.

**Miami University (Ohio) Portfolio Program.** In the Miami University Writing Portfolio program, students’ portfolios began with a portfolio letter. Program designers made the following request with regard to this letter:

> This letter, addressed to Miami University writing teachers, introduces you and your portfolio. It may describe the process used in creating any one portfolio piece, discuss important pieces in creating the portfolio, explain the place of writing in your life, chronicle your development as a writer, assess the strengths and weaknesses of your writing, or combine
these approaches. Your letter should provide readers with a clearer understanding of who you are as a writer and a person. (Sommers, Black, Daiker, & Stygall, 1993, p.11)

Student writers had the freedom to focus on different aspects of their writing: processes, choices in their portfolio selections, strengths and weaknesses, most successful and least successful pieces, development as writers or the place of writing in their life, and writing goals for the future. Researchers at Miami University believed that by reflecting on various aspects of writing, students would be stimulated into serious consideration about both the ways they had grown and the reasons for the growth.

In the submitted portfolios, the common feature of reflective writings was found to be self-assessment. Students, using critical thinking skills, examined their writing products, processes, and history to find patterns of development and success.

The researchers also noticed some gender differences by looking at selected reflective letters. Two findings they had were: (1) women’s responses tended to be more positive than men’s towards portfolio assessment, because portfolios provided a personal and holistic setting for writing; (2) women showed more interest in the opportunity for writing a reflective letter, because it could give readers a clearer understanding of who they were as writers and as persons.

**A summary of reflective questions.** Sunstein and Cheville (Sunstein, 2000) conducted a survey in 1996 and came up with a list of questions that teachers used to help students achieve a “reflective stance” in a portfolio classroom. These questions were especially helpful to guide students’ reflections, especially for students who had not had much practice in reflection in previous schooling. These questions demonstrated different focuses or aims:
• Generalizing about learning over time:

1. What do you know that you didn’t know before?
2. What can you do that you couldn’t do before?
3. What do you do that you couldn’t do before?
   
   Alan Purves, SUNY Albany

1. How are your writing and your composing process different now than they were when you began compiling this portfolio?
2. Which class activities (journal writing, peer response groups, revision, etc.) have affected your writing and your composing process this semester, and what effects have they had?
   
   Jeff Sommers, Miami University of Ohio

• Thoughtful analysis of the actual pieces collected into the portfolio:

1. If you were to choose one piece of work that represents your best effort, what would you choose?
2. Why is it a significant effort?
3. When you revise your work, what lenses do you use to determine what to change?
   
   Sally Hampton, New Standards Managing Director, 1992-1995 ELA Portfolio Project

1. Why have you chosen these specific pieces for your portfolio?
2. What makes these pieces interesting to you?
3. What surprises you about your work?
4. What would you do differently?
   
   Brian Huot, University of Louisville

1. What do you want people to learn about you from reading your portfolio?
2. Show me where or how they would learn those things from looking at your work.
3. What’s something that you’ve been working to improve? Trace your growth in that area through the collection of your work.
   
   Eunice Greer, Harvard PACE

• Making personal connections between themselves, their understanding of curriculum standards, and the artifacts they’ve collected:

1. How many pieces of writing did you finish this semester? What genres are represented among these pieces?
2. What’s the most important or useful information about conventions of written English you’ve learned this semester?
3. What will you try to do in your writing in the future?
   
   Nancie Atwell, Center for Teaching and Learning, Edgecomb, Maine

1. After looking over all your artifacts, what is missing?
2. What connections exist between your artifacts in your portfolios? Explain the connections.
   
   Lora Wolff, Keokuk High School, Iowa
• Viewing and articulating their work in relationship to a set of standards:

What should I know as a reader about this piece that will help me understand your thinking and work? What would you do next to this piece to have it “tell your story” even more clearly?

Linda Carstens, San Diego Unified School Dist.

If you are reflecting for personal reasons about your work, do you have a life or a school career pattern into which these reflections fit? If you are trying to show someone else something about your reflections, how will you make these reflections visible and meaningful for the other person?

Miles Myers, executive director, NCTE

What do you want your work to say (to others) about you? What does your work say about you? What are the differences?

Sara Jordan, SUNY Albany

What things can you show me about your learning that I would otherwise not know about?

Tom Romano, Miami University of Ohio

• Look over the curriculum guidelines for all students at your “level”. Find places in your portfolios that illustrates that you’ve accomplished each guideline. Mark them with Post-it Notes, and then explain how they all work together.

• How do the contents of your portfolios meet the six objectives for this course?

Bonnie Sunstein, University of Iowa

(Sunstein, 2000)

Very little research was found, however, on how to use reflective questions to guide ESL students’ reflection about their writing.

**Problems**

Dewey argued (1910) that education should direct students’ language use, both oral and written, so that students could learn to use language as a tool for obtaining knowledge and developing reflection. He noted that some school practices tended to interfere harmfully with students’ development of systematic reflection by
“monopolizing continued discourse” (p. 185). He pointed out that many instructors would be surprised to realize the amount of time they had talked as compared with any student. Dewey contended:

Insistence upon avoiding error instead of attaining power tends also to interruption of continuous discourse and thought. Children who begin with something to say and with intellectual eagerness to say it are sometimes made so conscious of minor errors in substance and form that the energy that should go into constructive thinking is diverted into anxiety not to make mistakes, and even in extreme cases, into passive quiescence as the best method of minimizing error. This tendency is especially marked in connection with the writing of compositions, essays, and themes (p.186).

Teachers’ over-emphasis on error-avoidance might have discouraged students from taking initiatives in learning. This phenomenon could have been especially true in ESL classrooms, where students might consider teachers as the only authority and only teachers’ words as valid and, thus, dared not delve into any self-assessment or reflection for which they should make use of their own judgment.

Dewey made this observation almost one century ago. However, even one-hundred years later, these problems still existed in some schools where the dominant practice was that teachers made judgments about students’ work. This practice could “discourage[s] reflection and experimentation, in fact learning itself” (Johnston, 1987, p. 127). Camp (1992) pointed out that when teachers were responding to students’ work, students were led to focus on what the teachers saw and valued rather than what they themselves saw and valued. In other words, when students were supposed to reflect on the experiences of writing and articulate what they had learned from it, teachers were taking the responsibility away from them.
“Faked” reflection. Reflection was not a skill that students gained automatically. It had to be learned and fostered by way of questions (Yancey, 1996). Conscious reflection was developmental. It took time, a lot of practice on the part of students, and support from the classroom teachers and the academic environment. However, with students’ tendency to meet the external standards imposed by the teachers or systems that traditionally emphasized grades, reflection could become perfunctory and unauthentic and did not really help students understand the processes that they had gone through. Classroom teachers noticed that students tended to put some self-serving comments in their reflection for the purpose of obtaining good grades (Murphy & Camp, 1996).

Potts (1996) recorded the following dialogue between Stephanie, a high school sophomore, and researcher Joe Potts:

Joe: If a person were to pick up your portfolio, and she toured it like we just did, what would she see?
Stephanie: She would see part of me. She would see me in my introduction and in my work, because that is really me in my work, but then, if she looked at my reflective analysis, she would see somebody who is fake, because I am writing fake in my reflective analysis.
Joe: You are writing fake?
Stephanie: Yes, I am not writing what I really mean because if I put in what I really mean, I wouldn’t get a good grade (Potts, 1996, p.232).

Stephanie considered her writing as “real” but her reflective analysis as just “fake.” She understood how she would be assessed. Therefore, in her reflective analysis, she wrote what the teacher expected to see. She might get a good grade by writing “fake” reflections that sounded more appealing to her teacher. However, did this “faked” reflection really help her to understand her own process, accomplishments, and thus
stimulate further learning? Did this kind of reflection help her to become a responsible and autonomous learner? The answers to these questions were probably, “No.”

Sunstein (2000) argued that frequently “reflection rubs against our learned behaviors for ‘success’ in school” (p. 8). As a result of years of schooling, where students were assessed by teachers and outside experts, students tended not to think of themselves as being capable of quality analysis of their own work. Instead, the best assessment always came from the “other.” The “forced” reflection thus became more of an attempt to meet the external standard rather than a legitimate effort to enhance learning. In addition to Potts (1996) and Sunstein (2000), other researchers (e.g., Conway, 1994; Schuster, 1994) also suggested that some students might write in their reflective writing what teachers or other portfolio readers expected to see.

If an American high school girl like Stephanie wrote fake reflections for the purpose of getting a good grade, what would ESL students do in similar situations? There was no ready answer for this question in the literature. Nelson (1995) argued that reflectivity was an important characteristic of Japanese learning. Reflectivity, “contrasted with impulsivity, refers to taking one’s time to think something over, to not to rush into something” (Nelson, 1995, p.11). However, reflectivity was not exactly the same as reflection. Therefore, it was unsafe to conclude that reflectivity naturally led to capability of meaningful reflection.

Unrealistic expectation. It was suggested that first-year college students frequently just began to learn to develop, “the kind of authority that enables them to ‘perform’ comfortably in front of audiences from the academic community” (Conway, 1994, p. 89). Developing this kind of “authority” took time. How much time it took varied from person
to person. Yancey (1998) pointed out that students differed in terms of their abilities to understand their own writing processes and strategies and to articulate about them: some might have been very good at both; others might have had the knowledge but lacked the ability to articulate it; still others might not have understood their own work very well. Therefore, it seemed “problematic for teachers to scrutinize students’ reflective letters for evidence of the kind of sophistication and self-awareness expected of experienced writers” (Conway, 1994, p.89).

Reflection on one’s own writing could have been an even greater challenge for ESL learners. First, there was the difficulty in understanding writing processes and developing awareness of the metacognitive strategies that were in use, whether for ESL students or native English-speaking students. In addition, articulating about the processes and strategies might require vocabulary which students might not have been exposed to in their previous learning and, thus, not have been familiar with.

Conway (1994), based on her own teaching experiences with portfolios and reflective writings, suggested giving students frequent opportunities for self-assessment of progress throughout the semester instead of being limited to the times when portfolios were completed and submitted to the teacher. She suggested that teachers should encourage students to compare different drafts of their work. In addition, Conway also argued that, “reflective writing is ethical only if it exists as an ongoing component of a course and if the teacher of that course openly discusses his or her reactions to the reflections with students” (p. 92).

It was necessary to provide guidance and help to students for their reflection about their writing. However, Murphy and Camp (1996) pointed out that some programs
and teachers had gone as far as creating a new genre, the so-called “fill-in-the-blanks portfolio letter.” This new genre was reported to have a format like: “I put this piece in because…. I put this piece in because…. Finally, I put this piece in because….“ (p. 118).

Murphy and Camp cautioned against the use of the prescribed format. They suggested that it might become a constraint to students’ creativity. Another consequence of this practice was that it might lead students into perfunctory efforts at reflection and students might become less motivated to engage in meaningful reflection that required more effort.

**Assessed or un-assessed?** Some researchers believed that another reason for the less satisfactory effort that students put into reflection was that reflection was often not graded (Conway, 1994; Murphy & Camp, 1996). Students might not have perceived the reflection letter or reflective writing as very important — at least not as important as the actual writing samples placed in their portfolios. In most cases, their papers had been the major discussion and evaluation topic for both students and teachers. Self-reflective pieces were frequently deemed secondary in importance (Conway, 1994).

There was debate as to whether the reflection essay should be graded or not (Yancey, 1998). Yancey (1998) acknowledged that the function of reflection in an assessment context was not entirely clear. In an earlier article, Yancey (1996) argued that reflection helped increase the validity of portfolio assessment because it made students discuss and assess their own learning and their own texts so that teachers had more evidence of student writing — not only the products but also the processes.

However, some researchers believed that including a reflection requirement in assessments complicated the assessment procedure and thus might have caused a
reliability problem (Murphy & Camp, 1996; Schuster, 1994). Schuster (1994) argued that one of the problems with portfolios, when they were used for large-scale assessment, was that teachers could “fictionalize” students based on their readings of reflective essays. He admitted that some of this fictionalizing was unavoidable and might help in portfolio assessment, at least for classroom practice, because teachers could “individualize and humanize their students” and create “justifications for student work.” However, in the context of the writing assessment, the fictionalizing could have obscured judgment and adversely influenced the fairness of evaluation on student writing. As suggested by Schuster (1994), readers might be moved away from the “normed criteria” and let their presumptions influence their judgment and analysis (p.319)

Yancey (1998) held different opinions with regard to the effect of adding a reflection component to assessment. She argued that the problem did not lie with the fictionalizing itself; rather, researchers and teachers should consider how judgment might be affected by the inclusion of students’ personal reflection. Yancey argued that such fictionalizing could be mediated through certain factors. For the purpose of this study, three factors in her suggested list were reviewed: (1) the genres that reflection took; (2) the position of the reflective text in a portfolio; and (3) expectations on the reflective texts.

Yancey (1998) argued that the most popular genre for reflection was the introductory letter. According to Yancey, the introductory letter tended to be personal. It provided an overview of the portfolio contents. It could also include stories of the writer’s development, thus setting a context for the reader and having the potential of influencing the reading of the rest of the portfolio. On the other hand, a reflective essay
tended to have greater expectations for analytical thinking, and usually sounded more academically oriented. Yancey (1998) suggested that if the point of student reflection was to encourage reflective writers who were expected to work in various genres, more than one kind of reflective writing could be requested; they could be independent documents or contained within portfolios.

As for the position of the reflective texts, when placed first in the portfolio, it served a defining function; when placed at the end of the portfolio, it served to bring closure to the portfolio and either confirmed or disconfirmed the writing samples placed in the portfolio. In the first scenario, readers were likely to read the reflective writing first. Then the texts read secondarily were called upon as evidence in support of the claims made in reflective writing. Yancey (1998) argued that it was self-evident that writing assessment was dependent on multiple pieces of evidence and involved multiple variables (e.g., grammar, vocabulary, content, organization). The implication was that, even though students might fictionalize in the reflective texts, the actual multiple texts in the portfolio still constituted the major basis for making a judgment about the quality of the writing itself.

As for the issue of expectation, Yancey argued that teachers and program designers needed to think more precisely about what purposes reflection served so learners could be given clear and specific directions. When constructing the directions for students’ reflection, program designers and teachers needed to be clear and specific on what they were interested in — whether it was students’ self-judgment of their own writing or students’ understanding and application of writing processes and strategy, or students’ self-assessment of their own effort and progress.
Summary

In spite of the intentions of program designers and teachers who tried to involve students in thoughtful reflection over their learning, student reflection sometimes did not achieve its original purpose. There were various reasons that could have caused this mismatch between teachers’ “delivered curriculum” and students’ “experienced curriculum” (Yancey, 1998, p.46). Solutions that could bring these two curriculums together varied from context to context. The context-dependency suggested that a solution that worked in one situation might not work in another situation.

However, researchers (Murphy & Camp, 1996) did try to work out some general guidelines that might help to facilitate thoughtful reflections for students. First, efforts were required from different parties involved: hard work, courage and honesty on the part of students; support from the teacher; and a classroom climate where everyone’s opinion was respected so that there was the freedom to discuss issues important to writing. In addition, it was also important to have support from the whole academic system, which played a very significant role in directing learners, teachers, curriculum, and instruction. Given stimulus and opportunities to develop agency and practice in evaluating their work, it was believed that all students could learn to become more articulate about how they wanted to present themselves in their portfolios, about the kinds of writing that they wanted to include in their portfolios, and about the processes that helped them improve their writing (Murphy & Camp, 1996).
L2 writing

A review of the distinct nature of L2 writing provided valuable insights for the investigation of the selected L2 students’ reflective writing, which was frequently regarded as the most important part of the writing portfolios.

Researchers claimed that L2 writing shared some similarities with L1 writing: in developing ideas and finding rhetorical and linguistic means to express them, both L1 and L2 writers used the process that included planning, writing, and revising (Raimes, 1985; Silva, 1993). However, differences also existed. After an extensive examination of 72 research reports involving a comparison of ESL and Native-English-speaking (NES) writing and/or the L1 and L2 writing of ESL subjects, Silva (1993) summarized the differences between L1 and L2 writing in composing processes and features of written texts.

Composing processes. Silva (1993) looked at writers’ composing processes in three steps: planning, transcribing, and reviewing. Overall, L2 writers did less planning at the global and local levels; they paid more attention to generating materials. Organizing the generated materials, however, was reported to be more difficult for the L2 group; more of the generated materials ended up not being used in the composed texts. L2 writers also involved less in goal setting and had more difficulty achieving these goals.

Transcribing referred to the process of producing the written text. Transcribing in L2 was found to be generally “more laborious, less fluent, and less productive” (Silva, 1993, p. 661). L2 writers tended to spend more time going back to review the prompt or the outline and consulting a dictionary and showed more concern and had more difficulty
with vocabulary. In L2 writing, pauses were more frequent, longer, and consumed more writing time. L2 writers also wrote at a slower rate and produced shorter written texts.

L2 writers tended to do less reviewing. Evidence showed that L2 writers did less rereading of and reflecting on their written texts. In terms of frequency of L2 revision, there were different findings; for example, Hall’s (1990) study (cited in Silva, 1993) concluded that L2 writers did more revision, while Skibnieski’s (1988) study (also cited in Silva, 1993) found that L2 writers actually revised less. However, it was agreed that revision was more difficult for L2 writers. L2 writers, when revising, were also reported to focus more on grammar and less on mechanics, particularly spelling. Grabe and Kaplan (1996) also reported that L2 learners appeared to expect and accept greater teacher intervention, and to make greater improvements when they got such feedback.

**Written text features.** Silva (1993) divided written text features into four subcategories: fluency, accuracy, quality, and structure.

In terms of **fluency**, Silva stated that there was “fairly strong evidence” (p.662) for the conclusion that “L2 writing was a less fluent process” (p.662). He found that sixteen studies agreed that L2 texts contained fewer words; four studies found that L2 texts were actually longer; two studies reported similar lengths between L1 and L2 texts.

With regard to **accuracy**, research showed that L2 writers made more errors overall, as well as more morphosyntactic errors, more lexicosemantic errors, and more errors with verbs, prepositions, articles, and nouns.
Judging *quality* was controversial. Silva found that a number of studies suggested that at least in terms of the judgment of native English speakers, L2 texts received lower holistic scores.

Some studies also suggested that L2 writers’ responses to two particular types of academic writing tasks – answering essay exam questions and using background reading texts – generally tended to be less effective. L2 writers were found to use “more undefined terms,” “less able to paraphrase concepts,” and to include fewer examples from the reading texts (Silva, 1993, p. 666).

L2 writers’ orientation of readers was thought to be less appropriate in that they made use of fewer and a smaller range of attention-getting devices, and that they tended to underestimate the importance of their themes.

In terms of lexicosemantic features, L2 texts tended to show less lexical variety and sophistication overall as well as in their use of lexical cohesion. L2 writers were also found to use fewer synonyms and collocations.

Within the category of *structure*, *argument structure* was one subcategory in which L2 writers were found to less often state and support their positions fully, and to be inclined to develop their arguments by restating their positions. In terms of *general textual patterns*, another subcategory, Silva (1993) pointed out that studies in this area mostly followed Kaplan’s (1966) study.

Kaplan (1966, 1972) studied the thought patterns of written English texts of ESL writers from different cultures and found that some Oriental writing (including Chinese and Korean, but not Japanese) was:
marked by what may be called an approach by indirection. In this kind of writing, the development of the paragraph may be said to be “turning and turning in a widening gyre.” The circles or gyres turn around the subject and show it from a variety of tangential views, but the subject is never looked at directly. Things are developed in terms of what they are not, rather than in terms of what they are (1972, p.46)

Kaplan found that Chinese students, while developing their papers, tended to wander around the topic instead of explicitly stating a point of view. This observation was supported by other researchers based on their studies, for example, Oliver’s study in 1971 (cited in Hinkel, 1994). Researchers also found that in Korean society and Japanese society, communication tended to be indirect (Tsujimura, 1987; Okabe, 1987; Yum, 1987). The feature of indirectness in communication could reflect in students’ writing.

Even though researchers found some common features of L2 writing in comparison to L1 writing, it was also pointed out that individual writing processes of L2 students differed considerably (Raimes, 1991). Careless generalization of stereotypes, as generated based on students’ language and cultural backgrounds, was to be avoided. To understand the phenomenon of L2 writing, multiple factors needed to be taken into consideration, such as cognitive, developmental, social, cultural, educational, and linguistic factors (Silva, 1993).

Summary

This chapter reviewed selected literature related to traditional types of writing assessment, portfolio assessment, reflection, and features of L2 writing.

Throughout the literature, portfolios were found to offer an alternative to traditional modes of assessing student writing. Portfolios eliminated time constraints,
used multiple writing samples, focused on both processes and products, and encouraged student reflection on learning. These qualities were reported to be especially important for instruction and assessment of ESL student writing. However, certain social and cultural values held by some groups of ESL learners might be in confrontation with the portfolio approach. The literature indicated the importance of exploring ESL learners’ experiences with portfolios required in composition courses as well as how their educational backgrounds might impact their attitudes towards writing portfolios.

The reflection component of writing portfolios was purported to be both an asset and burden in terms of assessment. In order to ensure that learners truly benefited from reflective writing required in their portfolios, it became apparent that it would be necessary to investigate how ESL students viewed reflective writing, what they tended to focus their reflective writing on, and to what extent they articulated their learning in reflective writing.

Further exploration into these questions, it was hoped, would reveal the value of portfolios and reflective writing from the student point of view and, thus, provide useful insights for improving the writing curriculum for ESL students.
CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

Introduction

The preceding chapters presented an overview of this study and reviewed relevant literature. This chapter introduces contexts of study, research design, study participants, and data collection and analysis procedures that were used. The underlying purpose of this study was to provide baseline data about selected ESL students’ experiences with writing portfolios and reflective writings.

Context of the Study

The context of this study spanned across three different portfolio classrooms at The Ohio State University: ESL Composition EDU T&L 107, ESL Composition EDU T&L 108.01, and English 110. The University is located in Columbus, Ohio and, at the time when this study was conducted, its undergraduate enrollment was approximately 37,000. According to a Lantern article, during the Fall Quarter of 2001, OSU had 4,313 international students, among which 1,537 were undergraduate students, ranking OSU third among all public research institutions that had the greatest number of international students enrolled (Imes, 24 January, 2002). Currently, the majority of international
students enrolled at the undergraduate level at OSU were reportedly from three countries or regions: the Republic of Korea, Indonesia, and Taiwan (Imes, 24 January, 2002).

Procedurally, after arriving on campus to begin their academic programs, non-native speakers of English were routinely tested for their ability to write in English, unless one or more of the following provisions applied, which exempted them from taking the English composition placement test:

- Those who scored on the paper-based TOEFL
  - 650 or higher, or
  - 610 or higher and 5.0 on the Test of Written English
- Those who scored on the computer-based TOEFL
  - 280 or higher, or
  - 253 or higher and 5.0 on the TOEFL Essay
- Those who scored on the MELAB
  - 95 or higher, or
  - 90 or higher and 90 on the writing sub-score
- Those who had been previously enrolled in an Ohio State academic program
  - Those who were citizens of the following countries or regions: Australia, Belize, Canada (except Quebec), Ireland, New Zealand, Liberia, United Kingdom (England, Wales, Scotland, Northern Ireland), The Commonwealth Caribbean, and the United States (see Website of ESL Composition Program, The Ohio State University)
If none of the above provisions applied, then, on the basis of the placement test, students were placed in English composition classes provided by the ESL Composition Program at OSU, one of the largest post-admission English as a Second Language programs in the United States. Three undergraduate courses were typically offered by the program: EDU T&L 106, EDU T&L 107, and EDU T&L 108.01. Students were placed into one of these three courses depending on the results of the placement test.

For purposes of this study, EDU T&L 107 and EDU T&L 108.01 were included, but not EDU T&L 106, because it did not include portfolios as yet. EDU T&L 107 and EDU T&L 108.01 were further described as follows:

**EDU T&L 107.** This course (5 credit hours) was for undergraduate international students who passed EDU T&L 106 or were assigned as such based on their placement essays. A first-day essay was also used to confirm that students in EDU T&L 107 were placed in the appropriate writing course. This course was designed to give students “practical experience with summarizing, documentation, and analytical academic writing” (Carreon, 2002, p. 1). There were four major assignments for this course:

1. **Summary #1 Informative Summary.**
2. **Summary #2 Descriptive Summary.**
3. **Essay #1 Comparison and Contrast Essay.** This essay was based on the two articles assigned by teachers — same two articles for all students enrolled in EDU T&L 107. Students were given two options to choose from:
   a. Compare and contrast the two authors’ views on the impact of technology on society. Compare and contrast their presentation style.
b. Discuss the positive and negative aspects of technology on society as discussed by the two authors in their essays.

4. Essay #2 Synthesis-Response Essay. This essay was based on the two articles assigned by the teachers. Students needed to synthesize important ideas from the readings and point out similarities and differences and then discuss their own feelings about the topic. Students were given two options to choose from:

   a. Compare and contrast the effect of the two stories on you as a young person.

   b. Which theme had a stronger impact on a young international student like you? (Carreon, 2002)

The course packet required each student to submit a portfolio that contained three writing samples at the end of the academic quarter. Except for the third one, which had to be an in-class writing exercise, the first two writing samples could be any writing conducted for this course during the quarter: essays, summaries, mid-term exam/essay, and materials (journal entries, outlines, drafts, reading notes) used to prepare an out-of-class essay. If summaries and essays were chosen, students had to include various drafts. In choosing the three samples, students were to look for samples that best represented their “effort” and “development,” (Carreon, 2002, underlined as original) but not necessarily what students considered “‘good writing’ in terms of the grade they would receive” (Carreon, 2002, p. 85). Among the two teachers who participated in this study Spring 2002, Jane and Mary, Mary followed the instructions in the course packet while Jane let her students choose whatever three pieces they wished among all the writing they had done over the course of the study.
Students were also required to write an Introductory Letter, which was described in the Course Packet as “an extremely important part of your portfolio” and “appearing first” in the portfolio (Carreon, 2002, p. 85-86). This letter was to introduce the portfolio samples to the reader by explaining the reasons of the selection and describing how each sample showed the student’s “effort and/or improvement/growth/progress” (Carreon, 2002, p. 87). Students submitted their portfolios at the end of the quarter. Portfolios, along with students’ journal entries and attendance records, were 10% of the students’ grades. The course packet listed seven criteria for evaluating portfolios:

1. Are the samples identified clearly and effectively in the introduction letter and in the body of the portfolio?
2. Has the writer provided clear and effective explanations as to why the samples were included in the portfolio?
3. Are the samples well-chosen in terms of illustrating the writer’s effort and progress in the course?
4. Does the introduction letter show evidence of appropriate effort?
5. Does the introduction letter provide information or direction which enables the reader to examine the portfolio in a meaningful, informed way? That is, does it prepare the reader to look at the portfolio in a helpful manner?
6. Has the writer made unnecessary comments in the introduction letter (e.g., about the course, the course instructor, etc.) which deviate from the sole intended purpose of introducing the contents of the portfolio?
7. Has the portfolio (introduction letter and samples) been prepared in a way which suggests care and effort on the part of the writer? Are materials arranged sloppily, carelessly, etc.? (Carreon, 2002, p. 90)

**EDU T&L 108.01**. This course (5 credit hours) was designed to help students evaluate and represent the opinions and arguments of others and to respond to these in their own persuasive writing. Like EDU T&L 107, there was a first-day essay to confirm that students were placed in the appropriate writing course. The major assignments for this course were:
2. Argument Paper #2. Building on Paper #1, students had to write on the same topic and thesis but would be using the “block” approach.
3. Literary Postings — based on reading of the assigned literary work (a novel), *Never Fade Away*.
4. Problem/Solution Project.

The EDU T&L 108.01 portfolio was a collection of ALL of a student’s written work for this course, including every draft of the two major essays, hard copies of all the argument paper postings and literary postings, midterm essay, midterm exam worksheet, final exam worksheet, grammar editing exercises, self-assessment of reading and writing (assigned at the beginning of the quarter), homework assignments, and in-class writing. In addition, students were also required to include an Introductory Letter each time they submitted their portfolios. Since students needed to submit portfolios twice during the quarter (the midterm portfolio and the final portfolio), they had to write two introductory letters to *reflect* in writing on their work and to “focus, in particular, on two things: your **effort** and your **progress**” (EDU T&L 108.01 Portfolio Submission Guidelines, bold in original). Work related to the Problem/Solution Project was not required as part of the portfolios. Portfolios were 10% of the students’ grades, with the midterm portfolio 5% and the final portfolio 5%. It was clearly stated in the Submission Guidelines that there were three criteria for grading the portfolios:

1. Inclusion of all required elements.
2. Neatness of arrangement of materials.
In Summer 2002, there were two teachers teaching two different classes of EDU T&L 108.01, John and Carol. Both teachers participated in this research. Each followed the Submission Guidelines as they were stated.

In addition to EDU T&L 107 and EDU T&L 108.01, English 110 was included in this study because it provided another major setting where writing portfolios played an important role. English 110 was further described as follows:

**English 110.** International students who successfully finished EDU T&L 108.01 moved on to English 110. This course was also the course chosen most frequently by first-year undergraduate students at OSU in order to fulfill the requirement of one course taught in the First-Year Writing Program. Non-international students came to the First-Year Writing Program in several ways, depending on their assigned placement, which was determined primarily by their SAT or ACT scores and/or a writing placement test administered during orientation. Most students were placed directly into this program. Some students that needed preparatory course work began in the Writing Workshop, where they enrolled in English 109.01 and English 109.02 before moving on into English 110. The First-Year Writing Program also used a first-day essay as confirmation of the appropriateness of the writing course.

English 110 was designed to provide students with opportunities to practice and reflect critically upon various processes of writing, forms of discourse, inquiry, and judgment. Further, it encouraged students to engage with others’ ideas and to, “reflect on the institutional and cultural contexts that both constrain and enable meaningful communication with others” (see First-Year Writing Program: Course Descriptions).
English 110 students were expected to explore three different types of discourse – personal, academic, and public. Unit One aimed at helping students analyze their past literacy experiences in particular settings and communities. Students were also introduced to the concept of writing as a process and as a rhetorical endeavor. Unit Two expected students to explore the meaning and implications of being literate in an academic institution. Unit Three focused on public discourse. Students were required to analyze the ways in which media messages and public images worked to represent their sources and persuade their audiences (see First-Year Writing Program: Course Descriptions).

The typical version of English 110 requirements were:

- Three formal writing assignments (essays developed through multiple drafting, peer response, and instructor feedback).
- A final assignment in which students reflected on their development as writers over the quarter.
- Several informal writing assignments. (These could be collected in writer’s notebook. Instructors could consider focusing most or all of the writer’s notebook entries on the act of self-reflexive discussions of students’ writing processes — students in the portfolio section could draw upon these entries in revising drafts or preparing their final cover letter for the portfolio.)

Two grading methods were used for this course. In traditional grading, an instructor assigned a grade to final drafts of all major assignments, and the final grade
was then determined according to the percentages identified on the course syllabus. In portfolio assignment, students compiled a collection of written work and submitted this portfolio at the end of the quarter. The instructor then evaluated the portfolio and assigned the grade using the percentages outlined on the course syllabus. Generally, students did not receive grades on individual essays in portfolio-based courses.

Instructors decided which method they wished to use for their class. As for the content of the portfolios, different teachers were allowed to have different requirements. Typical portfolios contained final and rough drafts of all major essays, selected entries from the student’s notebook or other informal writing, and a cover letter in which the student reflected upon his or her development and explained the revisions in the documents contained in the portfolio.

There was one teacher participant from English 110, who only required final drafts of the three essays: Persuasive; Evaluation (in Winter 2002), or Cultural Analysis (in Spring 2002); and Personal narrative. This teacher also required a final essay of reflection in the portfolio, which was described as “Final essay” in the Winter 2002 syllabus and “Reflection essay” in the Spring 2002 syllabus. In this study, the term “reflective essay” was used to avoid confusion. In Winter 2002, portfolios were 80% of students’ final grades, with 30% assigned to each regular essay and 10% assigned to the reflective essay. In Spring 2002, portfolios were 75% of students’ final grades. The purpose of the reflective essay was stated similarly in the Winter 2002 syllabus and Spring 2002 syllabus. In Winter 2002, the purpose was “to explore your development as a
writer this quarter” (see Appendix G for English 110 Syllabus for Winter 2002); in Spring 2002, it was “to reflect upon your development as a writer in this class this quarter.”

For all three courses included in this study, students had the opportunity to conference with their instructors at least once during the quarter to discuss their writing. In addition, students were also required to participate in peer response groups where they received feedback on their drafts from fellow classmates. These activities provided students with insights into their own work and encouraged them to write for real audiences.

**The Study Subjects**

Seven students were the primary focus in this study. Five were from EDU T&L 107, among whom, two participated in the follow-up study when they moved on to EDU T&L 108.01. The remaining two participants were from English 110. Table 3.1 provides demographic information about the seven students who participated in this study, including gender, age, ethnic origins, length of stay in U.S., courses enrolled in that used portfolios, and course instructors. As indicated on the bottom row of the table, five of the students were male and two were female. In terms of ethnic origin, three students came from Korea, two from Indonesia, and one each from Japan and India. The two students from Indonesia were both ethnic Chinese. Length of stay in U.S. ranged from eight months to four years and three months among the seven students. Age differences were substantial, ranging from seventeen to thirty-one, even though all seven students were college freshmen.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Course</th>
<th>Student</th>
<th>Ethnic Origin</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Length of Stay in the U.S.</th>
<th>Instructor</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>107</td>
<td>Moto (M)</td>
<td>Japan</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>4 years</td>
<td>Jane</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>107</td>
<td>Jeong (M)</td>
<td>Korea</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>3.5 years</td>
<td>Jane</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>107</td>
<td>June (F)</td>
<td>Korea</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>10 months</td>
<td>Mary</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>107</td>
<td>Tim (M)</td>
<td>Indonesia</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>2 years</td>
<td>Mary</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>107</td>
<td>Shim (M)</td>
<td>Korea</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>1 year</td>
<td>Mary</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>108.01</td>
<td>Moto (M)</td>
<td>Japan</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>4 years</td>
<td>John</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>108.01</td>
<td>Shim (M)</td>
<td>Korea</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>1 year</td>
<td>Carol</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>110</td>
<td>Fu (F)</td>
<td>Indonesia</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>8 months</td>
<td>Joy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>110</td>
<td>Raj (M)</td>
<td>India</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>4 years and 3 months</td>
<td>Joy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Summary</td>
<td>M = 5</td>
<td>Korean = 3</td>
<td></td>
<td>Range: 17 - 31</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>F = 2</td>
<td>Indonesian = 2</td>
<td></td>
<td>Range: 8 months – 4 years and 3 months</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
In Spring 2002 there were two sections of EDU T&L 107. One section was taught by Jane, and the other taught by Mary. The researcher visited each class during the first week and briefly introduced the research project. Moto and Jeong from Jane’s class, and June, Tim, and Shim from Mary’s class subsequently responded to the researcher’s introduction and expressed willingness to participate in the study.

In Summer 2002, it was planned that all five students would continue to participate in the study as they moved into EDU T&L 108.01. The initial plan did not materialize for a number of reasons. First of all, Tim went to California to take an English course where the cost was less expensive than at OSU. The four other students agreed to continue to participate in the study, and all registered in EDU T&L 108.01. Then, Jeong dropped out of EDU T&L 108.01 because he had already taken a higher level English course (equivalent to English 110 at OSU) at another American university. The three remaining students agreed to continue to participate in the study, but June later refused to respond to the researcher’s numerous requests to schedule interviews. Only Moto and Shim remained for further participation in the study. Data were collected from these two students over two consecutive quarters, but data were only available from the other three students during one quarter.

The two additional students from English 110 were both enrolled in Joy’s class, as indicated in Table 3.1. Near the end of Autumn Quarter 2001, and at the beginning of Winter Quarter 2002, the researcher sent three requests to the First Year Writing Program Listserv, with the help of the program’s director, looking for teachers who would be using portfolios in English 110 in Winter 2002. Two teachers responded, one male and one female. The male teacher gave the researcher one ESL student’s email address,
through which the researcher made three attempts to contact the student. This student refused to participate in the study due to fears associated with the interview process. The female teacher, Joy, gave the research information to the one international student in her class, Raj from India, who agreed to participate in the study.

In Spring 2002, Joy continued using portfolios in her English 110 course. She helped the researcher give the research information to her four ESL students, among which, the one from Indonesia (Fu) responded via email and participated in the study.

**Research Design**

The use of qualitative procedures in this study was selected because of the need to explore in depth how ESL students viewed the portfolio as a tool for writing assessment and how they viewed reflective writing. The use of qualitative procedure was also thought to be the best means of garnering rich student descriptions of different portfolio contexts. Specifically this research followed a case study format. Yin (1989) defined a case study as an empirical inquiry that:

- investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context; when
- the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident; and in which
- multiple sources of evidence are used. (Yin, 1989, p.23)

Case study was determined appropriate for this study because the comprehensive and in-depth information collected in each case of interest would allow the “investigation to retain the holistic and meaningful characteristics of real-life events” (Yin, 1989, p. 14). For purposes of this study, seven cases were explored and investigated. They shared
similarities as well as differences in terms of their backgrounds, which allowed each of them to serve a specific purpose within the overall scope of inquiry (Yin, 1989).

Patton (2002) pointed out that case studies could be content analyzed so that core meanings could be discovered; further, that core meanings generated from several cases were often called patterns or themes. A major purpose of this study was to search for patterns and themes in terms of students’ attitudes and behaviors across several different cases.

Data Collection

All of the study participants, including students and teachers, received and reviewed “Research Information” that outlined the purpose and requirements of the study (Appendix A). In addition, participants received either a “Letter to Teacher Participants” (Appendix B) or a “Letter to Student Participants” (Appendix C). All the participants signed the “Letter of Consent” (Appendix D), giving permission for the interviews, observations, and use of portfolios for research purposes.

Each participant was assigned a pseudonym in order to protect his or her identity. This procedure was used for both students and teachers. Each participant reserved the right to terminate participation in the study at any time for any reason.

Major data sources for this study were student interview transcripts and reflective writings contained in students’ portfolios. Additional data were collected through teacher interviews, classroom observations, and documents such as course packets and teacher syllabi. Table 3.2 provides the list of data sources for this study.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sources of Data</th>
<th>Focus of Analysis</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Student interviews (N = 24)</td>
<td>Students’ experiences with portfolios. Students’ attitudes towards portfolios. Students’ experiences with portfolio reflective writing. Students’ attitudes towards portfolio reflective writing.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student portfolio</td>
<td>Characteristics of students’ portfolio reflective writings.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>introductory letters/reflective essays (N = 12)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher interviews (N = 8)</td>
<td>Teachers’ views about writing portfolios Teachers’ views about their students’ performances in portfolios and in portfolio reflective writings.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Classroom observations (N = 8)</td>
<td>Students’ reactions towards portfolio assignments. Teacher-student discussions about portfolio assignments.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Documents (e.g., EDU T&amp; L 107 course packet; EDU T&amp; L 108.01 Portfolio Submission Guidelines; First-Year Writing Program: Course (English 110) Descriptions; Teachers’ syllabi).</td>
<td>Background information for understanding the contexts of portfolio usage.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3.2: Data Sources (January 2002 – September 2002)

1 See OSU First-Year Writing Program website: http://english.ohio-state.edu/programs/fywp.
Documents

Glesne and Peshkin (1992) pointed out that documents provided “historical and contextual dimensions to your observations and interviews” (p. 54). In this study, different documents were collected that supported and expanded interview data and observation data. In fact, the researcher photocopied entire student portfolios that were essentially collections of documents for the purpose described by Glesne and Peshkin (1992). These collections were acquired in all seven cases. Of particular interest were Reflective Essays composed for English 110 portfolios and Introductory Letters written for EDU T&L 107 and EDU T&L 108.01 portfolios. The essays and letters constituted the main sources of data for further analysis and interpretation.

In addition, the researcher collected the EDU T&L 107 Course Packet, which included Portfolio Submission Guidelines; the EDU T&L 108.01 Portfolio Submission Guidelines; and online materials related to the First-Year Writing Program, especially those that corresponded with English 110. These latter materials included program and course overviews, the First-Year Writing Handbook: A Teaching Resource, and model syllabi. The researcher also collected the syllabi and teacher handouts that were distributed in classes that student participants attended. All of these materials provided background information for understanding the context of the study.

Transcribed Interviews

The researcher interviewed students and their teachers several times each throughout the study. All interviews were conducted using a flexible, conversational approach that allowed interviewees to express personal perspectives and provided
opportunities for the researcher to pursue subjects of particular interest. That is, even though the research questions served as guidelines for the interviews, the interviews were of an open-ended nature, in which the researcher asked respondents for facts as well as opinions about events. Oftentimes, the researcher asked respondents to provide personal insights into certain events and procedures. Therefore, questions were allowed to flow from the immediate context (Patton, 2002). In this study, the role of each student participant and teacher participant was considered one of an “informant” rather than merely a respondent (Yin, 1989, p. 89).

Data gathered from informal conversational interviews were different for each interviewee (Patton, 2002). In this study, each student participant was interviewed multiple times over a sustained time period to track personal opinions at different stages of course and portfolio completion. Previous responses could be revisited and deepened. Each interview built on interviews already completed, creating possibilities for expanding or confirming information that was collected previously.

In Winter Quarter 2002 and Spring Quarter 2002, each student participant, except for Shim, was interviewed three times during the quarter. That is, at the beginning, middle, and end of the quarter. The first interview was scheduled soon after students were first informed that portfolios would be one of the course requirements. This first interview mainly focused on eliciting students’ background information and general understanding of the portfolio assignment. The second interview was scheduled shortly after midterm to follow-up on individual progress in the course as well as personal understanding of the portfolio assignment and reflective writing. The third interview occurred shortly after students submitted completed portfolios. Owing to a scheduling
conflict, Shim had to cancel the mid-term interview in the academic quarter of Spring 2002. However, Shim was able to participate in the first and third interview in the same quarter.

In Summer Quarter 2002, Shim and Moto participated in the follow-up study. Each of them was interviewed two times over the quarter. The first interview occurred after they received their midterm portfolios back from their teachers. The second interview occurred after they submitted their final portfolios.

In each of the three quarters, the researcher also interviewed these students’ teachers at quarter’s end, after they finished reading and grading all of the portfolios. The purpose of the teacher interviews was to obtain additional data and corroborate other sources of data. Two teachers (Jane and Joy) also attended an extra interview at quarter’s beginning, in which Jane talked about her previous experiences of using portfolios and Joy talked about her reasons for using portfolios.

All of the interviews were audio tape-recorded and transcribed. Immediately after each interview was transcribed, the researcher contacted the interviewees to clarify any unclear parts. The interviewees were also given the opportunity to review the transcribed interviews to make corrections or add new information. However, it was interesting to note that only one instructor, Jane, responded and sent back a revised version of her interview transcript.

**Interview Protocol Description**

For student interviews, usually the first interview that aimed at eliciting students’ background information lasted about twenty to twenty-five minutes; the second interview
lasted about thirty minutes; and the last interview lasted from about thirty minutes to forty minutes (see Appendix E for a sample of student interview). Before the official interviews started for each student, the researcher had a three- or four-minute light conversation with the participant talking about their academic programs or their hobbies to warm-up the atmosphere and to make the participants feel relaxed. This part of the conversation was not recorded. After each interview, the researcher kept notes about both the warm-up activity and the interview. Both at the beginning and end of the interviews, the researcher assured participants that the content of these interviews would be held confidential, and that the audiotapes would only be used for purposes of this research.

Teacher interviews usually lasted from about thirty minutes to fifty minutes. The researcher told the teachers the same as was told to students. At the beginning of each interview, the researcher assured the teachers that the content of the interviews would be held confidential, and that the audiotapes would only be used for purposes of this research.

Table 3.3 provides a summary of all the student interviews that were completed. Each student (except for Shim) was interviewed three times during their first academic quarter of participation; Moto and Shim, who continued their participation in the study for a second academic quarter, were each interviewed twice during the second academic quarter of participation.
### Table 3.3: Student Interviews

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Course</th>
<th>Student</th>
<th># of Interviews</th>
<th>Quarter of Participation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>107</td>
<td>Moto</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Spring 2002</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>107</td>
<td>Jeong</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Spring 2002</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>107</td>
<td>June</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Spring 2002</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>107</td>
<td>Tim</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Spring 2002</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>107</td>
<td>Shim</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Spring 2002</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>108.01</td>
<td>Moto</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Summer 2002</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>108.01</td>
<td>Shim</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Summer 2002</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>110</td>
<td>Fu</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Spring 2002</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>110</td>
<td>Raj</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Winter 2002</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Table 3.4: Teacher Interviews

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Course</th>
<th>Teacher</th>
<th># of Interviews</th>
<th>Quarter of Participation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>107</td>
<td>Jane</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Spring 2002</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>107</td>
<td>Mary</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Spring 2002</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>108.01</td>
<td>John</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Summer 2002</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>108.01</td>
<td>Carol</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Summer 2002</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>110</td>
<td>Joy</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Winter 2002</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>110</td>
<td>Joy</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Spring 2002</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 3.4 provides a summary of all the teacher interviews that were completed. Joy participated in the study for two consecutive quarters. In Winter 2002 she was interviewed twice; in Spring 2002 she was interviewed once. Three of the four other teachers were interviewed once. Jane was the exception. She was interviewed twice during the academic quarter.

**Observation Protocol Description**

The researcher observed the classroom activities related to portfolios in both EDU T&L 107 and English 110. In Summer 2002, there were two different sections of EDU T&L 108.01. The two student participants initially enrolled in the same section of EDU T&L 108.01. Their teacher did not respond to the researcher’s email request for permission to conduct a classroom observation. Later on, one of the two student participants transferred to the other section of EDU T&L 108.01. This student did not inform the researcher of this change until quarter was more than half over. The researcher thus missed the opportunity to observe portfolio activities in EDU T&L 108.01. The researcher attempted to make up for the missing data by asking the students and the classroom instructors to report on the classroom activities related to portfolios.

For EDU T&L 107 and English 110, the researcher was able to conduct classroom observations twice throughout the academic quarter. The first observation was conducted at the beginning of the quarter when the instructor introduced the portfolio assignment to the students. The second observation occurred at the end of the quarter when the instructor revisited the portfolio assignment to clarify potential ambiguity for students in terms of the portfolio assignment.
Depending on instructors’ different approaches to portfolio assignments, the length of each observation varied from the others. In Mary’s class as well as Joy’s classes, each observation lasted about ten minutes. The students did not raise many questions about portfolios; therefore teachers moved on to the next activity in their lesson plans.

In Jane’s class, the first observation lasted about forty minutes. The students remained silent when asked whether they had any questions about portfolios. Then, this instructor tried to make the students feel relaxed by talking about American cultural behavior and involving the researcher, who was also an ESL student, in the discussion. The second observation occurred on “portfolio day,” which lasted the entire class period, about fifty minutes. Jane dedicated the entire class to answering individual student’s questions as they selected samples for their portfolios and worked on their reflective letters.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Course</th>
<th>Teacher</th>
<th># of Observations</th>
<th>Quarter of Observation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>107</td>
<td>Jane</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Spring 2002</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>107</td>
<td>Mary</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Spring 2002</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>110</td>
<td>Joy</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Winter 2002</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>110</td>
<td>Joy</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Spring 2002</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3.5: Classroom Observations
Table 3.5 provides a summary of the classroom observations that were completed. In Winter 2002, the English 110 class was observed twice. In Spring 2002, each of the two EDU T&L 107 classes as well as the English 110 class were observed twice.

**Data Description, Analysis, and Interpretation**

As Wolcott (1994) emphasized, everything had the potential to be data, but nothing became data without description, analysis, and interpretation by the researcher. In this study, participants’ Introductory Letters or Reflective Essays in addition to their transcribed interviews constituted the major sources of data that were presented, analyzed, and interpreted.

The framework for the data analysis in this study consisted of description, analysis, and interpretation. The researcher developed descriptions of each participant before commenting with analysis and interpretation. Each case study began with a description of the participants’ backgrounds, including previous ESL courses taken; self-evaluation of writing skills; and attitudes about and perceptions of writing in English (The reports of follow-up case studies did not include the background section). Next, a composite picture of participants’ portfolio experience in courses numbered 107, 108.01, or 110 was described. This picture combined the interview data, observation field notes, and sample portfolio entries. For certain participants, who had previous portfolio experience or claimed to own other portfolios outside of those submitted for course requirements, these experiences of portfolios were also described. The final section of each case was about students’ portfolio reflective writing. This section included two
parts: (1) the coded results of students’ Portfolio Introductory Letters or Reflective Essays, and (2) students’ reflections on their experiences with the task of reflective writing.

Students’ Introductory Letters and Reflective Essays were coded by the researcher. The coding results were shown to a second coder, a PhD student in the College of Education at The Ohio State University, who had previous experience teaching EFL writing and coding data. The resulting descriptions and assigned codes were modified based on discussion between the two coders.

Through the coding process emerged two major categories for each student participant: (1) writing task perception, in which students described how they perceived/interpreted the writing tasks they had completed; and (2) self-assessment, in which students self-assessed various aspects of their writing, such as their writing products and writing processes. Within the category of writing task perception, two subcategories emerged: general and specific. Within the category of self-assessment, seven subcategories emerged: general, affective, goal setting, text features, surface features, audience awareness, and writing process. In addition to major categories and subcategories, six other categories were found in certain participants’ reflective writings, but not in all cases. These six categories were: (1) intention of the letter; (2) comment on course/teaching; (3) quote/evidence from selected samples; (4) difference between English and first language; (5) Reading-writing connection; and (6) portfolio process. Chapter 4 will use data from this study to illustrate these categories and subcategories.

Following data description was the analysis phase that cut across all cases and served as a springboard for the researcher’s interpretations. Data analysis and subsequent
interpretations were developed along two lines: (1) students’ experiences with writing portfolios, including their reported perceptions and attitudes towards writing portfolios, and, (2) students’ experiences with portfolio reflective writings, including the features of their reflective writings and their reported perceptions and attitudes towards reflective writings. In both instances, interviews with teachers provided corroborative information for analyzing and interpreting students’ situations. Data analysis results were organized in tables in order to better present patterns that emerged across different cases and to facilitate research interpretations. Data analysis and subsequent interpretations were presented in the “Discussion” part of Chapter IV.

Since data were mainly obtained from informal conversational interviews and students’ reflective writings in different courses, a large degree of variation in participant responses made it difficult, in some cases, to sift for patterns that had emerged at different times for different participants. However, this difficulty gave way to flexibility and sensitivity to individual and situational differences (Patton, 2002).

**Summary**

This chapter described the methodology that was employed in this study. Following a detailed description of the participants and the context in which this study was situated, the research design was described. This study employed qualitative procedures and specifically followed a case study approach. For purposes of this study, seven participants with different backgrounds were chosen; each participant served a specific purpose within the overall scope of inquiry.
The major sources of data for this study came from students’ portfolio reflective writings and transcribed interviews. Additional data that provided important background information were collected, including: teacher interviews, course packets, Portfolio Submission Guidelines, online course information and program information, classroom observation, and teacher syllabi. Both student interviews and teacher interviews were of an informal nature that allowed for “flexibility, spontaneity, and responsiveness to individual differences and situational changes” (Patton, 2002, p. 343). Interview protocol and observation protocol descriptions were also provided.

Data analysis aimed at discovering patterns and theme across multiple cases. The procedures of data coding and analysis were briefly described.
CHAPTER 4
DATA ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

Introduction
This chapter includes five major sections: discussion of categories that emerged in the analysis of students’ portfolio reflective writings, report of individual case study findings, discussion of findings across all cases, teachers’ views, and chapter summary.

Following the discussion of the coding categories, data were presented in case study report for all seven cases, follow-up case study report: Shim, and follow-up case study report: Moto. Based on the report of individual cases, data were analyzed and interpreted across the different cases.

The case study report was divided into three sections: Background, Portfolio, and Reflective Writing. The major subsection within “Portfolio” was 107 Portfolio or English 110 Portfolio. For Raj, Jeong, Tim, and Moto, there was also a subsection: Previous portfolio experience. For Jeong, Shim, and Moto, there was an additional subsection: “My own portfolio.” For all seven cases, the section of reflective writing started with the coding of 107 Portfolio Introductory Letter or 110 Portfolio Reflective Essay and ended with each student’s reflection on the Introductory Letter/Reflective Essay.
“Follow-up case study report: Shim” and “Follow-up case study report: Moto” included the following subsections: 108.01 Midterm Portfolio, Midterm Portfolio Introductory Letter, 108.01 Final Portfolio, Summary of portfolio experiences, and Final Portfolio Introductory Letter. The subsection of “Midterm Portfolio Introductory Letter” started with the coding of 108.01 Midterm Portfolio Introductory Letter (Letter #1) and ended with each student’s reflection on Letter #1. Likewise, Final Portfolio Introductory Letter started with the coding of 108.01 Final Portfolio Introductory Letter (Letter #2) and ended with reflection on Letter #2.

Discussion of Categories

The major observed pattern that emerged in the student portfolio reflective writings was students’ self-assessment of their writing. While analyzing the features of students’ self-assessment, Carter’s (1992) research on fifth graders’ self-assessment using writing portfolios was found useful for this study. Carter (1992) summarized thirteen categories in students’ self-evaluative comments on their writing. These thirteen categories were: “holistic,” “intrinsic,” “ideas,” “text features,” “surface features,” “process,” “form,” “style,” “word choice,” “audience awareness,” “writer’s perspective,” “purpose,” and “reading/writing” (p. 82).

Carter’s classification proved useful for his study and, in a certain measure, transferable to the study of ESL students’ portfolio reflective writings, since the major category that emerged from students’ reflective writings was self-assessment. However, it was necessary to adapt his classification model to describe certain characteristics of
reflective writing by ESL students at the college level. For this study, seven sub-categories were found under self-assessment: general, affective, goal setting, text features, surface features, audience awareness, and writing process.

With regard to writing processes, Faigley, Cherry, Jolliffe, and Skinner (1985) developed a set of categories for describing writing processes, including general intention, general strategy, and task-specific strategy:

1. “General intention.” These are very general and give no indication of any knowledge of specific composing strategies. In addition, they often suggest only a student’s abstract motivation to succeed in the writing task. General-intention responses often take the form of such statements as “I really worked hard on this essay,” or ‘I really tried to do my best.’

2. “General strategy.” These responses reflect a general approach that might apply to all writing situations. They are often mechanically employed and do not take into account the specific dimensions of the writing task or previous experience with tasks of the sort that are being commented on. Our research revealed such general-strategy responses as “I went back and corrected my errors,” or “I made an outline for this essay.”

3. “Task-specific strategy.” Responses in this category represent task-specific behavioral elaborations that have been adapted to meet the demands of the particular writing situation. We found task-specific strategies in such responses as “I wrote the rough draft of this essay very quickly since I wanted to have time to change my mind on this subject,” and “I know exactly how someone feels in this situation since I have been in this situation many times before.” (p. 192)

Data on students’ self-assessment of their writing processes found in this study also showed the above categories.

The remaining part of this section illustrates, via examples from the data, the seven sub-categories under students’ self-assessment: general, affective, goal setting, text features, surface features, audience awareness, and writing process.
General. This category included comments that were overall judgments of students’ writing. For example, “I learned a lot of things” or “I know how to write comparison/contrast.”

Affective. This category included affective comments about how a student felt about a selected writing sample or certain aspects of his/her writing. For example, “I don’t like critics.”

Goal setting. This category included comments in which students set goals for their future writing. For example, “I promise myself to keep in touch with my grammar hence.”

Text features. Students made comments about three aspects of their written text features: (1) content, (2) organization, and (3) style.

(1) Two examples of content were “it was boring” and “lack of details.”

(2) Two examples of organization were “There are big gaps between sentences” and “learned where to put topic sentence.”

(3) There was only one instance of the style comment among all the collected data: “my writing is from my speaking language.”

Surface features. Students made comments about two aspects of surface features of their writing: grammar and vocabulary.

(1) Two examples of grammar comment were: “improve my skill of putting my grammar knowledge to practical use” and “recognized my problem with grammar.”

(2) For vocabulary comments, examples were “My capacity of vocabulary is getting bigger than before the midterm” and “I learned a lot of useful expressions.”
Audience awareness. This category included comments in which students displayed their awareness of writing for audiences. For example, “[my] weak side were assuming reader already read the articles,” or “Using dialogues, a reader can really feel and live throughout the moment the writer live[s].”

Writing process. Students made comments about three aspects in their writing processes: (1) General intention, (2) General strategy, and (3) Task-specific strategy.

(1) Examples of General intention from this study were “I got help from tutorial” and “In-class writing, I tried to write my best in short time.”

(2) Examples of General strategy from this study included “need support and evidence to back up an argument,” and “use once in a while show vs. tell.”

(3) Examples of Task-specific strategy from this study were “I tried to develop my authority by describing how scary it was” and “Persuasion requires having more than one point of view for it to be effective.”

In addition to the major pattern, self-assessment, the second most frequently appearing category was writing task perception, in which students described how they perceived/interpreted the writing tasks they had completed. Comments in this category were found to be either specific or general. An example of a general comment was “This was new type of essay to me.” An example of a specific comment was “Summary 1 is one page short length summary of an article.”
Other additional patterns that were found in some reflective writings were as follows:

(1) *Intention of the letter*, in which students explained the purpose of writing the letter;

(2) *Comment on course/teaching*, in which students commented on the particular English course they were taking or the teaching they received from their teachers;

(3) *Quote/evidence from selected samples*, in which students cited examples from their selected samples to support their comments;

(4) *Difference between English and first language*, in which students addressed the differences between English and their first languages (this pattern only emerged in June’s reflective writing);

(5) *Reading-writing connection*, in which students talked about their understandings of the reading-writing relationship (only found in June’s reflective writing); and

(6) *Portfolio process*, in which students described the general and/or specific impact of the portfolio assignment on them (only found in Jeong’s reflective writing).

The two 108.01 students also talked about their group projects, which was not required according to the syllabus, and which was not part of this study.
Case Study Report: Fu

Background

Fu was a 19-year-old Chinese-Indonesian majoring in Chemical Engineering who had been in the U.S. for eight months at the time of the study. Prior to coming to the U.S. for higher education, she attended Indonesian schools\(^2\) for her primary and secondary education, where Indonesian was the language of instruction. At home, her parents and siblings frequently communicated in Chinese. To her, English was primarily a foreign language.

Fu started learning English in Kindergarten and continued throughout high school. For about six years before she came to America, her mom arranged for her to take extra English courses after her regular school hours. Most of her teachers in the after-school English courses were from Britain. Even though she did not attend the extra English courses on a regular basis, she reported that those courses helped her improve her English speaking and writing skills. The writing instructions she received in the after-school English courses were mostly focused on familiarizing her with different genres of writing, such as persuasive, narrative, exposition, and argumentation. Fu reported enjoying writing in English, much more than in Indonesian, because, as she stated, Indonesian language was under constant change, which has resulted in a complicated grammar system with many rules. Another reason she cited for enjoying writing in English was the challenge and excitement brought by being able to write in a foreign language.

\(^2\) In Indonesia, there are three different types of schools: Indonesian, Chinese, and English. Each type is characterized primarily by the instructional language that it employs.
Based on the results of the placement exam, Fu was assigned to English 110, while most of her Indonesian friends who came along with her were placed into 107. She reported being a bit nervous about this placement, even though she seemed confident about her writing in English. Her self-evaluation of her English writing skills was 7 on a scale of 1-10. She also appeared to have comparatively higher oral communicative competence within the seven participants, although the oral competence was not measured in the study.

**Portfolio**

*English 110 Portfolio.* During the first interview, Fu seemed slightly nervous over the fact that her portfolio would be 75% of her final grade for English 110, because, despite the extensive training in English writing she received in Indonesia, she had never heard of portfolios before. However, she believed: “there is always first time for everything.” She enjoyed the challenges and excitement brought by new ideas, therefore, she was also looking forward to the fact that she would be developing a writing portfolio for the first time. Besides, she suggested that in her field of chemical engineering, she would probably need to prepare a “full report,” in which case, portfolios might be a concept that would turn out useful for her someday in the future.

In terms of the consequences of the portfolio-based grading system upon students, Fu seemed to understand that there could be both freedom and responsibility. On the one hand, portfolios would probably bring more freedom because students could be in control of the time for the completion of individual papers. On the other hand, the teacher, by using portfolios, probably wanted the students to be more responsible for their learning.
In addition, she also talked about the potentiality of a problem: no grade for each individual paper would probably mean less feedback and less chance of improvement in the next papers. However, she predicted that conferencing with the teacher might help with this problem.

Her initial understanding of the required content of portfolios included: the final drafts of her three papers and the two best journal responses. She did not mention the portfolio reflective essay. Her interpretation of the portfolio was that it should be “a good collection, not a bad collection” of her work.

By the second interview, Fu announced that she already completed 50% of the portfolio work. She mentioned that many of her classmates had already finished the first two out of three required essays. In her case, after an informative discussion with someone from the ESL program, she became increasingly unsatisfied with her initial choice of topic for paper #1, English Immersion Education versus Bilingual Education. Therefore, even though she was already at the point of completing the first draft, she decided to take the risk of changing to a different topic, the Quarter System versus the Semester System. At the point of the second interview, she reported that before putting the first two papers into her portfolio at the end of the quarter, she would have to do a lot of work on paper #1 as well as some minor work on paper #2.

In Fu’s class, students revised their papers’ first drafts based on peer review comment, which Fu described was beneficial to her. The second drafts were handed to the teacher. The teacher would then schedule individual conferences with each student. She also required students, when handing in their second drafts, to include a memo responding to questions like: what are your biggest weaknesses, how do you want me to
help you with your paper, and how do you think your paper stands on my grading scale. According to Fu’s teacher, memos were designed not just for facilitating the student-teacher conference, but also to benefit students directly in two aspects: (1) helping students get into the habit of ongoing reflection; and (2) helping students compose their portfolio reflective essays. However, Fu did not seem to be aware of the benefits that memos could bring to students. She interpreted this memo as designed to help the teacher understand each individual student’s needs and be able to provide the best help for everyone during the teacher-student conference. She reported that the teacher-student conference helped her a lot in improving her course essays.

During the second interview, Fu revisited the issue of responsibility. More specifically, she mentioned that in a portfolio environment, students sometimes might get away with less or no revisions of their work. In her opinion, with a portfolio system, students should not expect the teacher to take full charge in every single aspect, instead, students should learn to discipline themselves and take more responsibility for their own learning. In her case, the portfolio system was especially helpful because she had an extra chance to work on her papers to the point where she was personally satisfied with her work. Therefore, at the point when paper #2 should have been completed according to the syllabus, she could still go back to make more revisions on her paper #1.

The portfolio Fu finally submitted included four samples: the final drafts of the three papers, and her reflective essay. There was no selected journal entry as she mentioned in the first interview. The teacher explained that she used the portfolio submission handouts from the previous quarter and forgot to add the journal part. In the end-of-quarter interview, Fu consistently expressed her opinion that portfolios served two
goals: (1) allowed students more freedom in terms of deadlines and time schedules; and (2) increased students’ sense of responsibility for learning. In her case, she took the risk of changing to a different topic for her paper #1 and started concentrating on it two weeks before the portfolio due date. As she recalled, it felt like she did not finish her first paper until the last minute. She admitted that she had been postponing working on paper #1, which led to a very hectic and “crazy” quarter’s end. The “craziness” that Fu experienced reflected the tradeoff of the freedom advantage. As Fu admitted, procrastination took root in the end, despite the obvious importance of self-responsibility and self-disciplining that she repeatedly emphasized in the first two interviews. In her opinion, whether or not a student benefits from portfolios is dependent on whether he or she is disciplined enough to take responsibility in his or her work. She reported herself as not having enough discipline and procrastinating too much.

In spite of Fu’s self-description of not being well disciplined, Fu’s teacher, Joy, described her as one of the several students who made the best use of portfolio grading by completing substantial revisions. Many of Fu’s classmates either did not revise at all and placed their first drafts in their submitted portfolios or only made minor revisions.

Fu acknowledged that portfolios played a significant role in her class for the single reason of the high percentage of the portfolio component in the final grades. She did not seem to think that it was fair for portfolios to carry so much weight. “What about journals,” she inquired, “we also worked hard on journal responses too?” However, she decided that it was not her responsibility to argue about the issue of what percentage portfolios or journals should receive:
She’s the teacher. She got the rules. It’s her class. We just have to follow her rules. We only have three papers. Not a big job either. Oh well, I don’t care. [Fu, Third interview, Spring 2002]

To her, there was nothing she or her classmates could do about the teacher’s “rules.” Nor did she care much to have those rules changed or reformed. In her opinion, students might just as well take whatever rule that the teacher had stipulated.

Fu did not show any desire to get her portfolio back. She had saved all her papers on her disks. There seemed no point in getting back the portfolio. Furthermore, she also reported that she did not plan to look at her portfolio any more in the future. She explained that she was “lazy” and not a “studious” student.

Despite her lack of interest in portfolios as collections of written products, her general attitude toward portfolios as a process that brought more freedom but also required more responsibility was positive. Her experience with writing portfolios seemed to indicate that, essentially, portfolios provided the opportunity as well as encouraged what good writing practice needs: long-term endeavor and risk taking. These two features are frequently reported in the professional writing literature.

**Portfolio Reflective Writing**

*110 Portfolio Reflective Essay.* Table 4.1 displays coded results of Fu’s portfolio reflective essay. Entitled “A growing process,” it primarily focused on reporting her writing development in terms of her writing process, and specifically her strategies for “developing authority” in the three papers she composed during the quarter.

Among the fifteen self-assessment comments, eight focused on different aspects of her writing processes: five belonging to the subcategory of general strategy, two falling into the subcategory of task specific strategy, and one in the subcategory of
general intention. In addition, there were three comments that represented her growing sense of audience awareness, three general self-assessment comments, and one affective comment. Finally, there was one comment on course/teaching.

She did not cite specific examples from her papers. However, she did try to situate all her comments within her papers.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Categories</th>
<th>Count</th>
<th>Comments</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Self-assessment</td>
<td>15</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| General                 | 3     | “I learnt a lot from this essay. I became more aware of the issues around campus….”  
|                         |       | “I am not a great writer”                                                 |
|                         |       | “I am just an ordinary person who wants to share my little experiences”    |
| Affective               | 1     | The evaluation essay was “my favorite”                                     |
| Writing Process         |       |                                                                           |
| General intention       | 1     | “I needed about 3 hours to come up with an idea for this essay (evaluation)” |
| General strategy        | 5     | “I learnt how to describe something vividly”                              
|                         |       | “adapting someone’s idea”                                                 |
|                         |       | “Tell people what I want”                                                 |
|                         |       | “let my ‘little voice’ out”                                                |
|                         |       | “share my little experiences”                                             |
| Task-specific strategy  | 2     | “I was trying to evaluate the idea and developing the authority by giving my personal experience in the beginning of the essay”  
|                         |       | “I tried to develop my authority by describing how scary it was…”         |
| Audience awareness      | 3     | Develop authority “to make people interested in my essay”                 
|                         |       | “I was hoping to make people …feel the scary plot…”                      |
|                         |       | “ I think the way to understand the whole me is by understanding what I wrote” |
| Comment on course/teaching | 1  | “This is my first ‘real’ English class”                                    |

Table 4.1: Fu’s Coded Reflective Essay  
(* “Count” refers to the number of comments found in students’ reflective writings that fell in the corresponding category or subcategory.*)
**Reflection on the reflective essay.** In the first interview, when describing the required contents for portfolios, Fu did not mention the reflective essay. In the mid-quarter interview, when asked about this particular essay, Fu responded that she had not thought too much about it. She knew that she was required to write this essay at the quarter’s end and place it into her portfolio. It would not be too difficult to write such an essay, she reported. Her initial impression was that this essay would probably be “similar to memo,” which she was not sure whether or not she still kept. However, on second thought, she decided that keeping the memos would not be of any help to writing the essay because “they are totally different” in that “memo is dedicated to certain people [the teacher]” while “reflection [essay] is just like your progress during the class, the development as a writer.” She reported that her major improvement in writing was in the area of transition from one paragraph to the next, which she described to be one of her biggest weaknesses in her paper #1. She reported that she did much better in this aspect of her paper #2. In addition to being especially cautious, she also attributed this improvement to the more interesting topic of her paper #2. However, this issue was not addressed in her reflective essay.

According to Fu, the reflection involved in writing her reflective essay would probably not be of any help for her to improve writing. It might help the teacher, she suggested, to view students’ progress as well as her own teaching. She seemed to especially emphasize the point that the teacher could identify the part in her instruction that helped students and the part that did not by reading students’ reflective essays.

In the end-of-quarter interview, Fu admitted that she only spent an hour writing the reflective essay. She reported that she had spent so much time working on the regular
essays\textsuperscript{3} that she remembered all the major issues involved. She described herself as being briefly confused and having had difficulty in finding a topic for her reflective essay, since the quarter was only ten weeks long and there seemed “nothing much” to write about. Once she decided on the topic of developing authority, however, composing the essay was reported to be nothing but transferring thoughts from her mind to paper. There was no need to re-read the three essays placed in her portfolio. She reported that she basically just wrote what she had primarily learned in English 110, i.e., developing a theory to arouse readers’ interest. Yet, she did not discuss her major writing improvement that she reported in the last interview. Fu suggested that writing this essay was not very meaningful to her, probably it would be useful to her teacher, who would have a better view of her own teaching and students’ progress. This comment echoed her mid-quarter view on her teacher’s purpose in designing the task of the reflective essay.

She described that her reflective essay was “not really a good one” because she did not have much time and “didn’t put much effort” into this task. However, she mentioned that even if she were given more time, she probably would not want to reflect more and write more in this essay. She was convinced that nobody would be very interested in her portfolio reflective essay: “No one wants to read the process thing. It’s boring.”

**Case Study Report: Raj**

**Background**

Raj was a seventeen-year-old Indian student. He immigrated to the U.S. in 1997 with his family. Upon his completion of high school in the U.S., Raj was accepted the

\textsuperscript{3} “Regular essays,” as indicated in Chapter III, refer to the three formal writing assignments in English 110.
into the undergraduate program at OSU. In the academic year 2001-2002, he was enrolled in the Freshmen Engineering Honor (FEH) Program at OSU.

There seemed to be a paradox in how he identified himself: on the one hand, he did not consider himself to be an ESL learner; on the other hand, he did not report English as his first language. He reported Marathi and Hindi as his first languages. He reported that he only used them occasionally for talking with his friends and seldom for writing. When it came to writing, English was the language he primarily used.

As he recalled, it was “painful” to write in English when he first enrolled in a high school in the United States. The reason, as he described, was that the teachers just asked him to write without telling him how to write. The situation did not get better until he enrolled in English 109.01 at OSU in Summer 2001. With the 109.01 teacher’s guidance, he gradually learned some basic techniques for writing and especially how to catch readers’ attention. He reported that since then, he began to enjoy the processes involved in writing: finding the topic, using strategies, challenging the teacher, and persuading the teacher on some topics. He said that he began to think of writing as “kind of fun.” His self-evaluation of his writing ability was “near 6” on a scale of 1-10.

**Portfolio**

*Previous portfolio experience.* Raj’s previous portfolio experience came from English 109.01, the course he was assigned to upon his acceptance into OSU. He stated that when his 109.01 teacher first talked about the portfolio assignment, he was scared, because prior to 109.01, he had never heard of portfolios. As the quarter went on, he gradually forgot about his anxiety over portfolios. Instead, his attention was shifted to the techniques his teacher taught him, which aroused his interest in writing. At the end of the
quarter, he was relieved when the teacher said that for the portfolio assignment, he just needed to collect his regular essays and then write a reflective essay. When a portfolio was described as a collection of regular course essays and a reflective essay, Raj’s initial anxiety was gone. At this point, portfolios were not a mysterious and distant concept but something solid that he could grasp.

Based on the 109.01 portfolio experience, Raj suggested that portfolios were helpful for learning to keep all the course materials together in an organized manner. He reported that these qualities were important for him as a future engineer. A portfolio, in his words, resembled a “project,” which he frequently had to encounter as an engineering student. Even though he praised portfolios for being a useful device, he did not seem to care much about the actual portfolio as a collection of written products. Half a year had passed since he handed in his 109.01 portfolio, yet it did not seem to have occurred to him to get it back from his teacher. Therefore, what was more important to him was probably the portfolio as a process that helped him learn certain qualities he deemed important to a professional.

**English 110 Portfolio.** During the mid-quarter interview, Raj expressed his understanding of portfolios as “adding up” what he had been doing throughout the course and then submitting the entire collection to the teacher. The portfolio did not have to have a fancy outlook, but had to be well organized and have good content. He believed that during the quarter, there was no need to spend time thinking about portfolios, because

> Throughout the quarter you are actually working on your portfolio, even though you don’t think about it. So once you are done with all these learning, with all these papers, that’s the portfolio. (Raj, Second interview, Winter 2002)
He said that students’ responsibility was to concentrate on improving their regular essays by continuing to revise them until the teacher was satisfied. Certainly students could still make more revisions afterwards if they wanted. In his case, Raj reported that at the end of the quarter, before he started collecting papers for his portfolio, he would reread his finished essays one more time. When he found problems, he would revise them. Actually, as he stated, he was “always revising” throughout the quarter because he knew that “there were always holes in my writing and I can always try to make it better.” As he described, his writing process followed a recursive rather than linear pattern. He would usually spend three to four hours continuously on one essay, feel “sick” of it, stop to work on something else, then come back to it the following day for more reviewing and revision. When he finally stopped making revisions, it was because he could not afford to spend more time on it. For example, when there was a final exam, he would choose to study for the exam instead of spending time revising a completed English essay.

During the last interview, Raj suggested that one immediate benefit brought by the portfolio system was that he had more opportunities for revisions. He said that reviewing various drafts of the persuasive essay made him realize how valuable the opportunities were for him to improve his writing and to learn what good writing practice takes. He described himself as “not a born writer,” so it was especially important for him to keep reviewing and revising until he had a clear thesis and well chosen and well organized supporting evidence. In addition, because Raj’s teacher gave students’ individual papers grade ranges rather than fixed grades, Raj was especially encouraged to keep improving his papers in order to improve his final grade. Raj’s teacher also reported
that Raj was “concerned with improving his writing.” In addition, Raj’s teacher mentioned that Raj did not come to the student-teacher conference often; however, he emailed her a lot of his papers to get feedback.

In the last interview, Raj also repeated his earlier point of view that the portfolio assignment would help him become more organized, which would be important to his future profession. However, the role of portfolios throughout the entire process of writing was, as Raj suggested, limited to providing opportunities as well as incentives for multiple revisions. He reported that neither the process of collecting the completed essays nor the folder that resulted from it seemed meaningful. For the same reason stated by Fu, he did not intend to get his portfolio back. There did not seem any point in getting back the folder since all the papers were already saved on his personal computer. Beyond the point of completion, portfolios, in his eyes, were reduced to mere folders that did not carry much significance. This attitude dominated the third interview, as demonstrated below with three quotes from his conversation:

1. It [Portfolio] is just a format thing, does not have much to do with the content…. It does not make too much difference…. (Raj, Third interview, Winter 2002)
2. I am not more into how it looks or anything… but your content is more important. So first consider content and later on you can have those little dividers and all that, to make it look good. (Raj, third interview, Winter 2002)
3. Portfolio isn’t really anything new. It’s just like, you tied all together everything at the end and give it to the teacher. (Raj, Third interview, Winter 2002)

The above points of view were similar to what he reported earlier in the quarter.

Even though Raj attended English 110 at a different time than Fu did, they had the same teacher, Joy. Their points of view were similar in three aspects: (1) both seemed to value portfolios as a process that impacted students’ writing and learning, even though
they did not emphasize exactly the same aspects; (2) both seemed to attach less value to portfolios as collections of their actual written products; and (3) at the quarter’s end when portfolios were completed, both seemed to view portfolios primarily as collections of work.

Portfolio Reflective Writing

110 Portfolio Reflective Essay. Table 4.2 displayed coded results of Raj’s reflective essay that was placed in his portfolio. Entitled “Development as a writer,” this essay discussed his development as a writer throughout high school, English 109.01, and English 110. Similar to Fu’s reflective essay, one of his primary focuses was the writing process, and specifically the two strategies he learned. However, different from Fu, he did not specifically address each individual paper collected in his portfolio.

Out of the twenty self-assessment comments, there were seven belonging to the category of writing process, including one in the subcategory of general intention, four in general strategy, and two in task-specific strategy. He especially focused on two strategies: “Show vs. Tell,” and “Dialogue.” In addition to the focus on the writing process, he had six general self-assessment comments, three comments indicating his sense of audience awareness (Raj connected comments in this category to the use of the learned techniques), one goal-setting comment, one comment about grammar, and two affective comments. Finally, there was one comment of writing task perception (specific), which was about the type of writing required in portfolio reflective essays.

Comparatively speaking, Raj’s reflective essay was long. It included 2.5 pages. However, he did not cite specific evidence from his portfolio samples, in spite of the one
major strategy he discussed in his essay, “show vs. tell.” He simply stated that in the past he would “only say or tell” without “showing,” which, he realized, was the characteristic of “immature writing.” Raj did record a short dialogue between him and his high school English teacher about the problem of his writing. It was probably risky to treat this dialogue as the evidence of his consciousness of the other major strategy he mentioned.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Categories</th>
<th>Count*</th>
<th>Comments</th>
</tr>
</thead>
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<tr>
<td>Self-assessment</td>
<td>20</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>General</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>“I didn’t feel any improvement”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>“I thought that my writing in those days [high school] sounded absolutely rubbish”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>“I did not give any effort to improve… I was not getting enough help”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>“I have a little understanding in how to approach writing a good paper”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>“I can write paper confidently with very little of B.S.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>“freshman year in high school, my writing was never appealing…”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>General</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>“Worries grew even more… heard… college writing… harder”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>“Writing test placed me in 109.01… which was no surprise”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Goal Setting</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>“I still need … improvement in the use of show vs. tell”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Surface Features</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grammar</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Last year of high school teacher recognized my problem of “grammar”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Writing Process</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>General intention</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>“I can… with much hard work”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>General strategy</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>“started to understand how … make it more interesting… show vs. tell”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>“The use of techniques … has matured me”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>“use once in a while the show vs. tell. The way I used to do…only to say… immature writing”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>“need support and evidence to back up an argument”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>“Dialogue gives life to a paper”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Task-specific strategy</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>“Persuasion requires having more than one point of view for it to be effective”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Audience awareness</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>“[high school writing] not interesting enough to get a response”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>“make it [writing] more interesting to read”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>“Using dialogues, a reader can really feel and live throughout the moment the writer has.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Specific</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>“It is hard to B.S. in these types of papers [final reflective essay.”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4.2: Raj’s Coded Reflective Essay

(* “Count” refers to the number of comments found in students’ reflective writings that fell in the corresponding category or subcategory.)
Reflection on the reflective essay. During the second interview, Raj expressed a positive attitude towards the reflective essay. He recalled his experience of composing the portfolio reflective essay, which was, as he described, “rather meaningful.” As for the cause of this “meaningfulness,” he attributed it to the learning of a different type of writing that served to explain his progress, his writing, and his maturation process.

Raj’s teacher Joy, while reading Raj’s portfolio reflective essay, noticed that he did not cite any specific evidence from his papers to support his comments, which, in Joy’s opinion, was obviously a discrepancy to the strategy that Raj had emphasized so much in exactly the same essay — “show vs. tell.” However, in the end-of-quarter interview, Raj displayed a different interpretation for the use of this technique:

I: You used examples from these three different essays to show how you used these techniques?
Raj: Yeah. For example, in persuasive essay, I learned about all these “show” vs. “tell” and how to double arguments and everything. Then I said in this essay I learned while doing this essay I learned about this. (Third interview, Winter 2002)

Raj seemed to think that, by stating that he learned the technique through writing the persuasive essay, he was not simply “telling” but also “showing.” However, when asked directly whether he cited any specific examples from his papers, he admitted that he did not:

I: Did you use specific examples from your papers?
Raj: Uh… no. Yeah, it would be better to do that. But I did not have the time for that. (Third interview, Winter 2002)

Raj acknowledged that at the moment of writing the reflective essay, he just wanted to finish it as soon as possible. It probably did not occur to him to make use of the strategies he was talking about. As a matter of fact, he admitted that he was not looking at his papers while he was writing the reflective essay. He did not think that he needed to do so.
He reported that he had been reviewing and revising them so many times that he could remember “everything.” This argument was similar to Fu’s in her explanation for not referring back to her papers while writing the reflective essay. When asked whether comparing drafts at different stages would help him to learn how he improved, Raj admitted that he did not keep the old drafts and explained why:

**I:** When you were writing this essay, were you having the old drafts of the three essays to review so that you can say: okay, this is my first very rough draft, this is my final draft which is very polished. Did you look at them and try to see progress?

**Raj:** I did not really look at those things. I had to revise it so much that I already knew what I wrote. You don’t keep those old drafts.... Because, in the old things, I realize that it’s not worth keeping ‘coz they were very (original emphasis) bad, no organization, just talking around the topic. There is no point keeping them. (Third interview, Winter 2002)

Similarly, Fu did not keep her old drafts and did not think it would have any meaning to compare drafts at different stages.

It could probably be inferred that when his writing would constitute the major basis of his grade, Raj employed the learned techniques; however, when there were no “high stakes” involved, these techniques might not necessarily be employed. Raj, same as Fu, seemed to treat the regular essays and the reflective essay with different levels of seriousness: while he should always review and revise his regular essays, the reflective essay, which was just “free writing,” did not necessarily have to go through the same process of multiple reviewing and revisions.

However, on the other hand, Raj also argued that it was the reflective essay that made a portfolio different from a folder. Writing the reflective essay had the potential of helping him identify and reinforce what he had learned. Yet, this was only the ideal situation. The reality, as he described, was:
To be honest, it [writing the reflective essay] was a pain in my ***…. because I had finals coming up right at the corner, a couple of hours. In 109.01 I was not that busy and writing the essay was really helping me. So this time, if we had a little more time for that, this is very helpful because it makes you realize how you have grown, how you have changed… (Raj, Third interview, Winter, 2002)

The reflective writing, which was designed for appropriate instructional purposes, ended up being perceived by Raj to be a waste of time.

**Case Study Report: Jeong**

**Background**

Jeong was a twenty-eight year old finance major from Korea, who transferred to OSU from University of Tennessee. He had been in the U.S. for 3.5 years at the time of the study. Back in Korea, his major post-secondary-school experience was with the military. He did not go to college in Korea. After coming to the U.S., he spent the first half-year “hanging out” with his friends. Later on he took ESL classes for one year and three months in a community college in Tennessee. Then, he attended University of Tennessee (UT) where he took “College Reading and Writing,” which was an equivalent course of English 110 offered at OSU. Different from English 110 at the OSU, where ESL students and the native English-speaking students could be assigned to the same class, the course he took at UT had separate sessions for native English speakers and ESL students. Jeong described that it was a difficult course for three reasons: first, the reading was mostly early American literature using vocabulary he had never seen before; second, he was unfamiliar with the cultural backgrounds depicted in those readings; and third, this was the first time he ever had to write in English.
He claimed that writing in Korean was much more complicated than writing in English, because in his opinion, “in English there’s only one adjective or adverb, but you can use all different ways in Korean language.” In his first language Korean, he never had to write much since after elementary school. So the question about whether he liked to write in Korean seemed to him irrelevant. Later on, he mentioned that he liked to write in English when he did not have to work under the pressure of time. For example, he liked to write at home, where he had easy access to coffee. In addition, for him to enjoy writing, the topic had to be interesting.

He rated his English writing skills as 7 on a scale of 1-10, one of the three highest self-evaluations among the seven participants. In the first interview, he showed confidence in his writing, even though he also admitted that for him, writing was not always easy. He reported that sometimes he could write very fast while other times he was very slow. As a mature student, he tended to be more reflective of his process of learning a second language and held his own philosophies:

Writing and reading is like speaking and listening in English…. Learning speaking is, first thing, I have to speak every day… Even though I speak well, if I did not speak every day, I will forget what I can say already, how I can say. Writing is the same thing, I guess. I think how long or how serious does not matter…. I think I need to do it every day, even though it might be very short and may only contain 2 or 3 sentences. (Jeong, First interview, Spring 2002)

The reality was that with all the courses he took, he could hardly make writing an everyday practice. Even though he already took a higher level English course at UT, he did not regret taking 107, because at least it would force him to keep writing, if not as frequently as he hoped, and he could have his writing checked by his teacher.

He never had much experience taking a writing exam. TOEFL was the first writing exam he ever had to take after elementary school —— in any language. When he
took “College Reading and Writing” at UT, the midterm and final were all multiple choices designated to test students’ understanding and knowledge on the readings. In the community college he attended, the in-class exam he had to take was also a test of reading comprehension. In both places, the writings were all designed to be take-home tasks. Therefore, he had a difficult time adjusting to the in-class writing exam for his 107 midterm, even though he was already given the topic in advance and it was the same type of essay as Essay #1, Comparison-Contrast. He wrote the summary and introduction part in the same way as he did with his Essay #1. He recalled that when he completed these two sections, he had already used up most of his time. As a result, he had to finish the body paragraphs and conclusion in ten minutes. He described the body part of his essay as not well developed. He had ideas but did not have the time to write about them. When reflecting on this experience, he reported that at least he would deal with the final exam more efficiently. However, he argued that making students take timed writing tests could not serve much purpose.

**Portfolio**

*Previous portfolio experience.* Since an early age of 13 or 14, Jeong knew the word “portfolio,” which he reported was quite commonly used in Korea. However, his knowledge about it was not related to any academic settings. He reported that portfolios were mostly used for job interviews to demonstrate achievement. He also said that he had never had the experience of preparing a portfolio for job interviews.

When asked about writing portfolios, he referred to the course “College Reading and Writing” he took at UT:
Jeong: …. I guess I made portfolio in that class. One semester. Actually I don’t know whether I can call it portfolio. I just put everything that I have done and gave the file to my teacher as like a profile, a finished product. I: Did the teacher call that a portfolio or you call that a portfolio? Jeong: I call it a portfolio. The teacher just said ‘file’. I: Why do you think of it as a portfolio then? Jeong: Because what I hear about portfolio in the class here sounds like same thing I did last time. (First interview, Spring 2002)

Jeong reported that for this course, he had five or six writing assignments, all related to the assigned readings. For each assignment he had to write three drafts. For the first draft, the focus was on how well students understood the literature. Students received feedback from the teacher and then read more and revised the first draft. For the second draft, the focus would be on grammar, as he recalled. The third drafts would be evaluated along with the essays written by the native English-speaking students. As an ESL student, Jeong had two more opportunities and also received more teacher help. He described this course as the best ESL course he had taken to help improve his English.

Jeong also reported that his teacher would give each draft a grade. Each draft carried a different percentage in the final grade for the essay. Even though the first draft was only a very small percentage of the final grade, Jeong reported that it was still important: “I never see somebody make better grades if you don’t do first one well.”

Toward the end of the first interview, Jeong did not use the word “portfolio” to describe what he developed for this course, instead he used the word “file:”

I: Did you write a final essay to reflect on what you had been doing during the semester to put into the folder? 
Jeong: No I didn’t have to do that. Actually we did not do anything for the file. Actually it’s kind of like a proof for my teacher and me for my grade. I think it does not have more meaning. Because the students usually have floppy disks for their work. For my work, I have the floppy disk. He had some copy of them. That’s only for the file. (First interview, Spring 2002)
Therefore, what Jeong actually had developed was nothing more than a folder that contained all his work and that could serve as a “proof” of his work. It was the teacher rather than the student that kept this folder. Same as Fu and Raj, Jeong did not think that he needed to get this folder back, because all his essays were already saved on disks. Neither the folder itself nor the process of preparing it seemed to have much meaning for Jeong.

107 Portfolio. Before the first interview, Jeong briefly read the portfolio section in the course packet. He knew the required content for the portfolios: three writing samples and an introductory letter. He mentioned that portfolios could serve as “feedback” to students, because students would have a chance to “think about their work again, show their achievement.” The following passage was quoted from the first interview with Jeong:

If you wrote something yesterday, you looked at it today and then you looked at it again months later, it would be different, I think. Usually, what I am thinking is, I keep all of my writing in my computer. So sometimes I looked at it again, I can see what word is wrong for my writing. But at that time, I did not know that. That’s why I wrote like that. Any kind of writing, even email. Maybe I can see more better ways to write and to explain. (Jeong, First interview, Spring 2002)

Jeong was aware that reviewing his past writing would shed new light on his problems in English writing and how to improve them. When saying “I can see what word is wrong for my writing,” Jeong placed special emphasis on “I.” This reaction seemed to indicate that Jeong realized the importance of developing autonomy in his learning to write in English. In addition to being conscious that reviewing his old work would help him develop autonomy, he also seemed to suggest that autonomy would not occur overnight.
In spite of the fact that he believed in the value of reviewing his old work, Jeong seemed to have doubts about the purpose of the 107 portfolio assignment, as indicated in the following conversation:

**Jeong:** …I am really not sure about why they want to use portfolios.

**I:** So how do you like the idea of using portfolios in an English writing class?

**Jeong:** Actually I don’t care about that very much, because it does not give me much work, I guess. And also I am already doing that sort of thing: keeping all of my work on my computer. (First interview, Spring 2002)

The cause of his doubt, as indicated above, was that Jeong seemed to persist in conceptualizing portfolios as simply a folder that contained all his work. Since he was already doing “that sort of thing,” i.e., keeping all work in a folder, the portfolio assignment did not make much sense to him.

Throughout the second and third interviews, Jeong’s reported perception about the portfolio assignment remained the same. To him, this assignment primarily meant printing out the documents already saved on his computer and placing them into a folder. He argued that an ESL composition course should emphasize improving students’ writing competencies, suggesting that portfolios did not seem useful or necessary for improving ESL students’ writing:

I think the portfolio thing is not a good idea for students who need to improve their English, because anything writing…. I mean, I don’t think students use too much portfolio. It’s just one more work they have to do for the final…. Because ESL classes, the purpose of ESL classes is to improve the international students’ writing, not for normal students…. I am just curious for what reason they design the portfolio thing. (Jeong, Second interview, Spring 2002)

In Jeong’s eyes, the portfolio assignment was mostly an extra task that students had to complete at the end of the quarter. In addition to complaining of not being well informed
about the purposes of the portfolio assignment, he also suggested that teachers or curriculum designers should try to make students develop more interest in working on portfolios:

> Depending on what kind of attitudes the international students have, the outcomes would be much different. So I think the teacher who was designing that course should give students some chance to get interested in that writing. (Jeong, Second interview, Spring 2002)

During the last interview when he reflected upon his experiences with the portfolio assignment, his interest level seemed to remain the same as before. He was not more motivated or interested in spending much time and effort on the portfolio assignment.

In Jeong’s class, there was a “portfolio day,” when students could spend fifty minutes working on their portfolio assignment, with their teacher walking around and answering students’ questions. On this day when students came to the class, most of them had already made their selections and were ready to write their portfolio introductory letters; one student participant (Moto) already handed in his portfolio. However, Jeong had not started the work on the portfolio assignment. He explained that he missed the previous class and did not know that students were supposed to have already started working on this assignment. At the end of the class, some students finished their portfolio letters and handed in their portfolios. Jeong finished reviewing his work and making his selections. He reported that he was not worried. Even in the first interview, he reported that writing the introductory letter would take him thirty minutes to one hour.

Even though he did not seem to emphasize the reflective component of the portfolio assignment, the process of selecting the samples for his portfolio might have involved some reflection, if not as much as what was expected of him. His submitted portfolio included: Summary #1 (with its two drafts) and the two essays (with the second
and the final drafts for each). The reason he chose Summary #1 was that it represented to him his “initial ability to write.” The two essays were chosen because “they were longer than the other things” so that “I can see more work, more of my mistake.”

He did not explain in his portfolio introductory letter why he did not include all three drafts for the two essays. In the interview, he mentioned that looking at his revised versions helped him a lot. It seemed to him that his first draft did not include as much “feedback” value as his drafts that had been revised with his teacher’s help. Similar responses were also observed in the two participants of English 110. Jeong suggested earlier that he needed time to become cognizant of and learn from his past mistakes. Therefore, while the teacher’s comments and feedback could prove to be valuable in an immediate context, giving feedback to oneself and being able to internalize it might take longer. Likewise, given that one academic quarter lasted about three months, lack of a longer-term engagement was probably part of the reason why Jeong did not feel much benefit of the portfolio assignment.

“My own portfolio.” Jeong claimed to have kept a “portfolio” for himself, which contained all written work he saved in his computer, ranging from the written assignments he completed for 107 to other types of writing he did, such as emails he composed. The purpose of keeping this electronic “portfolio” was, as Jeong described:

Every time I need to write any kind of thing in English like email or question to my professor, I just looked over to find something similar in my formal writing. I don’t only explore my writing, but also my revised writing. Sometimes it’s revised by my English teacher. Sometimes it’s revised by my friend who proofread for me. Sometimes some email or writing – I mean it’s mine but not my new one, I just copied and put together what I wrote before and just changed some words. Not for English class because usually English class subject, everything is new to me. But like some email thing. Email usually helped me to get used to writing in English…. (Jeong, Second interview, Spring 2002)
Jeong used his “portfolio” as a writing dictionary that he could refer to in times of need. He usually would not look back at this “portfolio” unless there was some purpose for it. While orally reflecting on his writing improvement in the last interview, Jeong did not seem to be able to identify how his writing had improved. He was able to articulate two weaknesses in his writing: (1) little variety in expressions, and (2) not providing readers with enough contextual information. As for progress, what he did say was: “I made less mistakes, probably.” It appears that, Jeong, though engaged in the portfolio process, was not convinced that the experience had a significant impact on the overall quality of his writing.

**Portfolio Reflective Writing**

*107 Portfolio Introductory Letter.* Jeong’s 107 portfolio introductory letter was a one-page summary of the three writing samples in his submitted portfolio, in which he primarily talked about his strength (“interesting or easy-understanding introduction”) and weaknesses (“assuming that a reader already read the articles and too many grammar mistakes”). Table 4.3 showed the coded results of Jeong’s 107 portfolio introductory letter.
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<tr>
<th>Categories</th>
<th>Count*</th>
<th>Comments</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
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<td>Self-assessment</td>
<td>15</td>
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<tr>
<td>General</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>“Summary #1 as a sample of my initial writing skills when the quarter began”</td>
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<td></td>
<td>“Essay 1&amp;2 showed my improvement during the quarter”</td>
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<td>“can not see a major problem”</td>
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<td>Goal Setting</td>
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<td>“should care about my weakness in progress”</td>
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<tr>
<td>Text Features</td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Content</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>“Connect well between my own experience and the article”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>“Lack of details”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>“Interesting or easy-understanding introduction”</td>
</tr>
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<td>Organization</td>
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<td>“Explains well by sections of the articles”</td>
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<td>Surface features</td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grammar</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>“I made many grammar mistakes”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Writing Process</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>General intention</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>“One of the effective ways to improve my English is reviewing the works I did.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Audience awareness</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>“assuming readers read the articles”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>“get reader’s attention”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>“[I did not] give a reader details about the articles so that a reader may be confused”</td>
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<tr>
<td>Writing Task Perception</td>
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<td>Specific</td>
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<td>“summary 1 is one page short length summary of an article…”</td>
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<tr>
<td>Portfolio Process (General)</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>“Preparing this portfolio let me have time to review my assignments and realize my weak and strong part”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4.3: Jeong’s Coded 107 Portfolio Introductory Letter
(* “Count” refers to the number of comments found in students’ reflective writings that fell in the corresponding category or subcategory.)
Among the fifteen comments of self-assessment, there were four general ones, three on content, and three on audience awareness. It seemed that the two primary focuses of Jeong’s letter were (1) demonstrating his developing sense of audience awareness, and (2) content of his written texts. In addition, there were one goal-setting comment, one grammar comment, and one general intention comment in the writing process category.

The other two categories that emerged in his letter were writing task perception, and portfolio process (general). Jeong was the only participant who commented on the general impact of the portfolio assignment on him in reflective writings, though very briefly.

Jeong’s letter was mostly being brief and did not go into depth, even though specifics were briefly addressed, such as the content or organization of his essays. He twice mentioned his problem of not giving enough details to readers. However, ironically, his letter itself did not contain any detailed evidence from his work.

In comparison with most of his classmates’ letters, Jeong’s teacher Jane thought that Jeong’s letter “tried very hard to be analytical and talk about larger issues than grammar and vocabulary.” Jane also pointed out that his “reflections” were actually from her comments on his papers. However, Jane did not think that Jeong was to blame for this problem. He did what he could do. In the two quotes below, Jane commented on Jeong’s reflective letter:

(1) His reflection is heavily based on my comments on his papers. For example, one of the discussions we had during the quarter was about giving the reader enough information about the texts he was using. In other words, I told him I thought he was writing with the assumption that his reader had already read the texts he was discussing…. The areas he
identified in his portfolio as “needing work” were areas I told him he needed to work on. He noted his improvement (or development) based on my comments….(Jane, Second interview, Spring 2002).

(2) It’s a good fake. His portfolio is a good fake…. Now when I say “fake,” this is not a criticism. I think Jeong knows what a portfolio is supposed to look and sound like, and he did it. This is an essential part of being a successful student. It is also a valuable part of finding your way inside a cultural practice: you do what you think you are supposed to do. Jeong did a good portfolio. He did what we asked (Jane, Second interview, Spring 2002).

Jane suggested that Jeong, by producing a “fake” portfolio, probably did not get the potential benefits of portfolios. However, she also indicated that how students dealt with an assignment was related to how teachers presented this assignment.

Reflection on the introductory letter. Both during the first and the second interview, Jeong expressed his opinion that writing the letter at the end of the quarter would not be very meaningful or valuable:

(1) I like to write, but that letter, in the final period of time when I am busy, it can be a burden. I can write that letter in an hour or 30 minutes. If I want to get good grades, then…. Depending on what kind of attitude I have, that letter, the writing time would be different….If I really pay attention to that. But I don’t want to do that. It does not help my English writing or anything. What I think is, when final comes, if I have to write that thing, I should do that. I should just finish that writing as fast as possible. (Jeong, First interview, Spring 2002).

(2) Just like what I said before, if I have much time, I can do that. But if don’t have time, it would be just like writing one more homework. So I will not really analyze what my progress was. (Jeong, Second interview, Spring 2002).

Jeong seemed to suggest that writing the letter was a waste of time since it would not be of any help to his writing. However, it was an assignment, so he would complete it. He
argued that the course designers should find ways to make students interested in writing this letter. In his opinion, “nobody really wanted to take the class —– it is required and students don’t get to choose.” Therefore, grades became the major concern. However, the reality was that portfolios were less than 5% of student’s final grades. Jeong also believed that it was easy to write a one- or two-page letter talking about his essays. He did not think that there would be much work or reflection involved in it.

Jeong finished writing his letter within about thirty minutes, just as he predicted in the first interview. He explained that it was easy because the course packet provided a very clear formula for the organization of this letter.

Jeong admitted that writing about what he learned would help reinforce the learning:

I think why writing is important in education is even though you know something, and you think something, by writing about it, it becomes more clear in your mind. That’s why the design of this portfolio. That’s the purpose. (Jeong, Third interview, Spring 2002)

In essence, because of the serious reflections that the writing procedure involved, the learned knowledge or skills became “more clear.” Here, Jeong’s opinion seemed to have changed, compared to the first interview, when he said that he did not understand why portfolios were required in this course and that writing the letter would make no difference to his writing. The process of composing the letter and then reflecting on it uncovered the potential value of the portfolio and the letter. However, to what extent had this potential been realized? In the first interview, he argued that it would depend on how much time and effort students spent composing this letter. At the end of the quarter he still believed in this point, saying that he would have benefited more from writing this
letter if he spent more time on it. However, with the limited time he had during the final exam period, it would not seem wise to spend too much time on the portfolio which was less than 5% of the final grade, at the cost of spending less time on those more “valuable” tasks, that is, tasks that could help improve his GPA. Jeong explained that he had no choice other than to spend more time on tasks that could improve his grades such as “reading the final article,” so that he could write a better final paper that was worth 30% of his final grade. In contrast, the portfolio was only less than 5% of the final grade. It was reasonable, therefore, that Jeong decided to “spend as little time as possible on the letter.”

Throughout all three interviews, Jeong’s opinions about writing portfolios and portfolio introductory letters kept swinging like a pendulum. On the one hand, he believed that students should be able to benefit from portfolios and portfolio introductory letters, in that portfolios could serve as “feedback,” and writing the portfolio introductory letter could reinforce the learned knowledge and skills. On the other hand, he was not sure that these potential benefits were fully realized because students did not have much motivation or interest in spending time on the portfolio assignment.

**Case Study Report: June**

**Background**

June was a 23-year old Korean student majoring in business. She took college courses for three years in Korea before she transferred to OSU. Therefore, when she participated in this study, she was already a senior student and was looking forward to
graduating the following year. Among all seven participants, she was one of the only two whose reported reason for taking the English course was to improve English (The other one was Shim). She started learning English at the age of twelve, and continued throughout middle school and high school.

June had only been in the U.S. for ten months. Before coming to OSU, she took a TOEFL preparatory course in New York City for six months. She reported that the six-month training was helpful in improving her writing, especially in learning how to write fast. She was still worried about her English, because she would like to work in America after her graduation. She reported wanting to improve her English through numerous ways, such as watching TV, listening to other people talk in English, and taking 107. Even though she seemed to primarily focus on improving her listening and speaking skills, she was also eager to improve her writing. However, she reported writing as being very difficult for her.

EDU T&L 107 was the first ESL writing course she ever took. She seemed to be nervous about it, because she did not think of herself as a good writer and she did not like writing at all. The reason for her dislike of writing was: “If I write something, I feel everyone knows, everyone reads my thinking.” She reported having many ideas at the brainstorming stage; however, when it came to writing them down in her own words, it became extremely difficult:

It’s just in my brain. I thought: oh, I can write well. Then I have some idea: how can I write something like that. Then I arranged them in my brain. But writing is different. I think writing required a lot more. I think some writing is important. (June, Second interview, Spring 2002)
One of the major problems she reported with writing in English was that she could not write long sentences and long paragraphs. To her, a good writer would first and foremost be able to produce nice long sentences and nice long paragraphs. She had high expectations for English 107 because on the first day, the teacher told students that they would learn how to write “nice long essays.”

Another problem she reported with writing was that she did not have an adequate vocabulary. She considered it to be a “big problem” because she had many things to say, yet sometimes she could not find the words.

Before taking 107, she heard of the word “portfolio” from her friends majoring in art, for whom portfolios meant folders where all the work was stored. She thought that the portfolios required in 107 would probably be the same. Therefore, she was not worried about the portfolio assignment at all. The letter that she had to write for her portfolio did not concern her as much as the other writing tasks because, it was “just a short letter,” as she described in the first interview.

**Portfolio**

107 Portfolio. This was the first portfolio assignment June ever encountered. June also reported that in the past, she had never developed a writing folder. In both the first and second interview, she described that she had no idea about why the department designed the portfolio assignment. In the first interview she reported that they were possibly designed for students to present themselves “logically.” In the second interview, she viewed portfolios as “something that could show the difference, from first one to last
one.” Even though she still did not quite understand the purpose of the portfolio assignment, she still reported that it would be helpful to her writing:

I think it [portfolio] will be helpful to me. I have to show everything to my teacher. I show the first draft and she checked it for me. Then I showed her the second draft. Then I showed her final draft. I think it is the best way to learn how to write. Yeah, knowing the process will be helpful, an important part….Doing different drafts and knowing the process is better. (June, Second interview, Spring 2002)

June seemed to appreciate portfolios for the opportunity of working on multiple drafts and reviewing her writing processes. Even though before taking 107 she had never been required to go through multiple drafts, she was convinced that working on multiple drafts and keeping revising were better ways to improve writing, when compared to the single-draft approach commonly used in her previous schooling in Korea.

During the first two interviews, June mentioned that she did not have a clear idea as to what she had to do for the portfolio assignment and what had to be included in her portfolio. During the second interview, she said that she had saved everything in a folder, including all drafts of her first summary, her second summary, and her first essay. She did not know what she was going to do with this folder. She reported that once in a while, she would review it because, “I want to get good grades.” She believed that “checking” her own work helped her learn from her mistakes:

When I write something and then I turn in to the teacher, the teacher checks it. Right? Then I got some grade. But at that time, I knew which draft is better. But when I write again, often I make the same mistakes again. So at the time if I check my own product, it’s very helpful. I would never make the same mistake again. (June, Second interview, Spring 2002)
June was aware that improvement in writing would not happen if she just waited for the
teacher to tell her what was wrong and how to correct it. She knew that she had to be able
to learn from her own mistakes by reviewing and reflecting on them.

In June’s class, students were not given the freedom to choose any three samples
for their portfolios. Therefore, everyone had to follow the directions in the course packet:
the first two samples could be anything from the course while the third sample had to be
the in-class writing. For each sample, all drafts had to be included. The three samples that
June chose were: Synthesis-response Essay, Summary #2, and one piece of in-class
writing. She described her selection process as follows:

I had two essays. I chose the better one into my portfolio. I spent more
time on this….In the case of summaries, I chose summary two. The other
one is better than this one – I mean grade is better, totally better. But I
chose this one because first one is very easy for me and second one is little
bit difficult. I spent more time on this one. Yeah, grade is not good.
Anyway, I invested more time and more effort and whatever. So I chose
this one. And in class writing, I picked up anything because they are all
the same. (June, Third interview, Spring 2002)

Throughout all three interviews, June expressed concern for her grades. However, she did
not use grades as the only criterion for determining what to choose for her portfolio.
Instead, her decisions were based on the time and effort she devoted.

June made title page for each sample in her portfolio. The three title pages were
named respectively as follows: “Portfolio Sample #1,” “Portfolio Sample #2,” and
“Portfolio Sample #3.” In addition, she also made title pages for her two introductory
letters, each of which contained not only the title she gave to the letters (“Portfolio 1” and
“Portfolio 2”), but also her name, the teacher’s name, the course number, and the date of
completion. It seemed that June treated the introductory letter as a formal assignment.
June could not articulate very well to this researcher what effect the portfolio assignment had on her, except that it forced her to review her work.

**I:** After you finished choosing samples for your portfolio and writing the introductory letter, did you feel that you learned something?

**June:** Actually I don’t know what is the good effect or what is the effect for me. I don’t know. But I think… it’s a chance to review my work.

**I:** So after you review your work, what was your impression?

**June:** First, my impression, I a little bit regret for myself.

**I:** Why?

**June:** Because I think I can get better grades. I mean I can do more good job. I think. But I did not do my best, first I realized that when I read my writing.

**I:** Why was what?

**June:** Because…. I don’t know. It’s kind of excuse. But it’s my first quarter; so I am too busy and then I am not used to everything, to school, to homework; so I can’t concentrate on my work this quarter. But I tried, I tried, I know, but I can’t. So you know, I will do next quarter something. I have to take 108 next quarter. It’s time to think about that, I will do more good job next quarter…. First problem is grammar – I can mistake a lot about the same grammar. Especially I have some problem with comma, because I am not used to put coma. So I mistook several times, same mistake. But after portfolio or after writing, I think about it whenever I write something, I become careful, I am careful with my grammar…. (Third interview, Spring 2002)

When I prepared for this portfolio, I realized that during the quarter, I was being lazy. At that time, I thought it was because I didn’t have enough time to do other things. But I had time. Just… I was busy to think about, to write. You know, if I tried more to write early, to study early…. But it does not matter now. I did not. That’s why I am regretful. Then so when I prepared for portfolio, I regret my attitude or behavior. So portfolio gave me this time to think about that. (June, Third interview, Spring 2002)

The two conversations quoted above contained June’s reflections on her experiences with the 107 portfolio assignment. This assignment did not seem to have much immediate influence on her except making her review her work and reflect on her effort and progress. An overall result of reviewing was the realization that she did not make enough effort and she could have done better. In terms of specific problems, she only mentioned
grammar and comma usage. As a consequence of her “portfolio work,” she set up a goal for the next English writing class 108.01: “to do more good work.” However, when asked about her specific goals, June admitted she did not have any yet.

June reported that the courses she took within her major were very demanding. As a result, she did not have much time for the English course. Therefore, it was very helpful that, at the end of the quarter, she could have an opportunity to go over all the work she had done and think about her progress and problems. Therefore, she seemed to value the portfolio assignment very much. Different from Jeong, June did not think of the portfolio assignment as a burden.

June frequently expressed anxiety about her grades. She mentioned three times during the third interview that she wanted to get good grades. She also lamented that, if she worked harder instead of finding excuses and being lazy, she could have earned better grades for the courses she was taking. In the first and second interview, there were also multiple occasions when she reported her concern for grades. However, as the quarter went on, grades were not her only focus; instead, she seemed to value “thinking” more:

I: For this course, portfolio is only about 3% of the grade. So it’s not going to make too much difference to your grade?
June: I know. But I think… I don’t know. Thinking is more important.
I: So grade is not important?
June: (Laughing) anyway…. (Third interview, Spring 2002)

Even though she knew well that the portfolio was a very small percentage of her final grade, June still treated it seriously. She chose to spend over three hours (more than all the other participants) in writing the letter. It seemed that, between reinforcing her
learning through reviewing and thinking and how her efforts and progress might be judged by outside authorities, she placed more importance and emphasis on the former.

**Portfolio Reflective Writing**

107 **Portfolio Introductory Letter.** June included two versions of the portfolio introductory letter in her portfolio, which she named “Portfolio 1,” the longer version, and “Portfolio 2,” the shorter version. She wrote an extra paragraph on top of her “Portfolio 1,” explaining the reason for including two versions. She claimed that “Portfolio 1” was better “in terms of contents,” because the 1.5-page limit was “too strict to explain enough my whole performances I made much efforts [sic] during this quarter.” Table 4.4 and Table 4.5 displayed the coded results of the two introductory letters.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Categories</th>
<th>Count*</th>
<th>Comments</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Self-assessment</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>“not easy to follow the course entirely…because of my unfamiliarity in English writing or thinking”&lt;br&gt;“developed my writing and reading skills much more than the first of this quarter”&lt;br&gt;“hard training to give us good skills as an effective reader and writer” (2)&lt;br&gt;“Progress showed from first draft to final one through training in this class”&lt;br&gt;“The more effort I put in out-class writing, the better offhand writing I can do in class”&lt;br&gt;“training in writing class is the best for me to improve my skill”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>General</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>“still need to devote more attention to do it (proofreading) well”&lt;br&gt;“If I continue to train using the good advice I got in the class, I believe I will be a good reader and writer”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Goal Setting</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>“still need to devote more attention to do it (proofreading) well”&lt;br&gt;“If I continue to train using the good advice I got in the class, I believe I will be a good reader and writer”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Surface features</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grammar</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>“it was not difficult for me to find grammar errors in TOEFL…I used to not be able to take advantage of my grammar knowledge entirely when I wrote earlier this quarter”&lt;br&gt;“agreement of subject and verb”&lt;br&gt;“improved my skill of putting my grammar knowledge to practical use”&lt;br&gt;“Articles and prepositions still vexing… I can handle them well by using … grammar knowledge and concentrating on errors that would happen”&lt;br&gt;“whenever I wrote I gave attention to my work carefully and I could get much progress (in grammar)”&lt;br&gt;“I found that reading a passage is different from writing… in terms of … usage … grammar”&lt;br&gt;“I was always afraid to choose the best preposition”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Writing Process</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>General strategy</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>“Struggle with the unfamiliar paraphrasing problem”&lt;br&gt;“Learned and repeated the skill how to proofread to be an experienced writer”&lt;br&gt;“able to do proofreading better”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Writing Task Perception</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>General</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>In-class writing more difficult for international students than out-class writing.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Specific</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>“In English, Summary means paraphrasing and abbreviating…”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Quote/evidence from selected samples</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>“When they meets a homeless….”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Difference between English and first language</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>“paraphrasing not emphasized in Korean”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reading-writing connection</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>“good paraphrase skills…completed after being a good reader”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intention of the letter</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>“explaining my work”&lt;br&gt;“review overall development or process as a writer or reader”&lt;br&gt;“Meaningful job to confirm or review what I should do to be a good reader/writer in English”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4.4: June’s Coded “Portfolio 1”

(* “Count” refers to the number of comments found in students’ reflective writings that fell in the corresponding category or subcategory.)
“Portfolio 1” started with the intention of the letter: (1) explaining her work; (2) reviewing her overall development and process as a reader and writer in 107; and (3) reviewing what she should do to be a good reader and writer. Following the intention of the letter was a general comment of her progress over the quarter, in comparison to that of the first part of the quarter. She then evaluated herself in the context of the course.

In the body paragraphs, among the eighteen self-assessment comments, there were six general comments and seven grammar comments. Among the seven comments on grammar, six were in the paragraph on the choice of Essay #2. The reason why June chose this essay was because she learned how to use grammar knowledge effectively in writing. She realized that even though she might be able to pick out grammar mistakes from a given text or sentence in exams like TOEFL, when it came to her own writing, she often made the same mistakes. She illustrated her problem with subject-verb agreement by citing from her own writing. She also pinpointed two other areas in which she had problems: the use of articles and the use of prepositions. It seemed that the major focus of the letter was on grammar.

In addition, she had three comments on writing process, all in the subcategory of general strategy, with one about her struggle with paraphrasing and the other two about proofreading. Finally, she also included two goal-setting comments, one being specific and one being general.

The body paragraphs also included: one comment on the difference between English and Korean, one comment about the reading-writing connection, and two comments on how she viewed the writing tasks: one being general, the other specifically addressing her interpretation of the task of writing summaries.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Categories</th>
<th>Count*</th>
<th>Comments</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Self-assessment       | 14     | *“developed my writing and reading skills much more than the first of this quarter”  
|                        |        | *“first draft showed different things to final one in terms of progress”  
|                        |        | *“training in writing class is the best for me to improve my skill”  
| General               | 3      | “If I continue to train using the good advice I got in the class, I believe I will be a good reader and writer”  
| Goal setting          | 1      | “If I continue to train using the good advice I got in the class, I believe I will be a good reader and writer”  
| Surface features      |        |                                                                                                                                                                                                 |
| Grammar               | 6      | “I found that reading a passage is different from writing… in terms of … usage … grammar”  
|                        |        | “agreement of subject and verb”  
|                        |        | “improved my skill of putting my grammar knowledge to practical use”  
|                        |        | “whenever I wrote I gave attention to my work carefully and I could get much progress (in grammar)”  
|                        |        | “Concentrating on errors that would happen”  
|                        |        | “I am always afraid to choose the best preposition”  
| Writing Process       |        |                                                                                                                                                                                                 |
| General strategy      | 3      | “Struggle with the unfamiliar **paraphrasing** problem”  
|                        |        | “Learned and repeated the skill how to **proofread** to be an experienced writer”  
|                        |        | “able to do **proofreading** better”  
| Writing Task Perception|       |                                                                                                                                                                                                 |
| Specific              | 1      | “Summary in English means paraphrasing and abbreviating…”  
| Intention of the letter| 3      | “explaining my work”  
|                        |        | “review overall development or process as a writer or reader in 107”  
|                        |        | “Meaningful job to confirm or review what I should do to be a good reader/writer in English”  

Table 4.5: June’s Coded “Portfolio 2”  
(* “Count” refers to the number of comments found in students’ reflective writings that fell in the corresponding category or subcategory.)
“Portfolio 2” started with the same three-fold intention in briefer language. Then, as in “Portfolio 1,” June gave the same general comment of her progress in comparison to her progress during the first part of the quarter. Compared to the eighteen comments of self-assessment, there were thirteen self-assessment statements in “Portfolio 2.” “Portfolio 2” was actually formed by deleting some sentences from “Portfolio 1” and keeping the remainder part intact. For example, among the general self-assessments, June chose to delete the sentence that talked about her struggle with the course owing to her “unfamiliarity” to “English writing or thinking.” Then, in the grammar part, she omitted the comment about being able to find errors with TOEFL texts but not being able to write grammatically correct sentences in her own writing. Further, she discarded comments on three other aspects: differences between Korean and English, reading-writing connection, and in-class writing being difficult for international students. In summary, her primary focus remained the same, grammar.

**Reflection on the introductory letter.** Initially, June thought that it would be very easy to write the letter because the she only had to write 1.5 pages. She predicted that, within 1.5 hours, she would be able to complete the letter. In the end, she spent about five hours reviewing the samples, thinking about all the work she did, and writing the letter. Writing the letter cost her three hours. She admitted that she did not realize her improvement until she finished the letter. During the quarter, she was too busy to have any time to seriously reflect on her work. She did not hesitate in saying that composing the letter for the portfolio turned out to be a meaningful activity for her:
Because I have to think about my whole work. You know, I have to review everything. I think about my improvement. Actually I did not realize my improvement. Actually I did not have time to think about it during the quarter. So it took longer.... (June, Third interview, Spring 2002)

(2) It’s meaningful. (June, Third interview, Spring 2002)
(3) It makes me become better. (June, Third interview, Spring 2002)

June did not show any regret over spending much time on this letter, because reviewing her work seriously and writing about it would help her become a better writer, as she reported.

June also reported enjoying the experience of being able to write freely about her thoughts, compared to the essays, in which she had to follow strict formats and keep counting the words. This probably explained why June, who complained about having difficulty writing long essays, exceeded the 1.5-page limit in her “Portfolio 1.”

**Case Study Report: Tim**

**Background**

Tim was a 21-year-old Chinese-Indonesian majoring in Operations Management, and had been in the U.S. for more than two years at the time of the study. He completed his last year of high school (1999 – 2000) in Michigan and spent his freshman year at Michigan State University. He transferred to OSU in 2001 and took a placement test. As a result, he was assigned to EDU T&L 107. Interestingly, he had already fulfilled the requirement of English courses for ESL students at Michigan State University.

Tim described himself as liking to write because it enabled him to tell what was on his mind. In Indonesia, Tim went to Indonesian schools, where Indonesian was the language of instruction. He started learning English at the elementary level. He evaluated
his English writing skills as 7 on a scale of 1 – 10 and reported “A” as the typical mark received from past instructors on his writing assignments. Even though he did not think of himself as a poor writer, he reported having difficulties with grammar and vocabulary while writing in English. This difficulty reduced his enjoyment of writing.

**Portfolio**

*Previous portfolio experience.* Tim reported that the first time he heard about portfolios was when he took an English literature class in high school in America. However, he could only remember two things about portfolios: (1) they were collections of papers, and (2) they were used in writing classes.

Having never written much in English when he was in Indonesia, Tim described this course as difficult but also helpful for improving his writing in English. He was required to write every day in his journal on self-chosen or teacher-assigned topics. At the end of each week, he chose the best entry from his journal to submit to the teacher, who would read his selected entry and then comment on various aspects such as grammar, vocabulary, and content. For every piece in his journal (including the ones he submitted to his teacher), he only did one draft. At the end of the semester, he placed all journal entries in one folder and submitted the folder to the teacher. He reported that this folder provided him a picture of his development as a writer in English. He described that his initial grammar was “totally messed up,” and that other aspects of his writing were weak too. When asked whether he still kept that folder, Tim reported that he did not. He was not certain whether this folder was a portfolio. He recalled that the teacher only briefly mentioned portfolios; therefore, the concept of portfolios was very vague to him.
107 Portfolio. In the first interview, Tim related the portfolio assignment in 107 to his high school experience of making a folder with all journal entries he completed. When asked whether he liked the portfolio system, he responded that, as long as it helped him improve his writing, he would not mind doing extra work.

In the second interview, his general impression about portfolios remained unchanged from what he reported during the first interview, i.e., a collection of papers. Despite the fact that in the past two months he seldom thought about the portfolio assignment, he gained more knowledge about portfolios and had some idea about what he had to do for the portfolio assignment. He reported that for the portfolio assignment he would have to place all drafts of his written work into a folder. He said that the purpose of showing all drafts was to help the teacher see his improvement throughout the quarter. He also reported that, by placing all his work together in one folder, he would be able to review his strengths as well as weaknesses.

During the second interview, when asked whether he had started working on the portfolio assignment, Tim said that he already had a portfolio. His portfolio contained all the materials related to the course, including all drafts for Summary #1, Summary #2, and Comparison-Contrast essay, as well as his in-class writing and messages that he posted online. To the question about whether he ever looked back at this portfolio, he replied that he reviewed it once before the midterm. This review, he reported, helped him reinforce his knowledge on topic sentences, thesis statements, and the organization of the particular essay that he was supposed to write for the midterm.

When asked about his concerns about the portfolio assignment, Tim mentioned that he had to select the best ones to submit to the teacher, therefore the portfolio he had
now could not serve this purpose. At this moment, he had no idea which were his best pieces; but he was not worried, saying that he could wait until the end of the quarter to decide what to choose to place into the required portfolio.

When questioned on why the pieces submitted to the teacher should be the best ones, Tim responded that the teacher asked for the best. For him, “best” was interpreted as best grades. In response to the question about how he could demonstrate improvement if only the best pieces were shown, he replied that the introductory letter would serve the purpose of showing his improvement. He did acknowledge that he never gave much thought to the portfolio assignment in the past two months. According to him, it did not seem necessary, because the teacher never mentioned it after the first time she introduced it.

The third interview occurred the night before Tim was flying back to Indonesia. He had already finished selecting samples for his portfolio and was still in the process of writing the introductory letter. His reported selection criteria changed to “the best improvement,” in comparison to the “best grades” he reported in the second interview. In the end, however, he ended up choosing the work that received the best grades, saying that the best grades represented the “best improvement” to him. The three samples that were included in his submitted portfolio were: (1) Synthesis-Response Essay, (2) Summary #1, and (3) in-class writing #2. For the first two samples, multiple drafts were included, as requested.

In the third interview, Tim reported that working on the portfolio assignment provided him a chance to review his work. When asked what he saw in his work, he

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4 After he finished his letter, Tim phoned the researcher briefly, saying that he did not finish the letter until almost 2 a.m., four hours before his flight.
responded that he improved but could not specify how. He did not seem to attach much value to the reviewing activity. However, he was convinced that students’ submitted portfolios would help the teacher evaluate students’ progress. He also said that he would not get his portfolio back because it would not be of any use to him. Six months later, the researcher ran into him on the street. When asked about his 107 portfolio, he looked confused for a few seconds and then said: “Oh, I don’t need that.”

In summary, Tim seemed to believe that portfolios were designed to help the teacher evaluate students’ progress and to make students review their own work. However, the actual benefits that he reported seemed mostly centering on the first aspect rather than the second. It was unclear whether he engaged in serious reflections on his learning while working on the portfolio assignment.

**Portfolio Reflective Writing**

*107 Portfolio Introductory Letter.* Tim’s 107 portfolio introductory letter was two pages long. In this letter, he talked about thesis statements, plagiarism, and topic sentences; he also cited specific examples from samples collected in his submitted portfolio. Table 4.6 showed the coded results of Tim’s 107 portfolio introductory letter.

Broadly speaking, five major categories emerged in Tim’s letter: intention of the letter, self-assessment, writing task perception, quote/evidence from selected samples, and comment on course/teaching. The first and third category each had only one comment. Within the second category, there were twenty-two comments, among which eleven fell into the general subcategory, which were mostly found in the introduction and conclusion paragraphs. The body paragraphs contained some general comments too, but
primarily focused on his progress in three specific areas: thesis statement, avoiding plagiarism, and topic sentence. In addition, he also included three comments that were in the affective domain, one goal-setting comment, and one comment on his writing process.

Tim’s letter contained sentences quoted from his written texts. Tim also used a blue pen to underline those cited sentences in the selected samples. However, there were comments in his letter that were ambiguous and vague. For example, Tim mentioned that while working on Summary #2 he learnt “an important thing” and he still had “problem on the fiction story.” It was not clear what these two quotes were referring to.

Some of the topics Tim addressed in his letter, such as topic sentences and the “three-word” rule for plagiarism, corresponded to the teacher’s written comments on his work. There was another particular comment from his teacher that asked him to do more proofreading and editing. He did not include this comment in his letter. Tim admitted that he did not have time to proofread his letter, which probably explained the ambiguities and vagueness in his letter. Finally, even though this letter was addressed to his 107 teacher, in the concluding paragraph, Tim referred to his teacher in the third person.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Categories</th>
<th>Count*</th>
<th>Comments</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Self-assessment               | 22     | “obtain many knowledge to improve…”  
“Many progression and improvement”  
“I can write nice long paragraphs…”  
“at the beginning there were a lot of mistakes”  
“I did not have enough knowledge about the academic writing”  
“I am not doing the same mistakes that I did”  
“Understand how to write in the academic writing”  
“in this essay I saw many good progress”  
“In-class writing #2 is a good selection”  
“I learned an important thing”  
“I was not able to understand the text well” |
| General                       | 11     | “Many progression and improvement”  
“I can write nice long paragraphs…”  
“at the beginning there were a lot of mistakes”  
“I did not have enough knowledge about the academic writing”  
“I am not doing the same mistakes that I did”  
“Understand how to write in the academic writing”  
“in this essay I saw many good progress”  
“In-class writing #2 is a good selection”  
“I learned an important thing”  
“I was not able to understand the text well” |
| Affective                     | 3      | “synthesis response, I started to like writing compare to the first essay (compare-contrast)”  
“I like the text”  
“everything … remembered as good memories” |
| Goals setting                 | 1      | “basic components… taught by the teacher will benefit my academic writing” |
| Text Features                 |        |                                                                                                                                                        |
| Content                       | 3      | “unclear thesis statement”  
“in the first draft I did not explain…meaningful connection with my life”  
“copied from the books is plagiarism. Maximum we can only use three words” |
| Organization                  | 3      | “topic sentence on top… because it contains a general statement”  
“learned where to put topic sentence”  
“also the reason it [topic sentence] has to put on the top because is going to make the reader easy to understand” |
| Writing Process               |        |                                                                                                                                                        |
| General Intention             | 1      | “When I come to tutorial Mary explained to me…” |
| Writing Task Perception       |        |                                                                                                                                                        |
| General                       | 1      | “Second essay easier even though the teacher asked me to write more words” |
| Quote/evidence from selected samples | 3      | “I wrote: what was happened… is reflected into …”  
“I have copied … from the book (Marked with blue pen)”  
“I put topic sentence in the bottom (Marked with blue pen).”  
“High technology cannot …” |
| Intention of the letter       | 1      | “Here are some progression that I would like to discuss in this portfolio letter” |
| Comment on course/teaching    | 3      | “Glad that Mary is my teacher”  
“She encourages me with a patient”  
“I want to say thank you for every works … you spend” |

Table 4.6: Tim’s Coded 107 Portfolio Introductory Letter
(* “Count” refers to the number of comments found in students’ reflective writings that fell in the corresponding category or subcategory.)
**Reflection on the introductory letter.** In the last interview, Tim’s responses towards the experiences of writing the portfolio introductory letter were mixed. His oral reports seemed to indicate that he was not well informed about the purpose of the letter and he felt confused as to why students were required to write something that was not meaningful. He acknowledged that he had never written this kind of letter before and did not know too much about it. However, at the same time, he also suggested that this letter might be able to help him become slightly more familiar with academic writing because, in his opinion, the letter should be a piece of formal writing. Later on, he added that writing this letter was probably designed to serve two purposes: (1) helping the teacher evaluate his progress; and (2) helping himself view his own progress. This opinion was the same as what he reported about the purposes of the entire portfolio assignment.

As for the reflective component of this letter, Tim did not seem to think it was playing a very significant role. He argued that his progress, his improvement, and his weaknesses were all contained in his written texts; he did not have to think hard to come up with something to write for this letter. However, writing about what he learned did provide him a chance of “reflecting what I did from the beginning of the quarter until the end.” He admitted that he was not involved in any reflection throughout the quarter, and did not even try to reflect until he began to write the letter for his portfolio.

Tim also reported that one purpose of the letter was to show appreciation to the teacher and saying “thank you” for her teaching. This was exactly what Tim did in the concluding paragraph of his letter. Another student, Shim, also showed a similar pattern in the concluding paragraphs for all three portfolio introductory letters he composed in 107 and 108.01.
Case Study Report: Shim

Background

Shim was a 31-year old Korean majoring in business. He had only been in the U.S. for one year at the time of the study. Before coming to the U.S., he had already obtained a Bachelor’s degree in education and a Master of Science degree in Information Systems in Korea.

Shim claimed that he liked writing in both Korean and English, even though he did not write much. He started learning English at the age of twelve. As he reported, in Korea, English language teaching focused on grammar and reading; none of the previous writing instructions he received emphasized process or revision. The previous writing instructions he reported were mostly related to a three-paragraph formula for essay writing: introduction, body, and conclusion.

Before joining OSU, Shim attended an ESL institute in San Diego for two semesters, which lasted for five months. He started at the level of 103, among six pre-college levels that ranged from 101 to 106. He described that at the beginning of his first semester, his English was “terrible.” After about two and a half months, he enrolled in the second semester, placed into level 105.

He was one of the only two student participants who claimed to take 107 for “improve[ing] my [his] English.” His self-evaluation of his writing skills in English was 5 on a scale of 1-10. Thus, Shim’s report of his writing skills was about average.
Portfolio

Before enrolled in 107, Shim had never had any experience developing a portfolio or writing folder. The first time he heard about the portfolio concept was when he was a first-year college student in Korea. He took an art course called “Introduction to Medieval Art,” where the professor briefly mentioned portfolios as a tool for artists to show their work. At that time, he thought that “portfolio” was special jargon in art and that only artists would have any use for portfolios. Except for this experience, he did not know exactly what portfolios meant. Nor did it occur to him that portfolios could be used for an English class. However, he believed that for a Korean college student, chances were that he/she would have at least heard about the portfolio concept, most probably used in art.

More than ten years later, he encountered portfolios again in the 107 course. In the first interview, he used a metaphor of drawing a flower to illustrate his understanding of how portfolios could be used to aid performance improvement. He drew a flower with a very rough shape on a piece of paper, which he described as the first stage, the rough draft. Then, he drew another picture of the same flower but with more branches and leaves — this was the second stage, improved as compared to the first stage. At last, he drew a third one with even more branches, leaves, and flowers — the third stage, which was almost “perfect,” as Shim described. After all done, he pointed at the three pictures on the paper and claimed that the whole process, with stages #1, #2, and #3, was what a portfolio meant. In the context of writing, he considered portfolios to be a “fundamental” step to improve writing:
I think some students hated portfolio because portfolios need a lot of time to improve the papers than the midterm and final. But I think to improve my writing, that is a fundamental process. So I like portfolio. (Shim, First interview, Spring 2002)

Shim suggested that multiple revisions were necessary to improve writing. Because he believed that portfolios meant multiple revisions, he decided that he liked portfolios. Among all seven participants, he was the only one who reported liking portfolios in the first interview.

In addition to the process of multiple revisions, Shim also described during the first interview that the portfolio was “a summary of all my writing” and was designed so that students could view their starting points and ending points and see how they had improved. Even though he realized the importance of reviewing old work, he admitted that he did not do it often before taking 107. He used a simple sentence to describe his past writing practice: “I just write,” indicating that having an assignment completed was his major goal.

Shim reported two portfolios in the context of 107. One portfolio was for himself, which contained all the materials related to the course, which he described as the “real portfolio.” The other portfolio, which only contained a few selected samples, was for submitting to the teacher as a course requirement.

“My own portfolio” – The “real portfolio.” Every time when he received handouts or his drafts with teacher comments, Shim would punch three holes in them and place them into a binder, which he referred to as his own “portfolio.” During the second interview, he claimed that he would sometimes review his own portfolio to see what he had done and how he had grown. However, he also reported that he did not have much time for reviewing old work.
Shim described that in his freshman and sophomore years as a college student, he would not keep any old writing: “when they were done, they were done.” He would just throw them away, like some of the younger students he observed. Now that he was more mature, he kept all writing he ever did, including this writing “portfolio” he developed for 107. He reported that in the future he would need to take 108.01 and 110, and he would keep all of his writing in portfolios. He described that, ten years later, when he could speak and write fluently in English, it would be fun to look back at these writing “portfolios” and realize how terrible a writer he once was. He emphasized that it was his own portfolio, not the required portfolio he made for the teacher, that would have this value.

107 Portfolio. Shim argued: “there is no meaning to select a few items to show to the teacher.” Therefore, in his opinion, the portfolio he submitted to the teacher did not have much meaning. At the end of the quarter, after he submitted the portfolio, he described the required portfolio in 107 as “artificial” and “not real.” In his opinion, an art portfolio was supposed to contain all the work instead of just the best ones. Until he enrolled in 107, where the teacher told him that writing portfolios were derived from art portfolios, he had never had any personal experiences developing a portfolio. He did not realize that there could be different types of art portfolios just like there were different types of writing portfolios. He believed that every portfolio, including a writing portfolio, would also have to include every piece of writing he completed.

The samples he chose for the required portfolio were the “best improved ones,” as he described. In his opinion, he did what the teacher expected of him, since she said that students’ choices should reflect how they progressed. He chose Summary #1 as his first
sample, which was an informative summary he learned through 107. He reported that his first draft contained many errors; so he devoted a lot of time to improving it based on the teacher’s feedback. Between Summary #1 and Summary #2, the first one showed more improvement than the second one, because the first one had a higher grade. Therefore, he chose the first one to be placed into the portfolio. He chose the Comparison-Contrast essay (Essay #1) as the second sample for his portfolio. Before taking 107, he already knew that he could use the “block” approach to write a Comparison-Contrast paper. In 107, he learned another approach, “point-by-point,” which was what he used in writing this essay. As for the third sample, which had to be a piece of in-class writing, he chose #3, which received the best grade among all the in-class writings. He explained that his in-class writings often received grades such as B or B+, but #3 received an A. When asked whether he thought it was the best one among all his in-class writings, Shim hesitated in giving an affirmative answer; however, he did report that it contained fewer mistakes because “the teacher did not mark too much.”

He agreed that the course portfolio would help the teacher assess students’ writing improvement:

The teacher can see how students have improved in one types of essay. See my Essay #1, my draft #1 has a lot of errors, here is my second and final draft. When the teacher sees all of my drafts from #1 to #3, the teacher felt: oh this student spent a lot of time making better papers. So this is assessment, I think. But in students’ perspective, I don’t think portfolio would help students write. (Shim, Third interview, Spring 2002)

Shim indicated that assessment should reflect students’ effort and improvement, which made portfolios a good assessment tool. Yet, in his opinion, assessment seemed to be teachers’ exclusive arena. Therefore, Shim believed that portfolios would be helpful to
teachers rather than students. While concluding that portfolios would not “help students write,” Shim, like most of the other participants, considered a portfolio to be a collection of students’ work. At this point, he did not mention the “process” aspect, which he emphasized earlier. It seemed that, after experiencing portfolios as they were implemented in 107, his impressions of portfolios were reduced to collections of written texts.

Another issue that Shim seemed to have strong opinions about was related to the final exam. Shim argued that it was unfair that the final exam was a high percentage of his total grade. He spent “hours and hours” on his two essays whereas the final exam lasted about two hours. His complaint seemed to make sense in consideration of his opinion that assessment should reflect students’ effort and improvement.

The third issue that Shim brought forward was about a self-assessment checklist, which was required as part of the portfolio, according to the 107 course packet. Shim was surprised that the teacher did not mention the checklist when discussing the portfolio requirement. He heard from his friends that students previously enrolled in 107 were required to place such a list into their portfolios. He seemed to be disappointed, because he believed that the self-assessment checklist would be helpful to him:

I think every international student don’t know what is my weakest point when I wrote a sentence. So I often mistook the subject and verb order. That has something to do with the word order in Korean. I think if I made a self-assessment checklist, it would be helpful to me. So I realize what my weakest point is. So whenever I write a sentence, I just remind myself what is my weakest point and concentrate so that I don’t make similar mistakes. (Shim, Third interview, Spring 2002)
Even though he did not seem to realize the value of portfolios in terms of students' self-assessment, Shim did believe in the importance of being aware of one’s weaknesses and making effort to improve.

**Portfolio Reflective Writing**

*107 Portfolio Introductory Letter.* Shim repeatedly claimed in both interviews⁵ that portfolios were supposed to be collections of all his work. In the beginning paragraph of his portfolio introductory letter, he stated that he “wanted to show all of [sic] work from the beginning of spring quarter 2002 to the end of it.” Yet, at the end of the same paragraph he admitted, “Now I am going to present 3 of my works: Summary #1, Essay #1, and In-class writing #3.”

Table 4.7 showed the coded results of Shim’s 107 portfolio introductory letter. Basically, no central theme could be found except for brief descriptions of the three samples in the submitted portfolio. In other words, Shim basically listed the major writing tasks that were taught during the course.

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⁵ Because of a schedule conflict, Shim was only interviewed twice throughout Spring 2002, the first quarter of his participation.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Categories</th>
<th>Count*</th>
<th>Comments</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Self-assessment</strong></td>
<td>12</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>General</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>“learned a lot of things”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>“acquired knowledge in English thought”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>“I can write more than before”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>“I got the best grade ….”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>“learned how to write an informative summary”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>“I know how to write comparison/contrast”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Text Features</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Organization</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>“I knew how to do it [first sentence in summary]”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Surface Features</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grammar</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>‘I made grammar mistakes”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Writing Process</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>General intention</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>“…. In-class writing, I tried to write my best in short time”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>General strategy</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>“I learned how to get the main idea of the text”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>“Block and point-by-point gave me a new solution in compare and contrast paper”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>“I have to mention topic sentence in the first of body paragraph”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Writing Task Perception</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>General</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>“This is my first summary”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>“topic of the articles are interesting”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intention of the Letter</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>“show all of the work from the beginning … to the end…”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Comment on course/teaching</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>“great course”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>“Mrs Mary … teach… enthusiastically”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>“I want to thank you for teaching me and other…”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>“I appreciate that”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4.7: Shim’s Coded 107 Portfolio Introductory Letter
(* “Count” refers to the number of comments found in students’ reflective writings that fell in the corresponding category or subcategory.)
Four categories emerged in his letter: self-assessment, writing task perception (general), intention of the letter, and comment on course/teaching. The first category contained twelve comments, including six general ones. Among the four writing process comments, one belonged to the subcategory of general intention and the other three belonged to the subcategory of general strategy.

The most frequently appearing category in his letter was the general self-assessment category, followed by his comments on course/teaching. The third most frequently appearing category was the general strategies employed in writing processes. It seemed that Shim, in addition to showing appreciation to the teacher for her work, primarily discussed general aspects of his written work and his writing processes. As mentioned earlier, his letter was basically a summary of what was taught to the students in the course. He did not cite any specific examples from his selected samples to support his discussions. Finally, even though he addressed the letter to his teacher, Shim referred to the teacher in the third person at the end of the letter. The same phenomenon was also found in Tim’s letter.

**Reflection on the introductory letter.** Shim reported that writing the letter was easy. In fact, it was “just like writing a letter to my friend,” as he described. He reported spending about two hours writing the letter and one hour selecting the samples. The reason that it was easy and not time-consuming was because, as he reported, he did not miss any classes and he claimed to remember everything. To him, “everything” probably meant just a list of the major points that his teacher emphasized. This could probably explain the brevity, dearth of details, and lack of personal touch that featured his letter.
Even though the letter was brief and did not display any particular focus, Shim still reported that after finishing the letter, he felt “a lot of progress.” In fact, he considered the letter to be “the most important thing of the portfolio assignment.” In his opinion, it was the letter that made a portfolio different from a simple folder that stored his work. He was affirmative in saying that writing this letter might be helpful to his writing and was not a waste of time. When asked about how writing this letter could be helpful to his writing, he responded that in the future he might need to do the same types of writing for other courses. For example, in history class, he might need to write a short summary, in which case he could review what he learned in the 107 course. Obviously, his focus was on the practical values of the specific types of writing he learned; and his response to the question indicated what he valued. Whether it answered the researcher’s question or not, what he chose to say was what he considered to be important. In some respects, the perspective he held was not unreasonable, even though it might not have responded to the question as it was intended. Another participant (Moto) also emphasized the practical values of the types of writing tasks students were taught through the course.

Shim questioned the inconsistency he perceived between the teacher’s advocacy of “creativity” and the fact that the teacher showed them some sample letters and told them they could mimic the samples while composing their own letters. He asked: “If the purpose is to make our own words and ideas, why did she show us the sample letter?” He reported that some students, including himself, were confused. He argued:

I think if I had no idea what an introductory letter is, and if I get a chance to be shown another introductory letter written by another student, I would follow this way – this is not my creative words. So what is the purpose? Creative or imitation? (Shim, Third interview, Spring 2002)
Shim described his letter as falling between being creative and being imitation. As a student, he had to follow the prescribed structure: introduction, three body paragraphs discussing the three samples, and a conclusion. He reported feeling unconstrained, because he would have followed such a structure even if he were not provided with such a formula. When asked what part of the letter showed his creativity, he answered that there was no restriction on writing each sentence. When questioned further as to whether “no restriction on each sentence” meant creativity, he acknowledged that he did not know. It could probably be inferred that Shim did not have a sure answer for the question about what part of his letter showed creativity. It was unclear, in addition, whether he truly considered his letter to be creative.

As mentioned earlier, Shim was disappointed that the teacher did not require students to include the self-assessment checklist in their portfolios. When asked about the self-assessment aspect of the introductory letter, his response indicated that he did not realize that the letter could be an expanded version of the self-assessment checklist. In his opinion, the introductory letter was more like the abstract written for a thesis:

I think the introductory letter is kind of, as you know, when you make thesis in graduate school, before we submit thesis, we have to write introductory letter, right? I think this letter is like that, abstract for my portfolio, and thanks for teaching me, you are a nice teacher – I think the introductory letter contains this kind of information. (Shim, Third interview, Spring 2002)

Therefore, to Shim, portfolio introductory letters were more like summaries of what were taught in a course, than self-assessing strengths and weaknesses. This view probably explained the “summary” nature of the letter he wrote. Similar to Tim, Shim also considered that this letter was to show appreciation for the teacher and her teaching.
Case Study Report: Moto

Background

Moto was a nineteen-year-old Japanese student majoring in Aeronautical Engineering. He moved to the U.S. in 1998 with his family because of his father’s job transfer. He “hated studying English and never studied English” before moving to the U.S. He attended an American high school where he was placed in ESL classes.

In terms of his attitudes towards writing, he expressed what appeared to be conflicting points of view. On the one hand, he “liked writing for fun.” He enjoyed writing when he could write anything he liked, when he did not have to care about his grammar, his vocabulary, or spelling. On the other hand, “when it is an assignment, someone grades my essay, then it is no fun to me.” To the very first interview question whether he liked writing in Japanese, without any hesitation, he answered that he hated writing. Later on, he added that he liked talking but did not like writing in any language, Japanese or English, because he could only write about 200 words or some short paragraphs and then had nothing else to say.

It seemed that he reported two types of writing that served different purposes and for different audiences: writing for himself, which was what he enjoyed, and writing for school, which was what he “hated.” The former was probably just recording freely what was on his mind and what he enjoyed talking about.

Moto was not confident of his English writing skills. On a scale of 1-10, he rated himself as 3, the lowest among all the study participants. Here, the writing was probably not any kind of writing but the “school writing” that he hated and could not find much to
write about. Other than not having enough to say, what made writing in English even more difficult was his perceived difference in word orders between Japanese and English, as he reported. He described that he would frequently mix up Japanese and English, which caused a lot of trouble and errors in his English writing.

According to his 107 teacher, Moto was a “delightful student,” “experienced” and “sophisticated” writer, “good ethnographer of culture,” who was “culturally sophisticated…. with a lot of awareness of what students are expected to do in American classrooms.” His teacher also described him as good at raising culturally insightful questions; he knew when to ask questions in class and what kind of questions to ask. Another reason that might have led to the teacher’s positive impression of Moto was that Moto tended to be more verbal and articulate in class than many of his classmates. This tendency was consistent with his self-image as a “talker” rather than a “writer.”

Before enrolled in 107, Moto’s past ESL courses included the three-year ESL courses he took in high school, which mostly focused on vocabulary, listening, and speaking, and EDU T&L 106, the first in the series of ESL composition courses offered at OSU, where he learned how to write summaries, as Moto reported himself.

**Portfolio**

*Previous portfolio experience.* Both in the Background Check Questionnaire and the first interview, Moto described his previous portfolio experience as writing a letter to his last year high school English teacher on what he thought about the class and the teacher. To him, it was nothing short of a “thank-you” letter. He recalled during the first interview that what he wrote was:
Thank you for teaching me how to organize paragraph [sic], how to write normal English, how to write normal American way [sic]. (Moto, First interview, Spring 2002)

It was possible that he wrote more than what he stated above. What he described to the researcher was probably just an outline or the major ideas which he was most impressed with or which he still remembered. When he was writing the letter, Moto probably did not think of it as important. In addition, it had been a long time since then; therefore, he could not remember all the details. In his opinion, this letter was only useful to the teacher, who would thus know how much she taught students and how much she had been helping students. To students, it was only “boring” to write such a letter.

Starting from the second interview, his reported perceptions changed with regard to what his high school portfolio meant. Instead of equating it to the mere “thank-you” letter, he re-conceptualized it as the folder where he stored every writing task he completed during the semester, including the letter he wrote. This was probably owing to his expanded knowledge about the 107 portfolio.

107 Portfolio. Initially, Moto thought that the portfolio required in 107 would be the same as the one in high school. What the teacher discussed in the first week about the portfolio assignment did not seem to register in his mind. Nor did he read the portfolio section in his course packet, as required by his teacher. Moto reported that he was going to wait until the end of the quarter when he had to submit the required portfolio. He seemed confident that he would have enough time for the portfolio assignment: “We have to do it at the end of the quarter, by that time I am going to read it, before the due date.”
Moto did not wait that long. Before the mid-quarter interview, the researcher sent him a list of questions about the 107 portfolio assignment. Moto reported that, before he came in for the second interview, he glanced the portfolio section in the course packet.

Despite the detailed explanations of the purposes and directions of the portfolio assignment in the course packet, Moto only focused on the directions, which looked straightforward and easy to him. Moto reported that what he had to do was basically nothing more than composing the letter, for which he had very clear directions: five paragraphs in all, i.e., introduction, conclusion, and three body paragraphs, with each paragraph discussing one selected writing sample.

Moto reported not having spent any time thinking about the purposes of the portfolio assignment or the introductory letter. It did not seem to occur to him to question the purposes of this assignment, nor did he complain. He reported that 107 was an English writing class, therefore, any kind of writing in English would be legitimate and would probably not do any harm, even though there might not be any use either. To him, the whole assignment was just another piece of schoolwork that teachers used to “keep students busy,” while students might not necessarily benefit from doing it. Interestingly, Jeong also reported of perceiving the portfolio assignment as extra school work.

While reflecting on his process of completing the required portfolio, Moto described that both the sample selection and the letter writing were easy, especially the sample selection part, which was made even easier because his teacher let students choose any three pieces they liked. Jane, Moto’s teacher, explained why she let students have the complete freedom in choosing samples for their portfolios:
I think that restricting them in their choices makes their tasks even more difficult. If we want them to tell us about their reflections and progress, we must allow them to select their own “meaningful instances” (Jane, Second interview, Spring 2002)

Even though he did not believe that any significance would result from the selection process, Moto reported that having the freedom to choose any three pieces was at least better than the prescriptive requirement in the course packet. He explained:

In-class writing, I don’t think… It’s like two or three sentences, it’s not like a big deal. It’s like a few sentences. How can I tell whether I have improved my writing and how I have improved. I can’t tell in three sentences. I think no one can tell in three sentences. Midterm, I don’t know. I don’t know how I improved in my writing. I don’t know. I only know what my grade is. Summary, I don’t know. I know how to write summary. I did not improve during this quarter for how to write summary. So yeah…. I don’t know. I don’t think I have improved my writing. I don’t know. (Moto, Third interview, Spring 2002)

He did not seem to think highly of the value of the in-class writing, which, in his opinion, was too short to contain any useful information. Nor did the midterm contain any meaningful information, because he only knew what his grade was; nor did the summaries, which he already learned about in the previous course EDU T&L 106. What he finally chose were the two essays, which were new to him, and which might come into use in his own field in the future. “Usefulness to his own field” was one major issue which he was mostly concerned with and which he constantly revisited in the later interviews as well as in the introductory letter.

In both the mid-quarter interview and the end-of-quarter interview when he reflected upon his process of developing the required portfolio, Moto questioned the rationale of selecting three pieces: “Why not four, why not five.” As a reference point, he mentioned his high school portfolio and compared it with the 107 portfolio:

When I was in high school in English class, I made portfolios too – I told you, right? At that time, I made portfolio with all my writing. We did not put rough drafts, but we put every single essay assignment’s final draft. So
it’s like how did we do in the whole semester, how many papers did we do, what is the final draft, what did we do during the class. It’s very fun to go over that portfolio. It has everything I did during the semester. It’s better than choosing three ’coz if I choose three, if I go over three years later, I don’t understand what did we do during school. I don’t know. So I think it’s useless. (Moto, Third interview, Spring 2002)

To Moto, a portfolio should include all of his writing. In the future, flipping through such a portfolio would bring back the memory and would be “fun.” However, the submitted portfolio would only present selected writing samples. It did not occur to him that the selection procedure was designed so that students could engage in more reviewing and more reflection. He reported not having felt any benefit from the selection process. In addition, he described the portfolio that resulted from this procedure as “useless.”

Moto reported that he did not understand the purpose of selection or the purpose of the introductory letter. He did not think there was any benefit for doing either of them. He did not claim ownership for the submitted portfolio nor did he feel proud of it. However, there was another “portfolio” that he did feel proud of, his own “portfolio” for 107.

“My own portfolio.” Same as Shim, Moto’s self-acclaimed 107 “portfolio” was a folder that contained all the work he did during the quarter. Moto reported that he had always had the habit of keeping everything from the past, such as pictures and letters from his friends. As another example, he mentioned that he still had some “stupid” essays he wrote in elementary school. He reported “enjoying” reading them once in a while now that he had grown up and had become a more mature and experienced writer.

Moto reported that someday he would probably go back to his own 107 portfolio for a revisit. It could be three or five years later or even further along the line. He
reported that he did not know how he was going to react by that time, probably laughing at how terrible his writing used to be, and then being proud at how much he had grown. Another possible use that he reported was related to his career: in the future, when his job needed him to write reports that were similar to comparison-contrast essay or synthesis-response essay, this comprehensive “portfolio” would turn out to be useful.

He was very proud that, for every course he took, he kept what he called a portfolio. Every quarter he purchased several folders to keep all the materials for all the courses. Sometimes his math materials could be in the same folder as his handouts for the English class. When the quarter was over, he would divide them into Math folder, Physics folder, and English folder, all of which were “portfolios” to him. During the mid-quarter interview, he admitted that he did not have time to review his English folder yet. However, there was evidence that he did reflect upon his academic writing, although not at a conscious level and not very frequently. The following two quotes were examples of Moto’s reflection effort about his English writing:

(1) I don’t know what kind of…. how did I improve my writing, I don’t know right now. I think, I may understand in the future, three years later, or sometime when I look back. Right now I can’t tell how I have improved in my writing coz I don’t know, every year I write, but I feel like nothing changed. I learned new types of writing. So I think at least I learned something new. (Moto, Third interview, Spring 2002)

(2) Within the two months, I can probably see differences in math or science because I know how to use formulas so I know I have improved. But language, I don’t know. (Moto, Third interview, Spring 2002)

Amid the struggle of trying to identify whether or not he improved and if so, how he improved in writing in English, he realized the need of an extended period of time for him to be able to see how he developed as a writer when looking back at his own
“portfolio.” Similarly, Jeong also emphasized the importance of time in allowing him to see problems in his writing that he was not able to see at an earlier stage.

Moto emphasized that it was his own portfolio, rather than the submitted portfolio, that would provide a complete picture of his development. If, years later when he revisited his own portfolio and read the introductory letter, would his perception change about the submitted portfolio and his own portfolio? Moto shrugged his shoulder at this question, indicating he did not have an answer or he had no interest in this question.

**Portfolio Reflective Writing**

**107 Portfolio Introductory Letter.** Moto’s 107 portfolio introductory letter was barely over one page in length. He seemed to focus on three facts: (1) the chosen samples in the submitted portfolios were new types of writing to him; (2) his teacher’s comments helped him; and (3) these types of essays he learned would probably be useful in his engineering field in the future. His letter did not contain any cited evidence from his samples. Table 4.8 showed the coded results of his 107 portfolio introductory letter.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Categories</th>
<th>Count*</th>
<th>Comments</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Self-assessment</td>
<td>4</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Writing Process</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>General intention</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>“Until I get back my rough draft…with Jane’s comments, I really have no idea”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>General strategy</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>“To write this essay, I had to read…write summary…” “find similar points and different points”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Writing Task Perception</td>
<td>6</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>General</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>“Useful and helpful” “I probably need … write this type of essay…in my engineering field” “Great opportunity to learn and improve…” “new type of essay to me” “gave me the opportunity to read interesting short stories”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Specific</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>“very hard to argue my opinion forward or against…”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4.8: Moto’s Coded 107 PortfolioIntroductory Letter
(* “Count” refers to the number of comments found in students’ reflective writings that fell in the corresponding category or subcategory.)
The comments in Moto’s letter fell into two major categories: self-assessment and writing task perception. His writing task perception comments were mostly general, as shown in Table 4.8. In terms of self-assessment, Moto ignored his written products and only focused on his writing processes. His comments on writing processes included one on general intention and three on general strategy. The three general strategy comments were about the three steps in writing a comparison-contrast paper: read the original essays, write summaries about them, and find similarities and differences between them. By describing these three steps, Moto was basically summarizing one type of writing task he learned in the course. The tendency of summarizing was also found in Shim’s letter.

Moto’s letter contained numerous repetitions of the same comments. For example, there were two comments that looked the same except that in the second one, Moto changed the sentence order and replaced “idea” with “crew” (it should be “clue” — he seemed confused between the two words):

(1) Until I get [sic] back my rough draft of this with Mrs. X’s comments, I really have [sic] no idea how to write [comparison-contrast essay]
(2) I again had no crew [sic] how to write this kind of essay [synthesis-response] until I get [sic] back from Mrs. X with her comments.

Other examples included: “very useful,” “helpful,” “might help in the future,” essay being “new” to him, all being repeated at least twice.

Throughout his letter, Moto did not include any evidence from his selected samples to support his comments. For example, it was not known in what ways the teacher’s comments helped him, even though he repeatedly mentioned this point in his letter. In addition, even though the letter was addressed to his teacher, he referred to his
teacher twice in the letter in the third person. This behavior was also found in Shim’s 107 portfolio introductory letter as well as Tim’s 107 portfolio introductory letter.

**Reflection on the introductory letter.** In spite of the wording in the course packet, which described the introductory letter as “an extremely important part of your portfolio” and should “appear first” in the portfolio (Carreon, 2002, p. 85-86), Moto placed the introductory letter at the end of his submitted portfolio and also described the letter as “not of much importance.” In addition, he repeatedly used the word “boring” to describe the process of writing the letter. He argued that “important are the drafts and final drafts” of the essays he learned to write through the course. The letter, he thought, would only benefit the teacher but not the students. He described the letter as similar to what he wrote in high school English class in that it was an “academic thank you,” “a college way of saying thank you to teacher.” He reported that, if he were the teacher, he would be happy and feel “flattered” when his students wrote him how they improved because of his help.

Moto reported that, in his class, there was one “portfolio day” when students could come to the class with all of their work, make sample selections, and then write the letter. Therefore, in his thought, the whole class period, which was less than one hour, would be all the time a student needed to complete the portfolio work. Moto’s teacher Jane reported that she told the students to think about their portfolio assignment before coming to the class so that if they had any doubts or concerns they could discuss with her during the class.

In Moto’s case, he turned in his portfolio at the beginning of the class, before everybody else did. While others were working on their letters, Moto was studying
physics. He explained later in the interview that he planned to study physics the night before, but he was tired and sleepy and, therefore, he decided to write the letter. He reported spending “a few seconds” in reviewing and making the selections and about thirty minutes to an hour composing the letter. He seemed to think that physics required a lot of concentration while writing the letter did not, even though he was not very confident in his writing ability in English. Moto never worried about any of his 107 assignments. As for the letter, he cared even less because “she (teacher) does not correct any grammar. So that’s no big deal. I just wrote and turned in.” Incidentally, Shim also used almost the same three words “I just write” to describe his writing practice before taking 107.

It seemed that Moto’s major concern for his school writing tasks was his grammar. Therefore, if grammar was not an issue, then there was nothing else to worry about. From the multiple English language errors in his letter, it could be inferred that Moto probably did not engage in serious proofreading before placing the letter into his portfolio.

Moto claimed that he did not have to go over his work either before or while writing the letter. When questioned on the dearth of detail in his letter, he answered that it was not necessary to provide any details since the teacher gave detailed comments to his work and also corrected all his major problems. It seemed that he was unwilling to repeat his teacher’s words in his portfolio introductory letter. This might be a sign that even though his papers were improved with his teacher’s help, he was not sure that his general writing ability had been improved. As he expressed repeatedly in the third interview, it might take him more than two or three months to be able to identify how he improved.
Likewise, to internalize what was learned from the teacher’s comments might also need more time. Again, the same type of question was raised: if years later he was revisiting his own portfolio and his introductory letter, would he have different thoughts about the potential values of the letter and how he might have rewritten this letter? Again, he did not give any answer to this question.

Moto admitted that writing this letter did make him “think,” but not very much. While recalling the process of writing this letter, he emphasized two points: first, the two essays were new to him and he probably would have to write the same types of essays in his own field; and second, for both essays his teacher’s comments helped him a lot. These two points corresponded to the second and third major themes in his letter. Other than these two points, he did not seem to have much to talk about in terms of his process of writing the letter. It was probably because that he did not spend much time and effort reflecting while writing the letter. Interview data indicated that he did not think that he benefited from writing this letter. To the question about whether he thought he would have benefited if he spent more time working on this letter, he again shrugged his shoulder and said he did not know. This was probably a sign that he did not have much interest in writing the letter.

Follow-up Case Study Report: Shim

108.01 Midterm Portfolio

Even though he complained about the 107 portfolio as being “unreal,” because it only contained a few items selected, Shim was not completely satisfied with the 108.01 portfolio either. He described that the 108.01 portfolio requested too many items. As
described in Chapter III, the 108.01 portfolio required students to collect almost all major assignments. Shim reported that some of them were “unnecessary.” He stated that a portfolio should demonstrate his individual writing process. This perception did not seem to have changed much from the time when he took 107, except that he emphasized that the process should reflect what he, rather than anybody else, had gone through. In his opinion, procedures like peer review did not contribute to his writing and should not go into his portfolio:

Shim: Peer review is just recommendation from another student. I don’t think it’s a process in my work. Just advice.
I: But this advice might help you improve your work. Right?
Shim: I think, it might or might not. It depends on the person who reads my paper. Because we are all international students. Who knows the exact grammar rules? Only the Americans. 108 class consists of students from a lot of different countries. I think their knowledge are almost the same. Peer review is just a recommendation. So I think peer review is not important. In 107 class, we did peer review in class, just exchanged our paper, and looked at it, wrote some comment. For example, if you read another person’s introduction, and his introduction is good, just mark “good.” But in 108, we have to send email, one to the other person, the other to the teacher. And the peer review has a format, at least 200 words, 150 words should be criticizing the other paper – for example, your paper needs more detailed support, your paper is not well organized; the remaining 50 words: even though your paper has problems, your paper is good – something like that. So peer review has a rule. But as I am an international student, it’s very difficult. Peer review has to have at least 200 words. When I first peer reviewed another student’s paper, I just wrote 100 words and sent it to teacher. She responded: what are you doing? Peer review is supposed to be at least 200 words. But your peer review is only 100 words. So do it again. So I made 200 words. (First Interview, Summer 2002)

Shim described himself as unwilling to critique other students’ papers. He did not seem to believe in the grammar competence of his fellow classmates, who were not native speakers of English. In his opinion, all students enrolled in 107 were basically at the same level in terms of their knowledge of English. This belief led him to conclude that no one
was in an authoritative position to critique another person’s papers. Shim seemed to focus mostly on grammar in terms of critiquing a paper. When asked about content and organization, he reported that a fellow student who worked on a different topic would not be able to provide any useful feedback for his work. Nor did he think that his feedback to a fellow student would be of any use. Therefore, whether it was his comment on others’ work or others’ feedback on his work, Shim reported that neither was highly relevant to his writing processes and neither should go into his portfolio.

Even though he was not happy with the requirement that peer review correspondences be part of his portfolio, on the whole, Shim valued the 108.01 portfolio more than the 107 portfolio:

**Shim**: But 107 class is, I put everything into my folder and chose some of them and made a portfolio. So 107 portfolio is artificial or just the purpose of showing another person; but 108 portfolio is much practical.

**I**: So 107 portfolio is just for somebody else while 108 portfolio is for yourself?

Shim: Yeah. So after finishing 108 class, when I wrote my own work in my own class, I can imagine: okay, at that time, I said, this could be good. I think 108 class portfolio is a good one.

**I**: A better one?

**Shim**: Yes. A better one. (First Interview, Summer 2002)

In Shim’s opinion, the 107 portfolio was created merely for the purpose of showing it to his teacher. It was obvious that Shim still considered the 107 portfolio to be just a folder, and an “artificial” one created merely for the teacher.

Shim did not value the process of selecting a few samples out of all his work. However, he seemed to emphasize the process of organizing his portfolio. He also seemed to take great pride in how organized his portfolio folder was with the thirteen index tabs he used for dividing different sections of his portfolio. The thirteen tabs were: Paper #1 outline, Synthesis worksheet, First draft of Paper #1, Second draft of Paper #1,
Final draft of Paper #1, Midterm Worksheet, Listserv *Never Fade Away*, Listserv Education, Tutorial document, *Never Fade Away*, Peer Review, Grammar homework quiz, and Introductory Letter. On the top of all the indexed documents was the First Portfolio Submission Guideline. When he showed the portfolio to the researcher, he had already received it back from his teacher. By this time, he also received his midterm paper back, which he inserted in the back pocket of his portfolio folder, not yet indexed. In the front pocket was the checklist that his teacher used to evaluate his portfolio submission. The teacher used the three criteria listed in the course packet: (1) inclusion of all required materials; (2) neatness of arrangement of materials; (3) quality (amount and effectiveness of detail) [of the Introductory Letter]. For all three criteria, he received A’s. His overall grade for the first portfolio submission was also an A. The only written feedback he received from the teacher was a one-sentence comment, which stated that he should participate more in the class. Shim seemed happy with the grade his portfolio received, although he mentioned that most students probably got A’s.

**Midterm Portfolio Reflective Writing**

**108.01 Midterm Portfolio Introductory Letter.** Shim’s 108.01 midterm portfolio introductory letter (Letter #1) started with a brief description of what he had learned: point-by-point approach for argument papers, what were proper refutations, and how to find suitable refutations. This was very similar to how he started his 107 letter. In the body paragraphs, he chose to talk about refutation, listserv assignment about *Never Fade Away*, which he described as “Tina’s diary,” the book students were assigned to read and discuss through the listserv discussion forum, and finally the group presentation project.
He followed the structure of the 107 letter: introduction, three body paragraphs with each addressing one topic, and conclusion. The content of the concluding paragraph was exactly the same as that of the letter for the 107 portfolio, except that the statement contained in the latter one was: “I know how to write a summary, comparison/contrast, and synthesis/response paper,” which obviously was not appropriate for 108.01. Table 4.9 was the coded result of Shim’s 108.01 midterm portfolio introductory letter.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Categories</th>
<th>Count*</th>
<th>Comments</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Self-assessment</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>“I don’t like critics.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Affective</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>“I don’t like critics.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Text Features</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Content</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>“first draft had many mistakes about refutation and additional supporting idea”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Surface features</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vocabulary</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>“I have learned useful expression with her diary”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>“Because English is my second language, sometimes I could not express what exactly I want to say.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Writing Process</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>General Intention</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>“I tried to correct those mistakes and found proper refutations.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>“got an idea through listserv about online education”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>“I didn’t devote to write (about Tina’s diary)”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>“After experience many useful examples, I could understand about refutation”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Writing Task Perception</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>General</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>“Tina’s diary deals with a lot of interesting situations.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Specific</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>“She wrote her diary with a lot of grammar mistakes.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intention of the letter</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>“show all of the work from the beginning … to now”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Comment on course/teaching</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>“great course”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>“Carol … teach… enthusiastically”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>“I want to thank you for teaching me and other…”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>“I appreciate that”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4.9: Shim’s 108.01 Coded Midterm Portfolio Introductory Letter (Letter #1)
(* “Count” refers to the number of comments found in students’ reflective writings that fell in the corresponding category or subcategory.)
Same as his 107 portfolio introductory letter, Shim’s 108.01 Letter #1 did not show any central focus, nor did it contain any cited evidence from his essays. The four major categories emerged in 108.01 Letter #1 were also the same as those in 107 letter.

Among the eight self-assessment comments, four reported general intentions in his writing processes. The second most frequently appearing category was comment on course/teaching. Comments in this category were exactly the same as those in his 107 portfolio introductory letter, except for the teachers’ names.

Shim also briefly described the group project he was involved in. The group project was placed into his portfolio; however, it was not specifically related to any writing task, not the focus of this study, and thus not included in the above coding table.

In the concluding paragraph, Shim again referred to his teacher in the third person, even though this letter was addressed to her. This also occurred in the 107 portfolio introductory letters by Moto and Tim.

Reflection on Letter #1. While writing the introductory letter for his 108.01 midterm portfolio, Shim employed the same three-section formula that he used for the 107 portfolio introductory letter. When asked why he used the same format, he responded that this was the format he learned for this type of writing. He claimed that he did think over what he had learned and what he still had to learn before the end of the quarter. In terms of the impact that writing this letter had on him, he did not seem to have much to talk about. He did indicate that by writing the letter, he had to look backwards as well as forward, thus becoming clearer as to what he had to do in the second half of the quarter. He reported spending half an hour reviewing his work and another half an hour writing this letter. It was not surprising that he did not need much time writing the letter, since
the structure, the wording, and the content of this letter were all similar to those of his 107 portfolio letter. However, he did not share with the researcher any other detailed information about his process of writing the letter.

**108.01 Final Portfolio**

The last interview occurred after Shim already submitted his second portfolio for 108.01. At this time, he repeatedly expressed his opinion that whether it was for art or writing, a portfolio should be a collection of all the work a writer or artist had produced:

In art class, to make a portfolio, they draw the first painting, the second, and the final one. When they submitted their work, they put together all the work. The same process with English class. We write the first draft and second, and final, and put together and submit. The procedure is the same. (Shim, Second interview, Summer 2002)

In the final portfolio, Shim kept all the original thirteen index tabs. More materials were added into the following categories: Peer Review, *Never Fade Away* Exercise, Grammar Exercise, Listserv Online Education, Listserv *Never Fade Away*. In addition, he added Paper #2 Outline, First draft of Paper #2, Second draft of Paper #2, Final draft of Paper #2, Self-assessment of Reading and Writing Ability, Copies of Two Additional Articles for Paper #2.

The Second Portfolio Submission Guidelines did not require the Peer Review documents; however, Shim still kept the documents that he placed in his midterm portfolio, which, earlier, led to his major complaint about the 108.01 portfolios in the first interview. His reported reasoning was: (1) portfolios should reflect the “whole process of work,” and (2) he was involved in peer review during the course of the study. It was not important whether or not he liked it or whether it was of any meaning to him. The central
issue here was, as he said, “I did it.” Shim seemed to be convinced that he needed to use
the portfolio to demonstrate to the teacher the work he did. His interpretation of the
purpose of the 107 portfolio seemed to also center around “demonstrating” to the teacher.
Shim reported that by demonstrating all the efforts he spent, he hoped to get the best
grade he could. To him, the portfolio was more appropriately used as the basis for
teachers to assess students. He believed that portfolios, as an assessment tool, would lead
to more fairness than the midterm or final, because he noticed that some students cheated
during the exams.

After compiling two portfolios for 108.01, Shim finally decided that the 107
portfolio was more “appropriate,” at least in comparison with the 108.01 portfolios. Still
insisting on portfolios representing entire processes, Shim argued that they should only
include “the most important things.” Therefore, he believed that, for the 108.01
portfolios, only argument papers were necessary. In addition to his complaint about peer
review, he also challenged the requirement of the grammar editing exercise, copies of the
two additional articles for Paper #2, and the midterm essay. He described that the
midterm essay was “just an essay,” indicating that it had no instructional value or
feedback value.

It seemed that Shim did not understand that one major purpose of the 108.01
portfolio requirement was to give students a picture of the various aspects students’
writing had involved. Knowing that working on multiple drafts helped him improve his
writing, he seemed to be certain about the importance of understanding his own writing
processes. However, he was not implicitly taught nor did it occur to him that writing was
a social activity that could involve multiple aspects, such as communication with teachers.
and fellow classmates as well as with the written texts. In his opinion, it was natural that a more “appropriate portfolio” would only contain the three drafts of his papers.

Shim reported that his teacher, after the first portfolio submission, only commented on the organization problem in students’ submitted portfolios, because some students’ portfolios were “not well organized,” in Shim’s words. Shim also reported being impressed with a fellow classmate’s portfolio that the teacher showed to the class. This portfolio, as Shim described, used a “fancy” and “expensive” binder that was organized with dividers. In Shim’s eyes, his teacher, by showing this portfolio to the whole class, was actually conveying a message to the whole class: here was the standard that every submitted portfolio should follow. However, Shim decided that he would not purchase the same expensive binder for his final portfolio, because it was “a waste of money.” For him, the outlook of a portfolio was not very important. In the final portfolio, Shim still used the index tabs he had used for his midterm portfolio. However, he noticed that some students began to use dividers to make their portfolios look nicer while others kept their old ways. Shim also reported that a male classmate of his, for both his midterm portfolio and final portfolio, did not start assembling papers until the morning of the due dates. In the end, this student’s submitted portfolios were full of papers with cropped corners, and he did not use dividers or tabs to separate different sections, as Shim described.

**Summary of Portfolio Experiences**

In a summary of his three portfolio experiences, Shim argued that the 107 portfolio requirements were simpler and more appropriate than the 108.01 portfolio
requirements, which were “unnecessarily painful.” In his opinion, portfolios required in 108.01 were more like summaries of the whole course, which was not how portfolios should be used. His reported attitudes towards the 107 portfolio changed from being unauthentic and artificial to being at least a better interpretation of the portfolio concept, as compared to the 108.01 portfolios.

There was possibly another underlying factor that led Shim to value the 107 portfolio over the 108.01 portfolios. That is, the freedom to decide what to place in his portfolio, what to demonstrate to his teacher. In 108.01, he did not have this freedom; it was clearly stated that all tasks were required to be in the completed portfolio. Therefore, no personal decisions were involved. Whether he felt he had learned anything, whether he felt any personal connection, none of these mattered. Even though his opinions changed with regard to what constituted a better representation of the portfolio concept, his underlying principle remained unchanged: portfolios should represent the entire process of working towards the final products; further, the process should be self-chosen so that it contributed directly to the completion of the final products; and finally, portfolios were for demonstrating his work to the teacher.

What Shim was not aware of was that there were two types of portfolios involved, which were designed to serve different purposes. In 107, students were involved in multiple writing tasks. The choice they made in choosing one sample over another reflected what they valued in their learning. In order to make selections, they had to reflect upon their learning. In 108.01, there were only two major writing tasks: one argument paper written in two different approaches. The 108.01 portfolio assignment was designed for students to review and reflect on all the work they had done.
Final Portfolio Reflective Writing

108.01 Final Portfolio Introductory Letter. Except for a few minor changes, the first paragraph of Shim’s final portfolio introductory letter (Letter #2) looked the same as in Letter #1. The first two sentences were changed with regard to the respective time frames: “one month” in Letter #1 versus “the last week of the course” in Letter #2, “to now” in Letter #1 versus “until the end of the quarter” in Letter #2. Then, he reflected on the two major writing tasks for the current quarter, using exactly the same sentences.

His second paragraph, dealing with the point-by-point argument paper, was also the same as in Letter #1 except that a few details were omitted: the affective reason for not knowing how to write refutations, a comment regarding his finished refutation being “insufficient,” and a comment on learning about on-line education through listserv discussion.

The third paragraph very briefly addressed two aspects involved with the block approach: the perceived difference between the block approach and the point-by-point approach, and finding articles for writing the paper through OSCAR (OSU library search system). Then, in two sentences, he briefly talked about using OSCAR to get the articles he needed.

The fourth paragraph was about listserv discussion about the novel: Never Fade Away. Again it was the same as letter #1 except that he deleted his acknowledgement of not having devoted time and effort to this activity. He also replaced “a lot of interesting situations” with “many interesting stories” in Letter #2.
The fifth paragraph was exactly the same as in Letter #1, which addressed the
group project. In the last paragraph, he added one sentence: “I fell I have improve to a
better writer than before [sic].” Except for this added assertion, which seemed to aim at
bringing closure to the 108.01 course or the whole ESL composition sequence, the whole
concluding paragraph was exactly the same as in Letter #1.

In summary, the content of Letter #2 was highly similar to that of Letter #1. He
admitted that he only spent about half an hour on Letter #2. Table 4.10 showed the coded
results of Letter #2.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Categories</th>
<th>Count*</th>
<th>Comments</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Self-assessment</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>General</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>“I fell I have improve to a better writer than before”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Text Features</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Content</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>“first draft had many mistakes about refutation and additional supporting idea”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Surface features</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vocabulary</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>“I learned some useful expression with her diary”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>&quot;Because English is my second language, sometimes I could not express what exactly I want to say.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Writing Process</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>General intention</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>“I tried to correct those mistakes and found proper refutations.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>“After experience many useful examples, I could understand about refutation”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>“searched related article using OSCAR”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Writing Task Perception</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>General</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>“Tina’s diary deals with a lot of interesting situations.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Specific</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>“She wrote her diary with a lot of grammar mistakes.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>“block approach… almost same as argument paper #1, only difference is … offer specific arguments in support of my thesis.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intention of the letter</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>“show all of the work from the beginning … until the end”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Comment on course/teaching</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>“great course”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>“Carol … teach… enthusiastically”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>“I want to thank you for teaching me and other”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>“I appreciate that”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4.10: Shim’s Coded 108.01 Final Portfolio Introductory Letter (Letter #2)
(* “Count” refers to the number of comments found in students’ reflective writings that fell in the corresponding category or subcategory.)
A comparison between Table 4.9 (coded results of Shim’s Letter #1) and Table 4.10 demonstrated the striking similarity between the two letters, not only in structure, emerged category, but also in wording. Within the category of self-assessment, only one general comment was added: “I fell I have improve to a better writer than before [sic].” He skipped the affective comment in Letter #1.

Under the subcategory of writing process, one comment about general intention was added: “searched related article using OSCAR.” Within the category of writing task perception, one specific comment was added discussing the block approach. In addition to these two comments that seemed to be the result of reflection, all the other comments in his Letter #2 were similar or even identical to those in Letter #1.

In addition, a comparison between Table 4.7 (coded results of Shim’s 107 portfolio introductory letter), Table 4.9, and Table 4.10 showed that in the last category, comment on course/teaching, Shim used exactly the same comments, with the only difference in the teachers’ names.

**Reflection on Letter #2.** Despite the fact that he obviously did not spend much time and effort on Letter #2, Shim did emphasize the importance of the introductory letter in a portfolio, which he described as “the most important element of the portfolio.” The reason he provided was that the letter could explain what was hidden underneath his papers, especially his situation of being an ESL student who was still struggling with language difficulty while writing in English. Therefore, the letter, he reported, would provide extra information for understanding his background and his development, which would help the teacher to reach a more accurate assessment of the progress he made. This opinion, along with his perception of portfolios’ potential as a fairer assessment tool,
seemed to indicate that Shim held positive attitudes towards portfolios as a tool for teachers to assess students. In addition, he also reported that the letter was to show appreciation to the teacher’s work. Therefore, simply put, the portfolio introductory letter, to Shim, was designed to serve the teacher rather than the students.

He did not think that writing the letter had any influence on his writing. He claimed that he was taught a format for writing the portfolio introductory letter in the 107 course; while writing the 108.01 portfolio letters, he followed the same format and the same guideline, “thank[ing] the teacher for teaching.” Certainly, while composing the 108.01 portfolio letters, he did change the writing tasks in the body paragraphs. However, most portions of the two letters for the 108.01 portfolios were, he admitted, actually copied from the 107 portfolio introductory letter. This explained the high frequency of the identical sentences that appeared in all three letters. His two letters for the two 108.01 portfolio submissions showed even higher frequency of identical sentences.

Even though his three introductory letters were very similar and some sentences were exactly the same, Shim emphasized the difference between the letter for the 108.01 midterm portfolio and the letters for the two final portfolio submissions. As he suggested, the latter ones were more like a summary of the entire course while the former was more of an uncompleted picture. The difference he reported was as follows: while he was writing the midterm portfolio introductory letter, the course was still going on; with the final portfolio introductory letter, he could only reflect on what had happened, there was no way to go back and change. In spite of this reported difference, his letters basically
seemed to be just summing up what the teachers had taught or emphasized in class discussions. It was unclear how much learning this “summing up” could lead to.

With regard to the two criteria stated in the course packet (informative and reflective), Shim stated that his letter for the 108.01 final portfolio met both criteria. It was informative because he provided enough details and reflective because he “recognized” how he “progressed.” In addition, he described that the 107 letter and the second 108.01 letter were more informative and reflective while the first 108.01 letter was like a diary that partly recorded what was going on and partly looked to the future.

Follow-up Case Study Report: Moto

108.01 Midterm Portfolio

To Moto, the 108.01 portfolio was more like what he perceived portfolios should be like. He collected all the materials related to the course into his portfolio: Paper #1 outline, synthesis worksheet, and its three drafts, midterm worksheet, listserv posting about online education, listserv posting about Never Fade Away, diagnostic test essay and its three revisions, Quizzes of Never Fade Away, Grammar Editing exercises, and the portfolio introductory letter. In addition, he also placed in the front pocket a copy of “Comments on First Portfolio Submission,” which contained directions on how to compile portfolios and a checklist of portfolio contents. Even though he included all the required materials on the list, Moto only received a B+ for his midterm portfolio.

Moto expressed unhappiness with the B+ grade, which was lower than what he expected. His teacher wrote on the midterm grade sheet that his listserv postings should
be in the format of listserv postings, while the ones contained in his portfolio were in the word document format. In addition, he was told during the student-teacher conference that, first he was not writing complete paragraphs in the synthesis worksheet, and second, he did not have a table of contents for his portfolio. Moto challenged that he was not told to include a table of contents or to write complete paragraphs for the worksheet — neither the portfolio direction nor the teacher made such requirements clear to him. Moto’s teacher did not think his portfolio met the standard for A. However, Moto argued that he was not being informed of what the A standard was like.

Moto seemed to think that there should be a relationship between students’ performance on papers and their grades on portfolios. He complained that a student received A for his portfolio in spite of the fact that his paper only received C. John, his teacher, however, did not think that a weak paper necessarily led to a low portfolio score. John stated that it was unethical to penalize a portfolio for a poor paper contained within it.

There seemed to be a mismatch between the teacher’s expectations for students and students’ perceptions of their responsibilities. The teacher believed that students should be responsible for their own learning and that, what was explained in the course packet needed not be repeated in class discussions. The teacher emphasized student autonomy, expecting students to judge for themselves what constituted a high-quality portfolio. Yet, Moto reported that sometimes the course packet did not make complete sense to him. He expected to get explicit, detailed, and elaborate instructions from the teacher. Moto indicated that there seemed to be a hidden agenda underneath the grading criteria listed in the course packet, which he considered was the cause of his lower grade,
even though he met the criterion of placing all required elements into his portfolio. However, it was important to note that, among all three criteria listed (see Chapter III), Moto chose to focus only on the first one (i.e., inclusion of all required materials) and ignore the other two (neatness of arrangement of materials, quality of the Introductory Letter). This reaction seemed to indicate that Moto primarily treated portfolios as collections of students’ written work.

In spite of his complaint about the grade he received for his portfolio, Moto suggested that the required 108.01 portfolio “might be better than the portfolio for 107,” because he could see how he did before and after midterm. However, his description of this advantage did not go beyond this general statement. He focused most of his attention on the function of portfolios as keeping records and providing memories. In the first interview of Summer 2002, he stated that portfolios for both 107 and 108.01 would probably be “meaningful in the next few years. But not right now. I don’t think this is helpful during this quarter.” This opinion was consistent with how he perceived his own portfolio for 107.

**Midterm Portfolio Reflective Writing**

**108.01 Midterm Portfolio Introductory Letter.** Moto’s 108.01 midterm portfolio introductory letter (Letter #1) was about the same length as his 107 portfolio introductory letter, a little bit over one page. Table 4.11 showed the coded results of Letter #1.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Categories</th>
<th>Count*</th>
<th>Comments</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Self-assessment</td>
<td>16</td>
<td><strong>General</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>“Every time I study English in English class, I definitely learn new materials… grammar, structure.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>“Since starting the course, my English… improve, … vocabulary and grammar”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>“I learned English little by little”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>“After peer critique and tutorial with Dr. Y, I found my weakness of writing.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Affective</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
<td>“I felt terrible when I revised … papers…”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Goal setting</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3</td>
<td>“To fix grammar problems will take long time, but I promise myself to keep in touch with my grammar hence”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>“I am going to use this program [thesaurus]”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>“for rest of 4 weeks of this course, I am going to keep in touch with my grammar and vocabulary”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Text Features</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Content</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>“they were boring papers”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Organization</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
<td>“first draft…was not organized at all”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Style</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
<td>“my writing is from my speaking language”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Surface features</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Grammar</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
<td>“I never pay attention to my grammar before”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Vocabulary</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
<td>“I was always using same vocabulary”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Writing Process</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td><strong>General strategy</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2</td>
<td>“compare my essay with example essay [in course packet]”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>“I usually do spelling check my computer but I don’t check my paper after writing is finish.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Task-specific strategy</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
<td>“I realized how much the transition words are important for this paper because it has opposing argument … and refutation….”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4.11: Moto’s 108.01 Midterm Portfolio Introductory Letter (Letter #1)
(* “Count” refers to the number of comments found in students’ reflective writings that fell in the corresponding category or subcategory.)
In comparison to Moto’s 107 portfolio introductory letter (coded in Table 4.8), Letter #1 seemed to focus much more on self-assessment, since it contained sixteen self-assessment comments, four times as much as the 107 portfolio introductory letter, which only had four. In addition to the increase in quantity, there also seemed to be a step forward in the quality of his self-assessment. Instead of general comments that characterized his 107 introductory letter, his 108.01 Letter #1 focused on specific aspects of writing, such as organization, vocabulary, grammar, and especially the importance of transition words for argument papers. He also set two goals: (1) paying more attention to his grammar problems, and (2) making use of a thesaurus to enrich his vocabulary.

Letter #1 did not include any comments in the category of writing task perception, which appeared most frequently in his 107 portfolio introductory letter. Instead, there were more comments in the category of writing process, especially within the subcategory of general strategy and task-specific strategy. Among all the introductory letters in 107 and 108.01 portfolios, Moto’s Letter #1 contained the only instance of task-specific strategy. The other instances of comments in this category were only found in the portfolio reflective essays by the two students of English 110.

**Reflection on Letter #1.** Moto’s responses to the 108.01 portfolio as well as the portfolio introductory letter were negative at the beginning of the interview, partly owing to the B+ grade his portfolio received. He did not receive any written comment about his portfolio introductory letter. He reported his general impression as spending time writing meaningless things just for the teacher. When pushed for an answer about whether he thought he was involved in any thinking while composing the letter, he responded, “probably.” However, he expressed doubts that this thinking activity was of any
significance to his writing. This reaction did not seem to differ much from his responses towards the portfolio introductory letter he completed for the previous course 107.

108.01 Final Portfolio

Moto learned from his midterm portfolio experience that simply collecting all materials into one folder did not make an A-grade portfolio. He spent more time and effort in organizing his final portfolio. He added all the materials since midterm: the outline and three drafts for Paper #2, related articles to Paper #2, more Grammar Editing Exercises, Listserv postings about online education, more quizzes about Never Fade Away, an EDU T&L 108.01 Problem/Solution Project Evaluation Form, his portfolio introductory letter, and “Comments on Second Portfolio Submission” that contained directions and a portfolio content checklist. He acknowledged that he did not read the portfolio submission directions, which clearly stated that the Problem/Solution project was not required in final portfolios. In addition to the extra materials he added to the portfolio, Moto also numbered each page in his portfolio and made a table of contents for his portfolio. For each section, he also made a cover page. In comparison with his midterm portfolio, Moto’s final portfolio looked more organized.

The motivation behind this extra effort was “to get a good grade,” as Moto reported. He also reported that he did not feel proud of his portfolio, in spite of the time and effort he spent trying to make it more organized. This extra effort was not deemed to be meaningful by Moto. In his opinion, portfolios should simply mean placing everything together into one folder, just like what he did for all the other courses he had ever taken.
He described that even though he spent extra time in making his portfolio look nicer and in writing introductory letters, all of this meant little more than “extra work.”

During the last interview, when asked whether the two portfolio submissions made students work harder, Moto’s response was: “they were the same things, why repeat?” He suggested that the two submissions only made students’ lives busier and harder. Not seeing any positive impact, he repeatedly expressed his opinion that two submissions were not necessary.

**Summary of Portfolio Experiences**

Different from Shim, who changed opinions about the three portfolios from the first interview to the last interview within one academic quarter, Moto consistently favored the 108.01 portfolios over the 107 portfolio. He argued in the last interview: “Even though the teacher only wanted three pieces, I kept everything, handouts, homework, and in-class writing. Every single thing went into my portfolio. So it’s exactly like this one [108.01 portfolios].” In 107, he perceived a dichotomy of “my portfolio” versus “portfolio for the teacher,” while in 108.01, the two entities were not as separate but almost merged with each other, except that the portfolio for the teacher needed extra “decoration” work, which he considered unnecessary.

When comparing portfolios to in-class exams as tools for assessing students’ writing, Moto preferred portfolios because portfolios would give him more opportunities to think, read, and revise:

I don’t like to write papers in an hour and forty-eight minutes, because I can’t organize my paper, because it’s only very short time. The introduction and conclusion, it takes an hour and thirty minutes, almost the whole time. I can’t check my grammar carefully. I can’t organize my
paragraph well. I don’t know. If I have to write a paper, even like midterm and regular assignment, I want to think about it more, I want to organize more. ‘Coz like, my first draft is always messy, pretty bad. But I want to read it twice and three times before turning it in. I wanna take more time to organize my paper. I don’t like to do it in class. (Moto, Second interview, Summer 2002)

Moto reported that he did not like to write under the pressure of time. To him, serious writing should be a time-consuming activity that involved multiple factors and multiple stages. He stated that he was not completely against taking writing exams under timed conditions. However, he also argued that timed exams could only produce grades. In comparison, he reported that portfolios, used appropriately, would not only provide grades but also help students write, review, revise, reflect, and improve.

In his opinion, portfolios had the potential to serve teaching, learning, and assessment. However, first and foremost, in order to make portfolios effective, students should be motivated to be interested in working on portfolios. The same opinion was also expressed by Jeong, another student participant from 107. Moto suggested that students be given more freedom in a portfolio system:

**Moto:** Everybody thinks of portfolio in different ways. My portfolio may have only the papers, and not very fancy; other people think of only class writing, like quizzes or worksheet, not paper. Everyone thinks different way; I wanna see how they think about portfolio so…. If I am teacher, I am going to make them make their own portfolios. I can enjoy what the portfolios offer. If every portfolio is the same, it’s like, I feel bored.

**I:** What kind of portfolio is interesting to you?

**Moto:** I don’t know. That’s why I wanna to make the students make it.

**I:** If your teacher told you that you could make whatever portfolio you like as long as it is interesting, what kind of portfolio would you make?

**Moto:** I would be making a portfolio like this. I don’t know whether this is interesting to the teacher. But this is my portfolio. (Second interview, Summer 2002)

Moto argued that there needed not be a universal standard for evaluating portfolios. He asserted that a teacher could not predict what kind of portfolios would be interesting or
meaningful to all students. In his opinion, students should be the ones who made decisions about what was significant to them and what should go into their portfolios.

Moto also reported that because he wanted to become an engineer working for car companies, a portfolio significant to him would not have to contain an introductory letter but had to include all the relevant materials. He illustrated what he meant by “relevant” with an example in the automobile industry: the description for each car model should be saved for historical records so that engineers could trace the development within a certain period of time. He argued that the concept of portfolios reflected the same principle: saving historical records for future references. In his words, portfolios could serve as a tool for “display[ing] past experience in my field.”

**Final Portfolio Reflective Writing**

*108.01 Final Portfolio Introductory Letter.* Moto’s 108.01 final portfolio introductory letter (Letter #2) was more than two pages, twice as long as Letter #1. However, the content of one page in Letter #2 did not focus on any aspect of his writing but on the group project. Since the group project was not required as part of students’ portfolios, it was not the focus of this study and was not included in the analysis here. Table 4.12 showed the coded results of his comments related to writing found in Letter #2.

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6 Moto devoted almost half of his Letter #2 summarizing what he learned through the group project: (1) being punctual, (2) “working as a unit,” and (3) the importance of communication among group members.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Categories</th>
<th>Count*</th>
<th>Comments</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Self-assessment  | 18     | “Since the beginning of this quarter, I learned new materials…. vocabulary, grammar, and organization…”  
|                  |        | “as go through … assignments, my English writing skill is definitely improved little by little.”  
|                  |        | “After the midterm… block approach, posting online… group project with…”  
|                  |        | “From … writing Paper #2… I found several weaknesses”  
| General          | 4      | “I will try to continue with focus on the grammars.”  
|                  |        | “I must focus on the organization … more carefully.””  
|                  |        | “I will keep in touch with vocabulary…”  
| Setting goals    | 3      | “My organization… is not enough….well.”  
|                  |        | “In both drafts (draft #1 and #2), I got several comments that paragraphs don’t flow well. There are big gap between sentences”  
|                  |        | “I tried… but results [in better flow] is not shown yet.”  
| Text Features    |        |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                 |
| Organization     | 3      | “My capacity of vocabulary is getting bigger than before the midterm…”  
|                  |        | “From the articles and novel, I learned many new words… use those new vocabularies into … paper … and postings.”  
|                  |        | “I am still having [vocabulary] problem… writing… I can’t express in writing even I have several ideas…”  
| Surface features |        |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                 |
| Grammar          | 2      | “I am still not satisfactory with my grammar yet.”  
|                  |        | “I just started to see my grammar carefully lately, so there is no result yet”  
| Vocabulary       | 3      | “I wrote two drafts before turning in the final draft.”  
|                  |        | “Since after midterm, I tried not to use wrong verb tense and verb form much harder than before…”  
|                  |        | “Since after the midterm… I tried to fix this problem [flow]”  

Table 4.12: Moto’s Coded 108.01 Final Portfolio Introductory Letter (Letter #2)  
(* “Count” refers to the number of comments found in students’ reflective writings that fell in the corresponding category or subcategory.)
Same as Letter #1, all the comments related to writing in Letter #2 fell into the category of self-assessment. In comparison to Letter #1, which included sixteen self-assessment comments, there were eighteen of them in Letter #2, not a major difference. The self-assessment comments in Letter #2 were mostly focused on his effort, progress, and achievement, similar to those in Letter #1. In terms of content, he still chose to focus on the same three aspects addressed in Letter #1: grammar, vocabulary, and organization. He was being more specific in Letter #2 by including more comments in all of these three aspects. For example, with regard to vocabulary, he argued that he was able to enrich his vocabulary by reading articles and novels. In terms of organization, he mentioned his teacher’s comments about his problem of poor flow between paragraphs and sentences.

Under the category of writing process, there were three comments in the subcategory of general strategy, but no comment in task-specific strategy. Even though the general strategy comments did not address any specific writing tasks, some of these comments displayed Moto’s effort at trying to make his discussion more specific. For example, he discussed his effort in trying not to use wrong verb tenses or wrong verb forms, which indicated his awareness of his specific problems with the use of English language.

In each body paragraph, in addition to talking about his problems and efforts, Moto also acknowledged that he had not seen much result from his effort. This response was reasonable, in consideration of his opinion that it would take more than one academic quarter to see how his writing had improved. At last, he ended each body paragraph with the stated goal of either “paying more attention” or writing “more carefully.”
Reflection on Letter #2. Moto reported that in Letter #2, he was supposed to summarize the entire course, rather than the portfolio. This opinion was similar to Shim’s reported perception of the 108.01 Final Portfolio Introductory Letter. Moto admitted that he did not read carefully the portfolio submission directions. He reported that by discussing the group project, he would easily make a two-page letter.

Moto did not see any point in writing two introductory letters during one academic quarter. He said that he was very tired when writing Letter #2 because the next day he had final exams. So he just wanted to get the task completed as soon as possible. He admitted that he did not refer back to what he wrote in Letter #1. It was obvious that his two letters primarily focused on the same three aspects of his writing: vocabulary, grammar, and organization. To explain this similarity, he mentioned that he actually did not feel too much difference in his writing ability between the beginning of the quarter and the end; therefore, he could only talk about his problems. As for the discussion topics, he reported that the most obvious choices were grammar, vocabulary, and organization.

Similar to his attitude towards the 107 portfolio introductory letter, Moto reported that it was not worth spending much time and effort on the 108.01 portfolio introductory letters. He did not think that the teacher would correct any language errors. In addition, he also reported that many of his classmates held the same attitude, indicating that they would spend as little time as possible writing the letters so that they could have more time studying for the midterms and finals.
Discussion

Portfolios

For all student participants in the study, the portfolio assignment primarily meant, at the end of the quarter, collecting all or selected work and placing it into a folder along with an introductory letter or reflective essay. Some submitted portfolios, such as June’s 107 Portfolio and Moto’s 108.01 Final Portfolio, included title pages for each individual section. In addition, Moto made a table of contents for his 108.01 Final Portfolio. Shim used index tabs to separate different sections in both his 108.01 portfolios. In spite of the extra effort they put into “decorating” their portfolios, most students did not think of it as necessary; nor did they feel proud of the extra “decorating” work they did. They did it in hope that the teachers would give them better grades. Several students, such as Moto, Shim, and Raj, openly argued or implicitly implied that the outlook was not important at all for a portfolio, instead, what was important should have been the content. Moto expressed dissatisfaction with the fact that his 108.01 midterm portfolio did not receive an A, owing to poor formatting and organization. Shim showed resistance to the teacher’s attempt to motivate students to make their portfolios more professional looking. June was the only one who, out of her own will, did a little extra work to improve the outlook of her portfolio by including title pages for the three samples as well as her introductory letters. Mary, one of the 107 teachers, observed that in the portfolios submitted by most of her male students, hardly any extra work had been done to make portfolios more organized and professional looking.

The lack of interest in the outlook of portfolios was probably due to students’ perception of portfolios primarily as folders that stored collections of their finished work
and/or work in progress. What all students deemed important in portfolios was the quality of the work contained within them rather than what kind of folders they were and how they looked.

In EDU T&L 107 and 108.01 student participants habitually kept their work in working folders that were already read and corrected by their teachers. Because of this practice, most of them, before working on their portfolio assignment, tended to consider this assignment as unnecessary extra work, and they expressed confusions or doubts about its purpose and usefulness. June and Shim initially both reported that portfolios would portray their writing processes. They both reported the importance of going through multiple revisions for improving writing. However, in the case of Shim, he did not seem to be fully convinced of the benefits of the 107 portfolio assignment to students.

Among four out of the five 107 student participants (Moto, Shim, Tim, and Jeong), their doubts seemed mostly focusing on how useful portfolio assignments were to students. Their doubts seemed to persist throughout the quarter and become stronger at quarter’s end after students completed their portfolio assignments. This phenomenon occurred in spite of the multiple sources through which they could have been informed of the purposes and potential benefits of their portfolio assignments. First, the 107 course packet clearly stated the double-edged purpose of the portfolio assignment: (1) allowing students to “analyze” their work and to “identify and appreciate specific types of growth and improvement,” and (2) giving students “the opportunity to show to the instructor the progress” he/she made over the entire quarter (Carreon, 2002, p. 6). Second, both instructors, early in the quarter, spent the whole or part of one lecture period explaining the various aspects of the portfolio assignment. Towards the quarter’s end, both
instructors spent about ten minutes going over the portfolio section in the course packet, which included detailed instructions on how students should approach the portfolio assignment and the assignment’s potential benefits. One instructor devoted one whole class period (about fifty minutes) for students to work on their portfolios so that students could get immediate feedback for questions they might have. Yet, the instructors’ efforts in trying to elevate the significance of this assignment beyond the actual percentage of less than 5% of the final grade did not seem effective in alleviating students’ doubts. June was the only one out of the five 107 participants who, in the end-of-quarter interview, did not show any doubt or negative feeling about the 107 portfolio assignment in spite of her earlier confusions.

The 108.01 portfolio assignment differed from the 107 assignment in two aspects: (1) no “selection” was involved, and (2) two submissions were required. The major purpose of this assignment remained the same (i.e., to “review and reflect”), as was stated in the First Portfolio Submission Guideline and the course packet. Owing to time limitations, the two instructors did not spend as much time in class elaborating on the purpose of the portfolio assignment as the two 107 instructors. One instructor argued that, since the course packet included clear instructions and explanations about the portfolio assignment (“clearer than I could explain myself”), students should be responsible for learning about it themselves. However, for the two participants (Moto and Shim) who were followed-up into their 108.01 portfolio experiences, doubts still seemed to exist as to how useful this assignment was to students after they submitted their third portfolios in the 107-108.01 sequence.
The students seemed not to think about the portfolio assignment until close to the due date(s). In EDU T&L 107, the due date was the end of the quarter. In EDU T&L 108.01, students needed to submit portfolios twice, at mid-quarter and quarter’s end. Throughout the quarter, students did not show much worry about the portfolio assignment. They had been doing all their assignments and had been keeping their work at all stages. Therefore, when the time came to submit their portfolios, they just needed to collect the required materials and write an introductory letter. The portfolio assignment was not interpreted as an ongoing activity in their minds. However, this perception was not in any conflict with the course packet or the instructors’ expectations. Except for June, the other four students tended to consider the portfolio assignment as merely a supplementary task to the midterm or the final exam.

During the quarter, all 107 student participants, except for June, claimed to have their own “portfolios.” Jeong’s “portfolio” was an electronic one that served like a “writing dictionary.” Shim and Moto, incidentally, both mentioned that they would keep their “portfolios” beyond the course of study so that they could enjoy looking back to see what their writing used to be like. For Tim, his “portfolio” only came into use once when he reviewed it before the midterm. The “portfolios” these students claimed to own were essentially working folders where they stored their work in progress. June, like her classmates, saved all course-related materials in a folder, but she did not identify it as a portfolio.

All of the five 107 students elaborated, to varying degrees, the significance of their own “portfolios” or writing folders, which primarily consisted of accessibility for reviewing. All students admitted that during the quarter they did not have much time to
look back at their completed work. Except for Moto, all of them mentioned that they did review their work once in a while. Moto reported that he would probably review his “portfolio” in the future. Generally, this reviewing activity that students did or might engage in was not systematic or frequent, but sporadic and sometimes unfocused. In addition, it seemed that for some students, this reviewing activity was not for academic purposes as much as for future “reminiscent” purposes.

Three ESL teachers pointed out in interviews that, with each quarter lasting only ten weeks, students were frequently overwhelmed with all the assignments and rarely did they have the time to stop and reflect on what they had learned; therefore, the 107 portfolio assignment — by requiring three samples selected from all the work and an introductory letter explaining the selections — and the 108.01 portfolio assignment — by requiring two portfolio submissions and thus two introductory letters — would provide students the extra opportunity (opportunities) to review and reflect upon their learning. The 107 course packet stated that, “by comparing and contrasting your earlier and later work in this course, you will have a valuable opportunity to identify and appreciate specific (emphasis added) types of growth and improvement you have experienced in your writing (as well as in your reading)” (Carreon, 2002, p. 6). The 108.01 First Portfolio Submission Guideline also made it clear that students should be able to “identify (emphasis added) your strengths and weaknesses.”

However, interview data indicated gaps in three aspects between teachers’ expectations (as well as those stated in the course packets) and students’ perceptions: (1) the purpose of the portfolio assignment, (2) the usefulness of the assignment, and (3) whether students could identify their specific growth in writing in English. In terms of
students’ perceived purposes of the portfolio assignment, most students mentioned that it was designed so that teachers could have a better view of their writing development. In other words, it was designed for teachers to assess students. Two students (Moto and Shim) emphasized the point that portfolios were a better assessment tool than in-class writing exams.

In terms of the usefulness of this assignment, students differed in their opinions. Tim, Shim, and Moto perceived this assignment as more useful to teachers than to students in that teachers, using students’ submitted portfolios, could assess students’ progress and efforts during the course of the study. June reported that she developed more consciousness of her problems in writing, even though she did not see any other immediate benefit that this assignment could bring. Her general attitudes about this assignment were positive. The other four male students all reported that, working on the portfolio assignment provided them the opportunity to look over their work. However, they did not seem to think of the reviewing activity as highly valuable or useful to them. To explore the difference in students’ opinions, it was worthwhile to consider the time and effort that students invested in their portfolio assignments.

Table 4.13 provides a display of these two factors in the three contexts of this study: EDU T&L 107, EDU T&L 108.01, and English 110 (The two cases from English 110 would be separately addressed later in this section). Effort was a complicated concept to measure. For this study, one important indicator was whether students cited specific examples from their selected samples. Table 4.13 also shows word counts for students’ portfolio introductory letters or reflective essays as a second indicator of effort. However, it was unclear whether a longer letter/essay necessarily involved more reflection. Even in
scenarios where specific examples were cited, examples might still be “weak,” as Jane observed in her students’ portfolio introductory letters, and thus might not necessarily result from serious reviewing and reflection activities. Therefore, both these indicators should be interpreted with caution and not as absolute evidence of effort.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Student</th>
<th>Reported Time Spent Working on the Portfolio Assignment</th>
<th>Portfolio Reflective Writing</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Total</td>
<td>Reviewing (and Selection)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moto</td>
<td>107</td>
<td>1 hour</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Moto. 01 Midterm</td>
<td>15-20 minutes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Moto. 01 Final</td>
<td>2 hours</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shim</td>
<td>107</td>
<td>3 hours</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Shim. 01 Midterm</td>
<td>1 hour</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Shim. 01 Final</td>
<td>1 hour</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jeong</td>
<td>107</td>
<td>1.5 hours</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>June</td>
<td>107</td>
<td>5 hours</td>
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<tr>
<td>Tim</td>
<td>107</td>
<td>3 hours</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fu</td>
<td>110</td>
<td>1.33 hours</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Raj</td>
<td>110</td>
<td>1.25 hours</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4.13: Students’ Self-reported Time and Effort Spent on Portfolio Assignments

Notes to Table 4.13:

¹ In Moto’s 108.01 Final Portfolio Introductory Letter, there were three paragraphs addressing the issue of group project, which was not required for the introductory letter, was not part of this study, and was not included for the word count here. The total length of his letter was 710.

² In Shim’s 108.01 Midterm Portfolio Introductory Letter, there was one paragraph addressing the issue of group project, which was not required for the introductory letter, was not part of this study, and was not included for the word count here. The total length of his letter was 346.

³ In Shim’s 108.01 Final Portfolio Introductory Letter, there was one paragraph addressing the issue of group project, which was not required for the introductory letter was not part of this study, and was not included for the word count here. The total length of his letter was 405.
Among all student participants in this study, June spent the longest period of time on her portfolio assignment. She cited specific evidence from her selected samples to support comments made in her portfolio introductory letter #1, which she described as a better version; June’s Letter #1 also turned out to be the longest one among all portfolio reflective writings (introductory letters or reflective essays). It seemed that June was seriously engaged in the reviewing activity, which probably explained her positive responses towards the portfolio assignment. Tim spent one hour in reviewing and making selections; he included specific examples from his samples; his portfolio introductory letter was the third longest among all portfolio reflective writings. However, some additional information was necessary for understanding his situation. He did not finish his portfolio assignment until about four hours before his early morning flight back to Indonesia. Amidst the excitement of finishing a very hectic quarter, packing, and flying back home, how concentrated could he have been in trying to complete his portfolio assignment? Some comments in Tim’s portfolio introductory letter also seemed to be vague and ambiguous, which seemed to result from lack of proofreading. In the other three cases (Shim, Jeong, and Moto), the time spent on reviewing and selection (108.01 portfolio assignment did not involve selection) was limited; the portfolio reflective writings tended to be short and contained no examples (although Moto’s 108.01 portfolio letters did show major improvements in comparison to his 107 letter). The less time and effort spent by the four male students provided a possible explanation of why they did not feel there was much value or usefulness in reviewing or completing the portfolio assignment.
The difference in time and effort also led partially to whether students could identify their specific growth. Most student participants felt that they had improved their writing in English. June pinpointed her biggest growth as being in grammar and the use of commas. The other four students, in the end-of-quarter interviews, seemed to have difficulty identifying their specific growth. Moto said: “I learned many things. I just don’t remember.” It was likely that, in order to “remember,” Moto would have to spend more time than “a few seconds” reviewing and reflecting upon his work.

However, the amount of time students spent reviewing was not the only issue here. To remember what was learned did not necessarily mean to be cognizant of and able to articulate it. Moto’s 108.01 portfolio experiences illustrated that effort did not necessarily lead to growths that were immediately identifiable to students. Given the levels of these students’ English proficiency and how much they had to learn in a limited time, it was highly possible that they could not immediately internalize the knowledge and skills transferred by their teachers or course packets. Moto argued that two or three months were not enough for him to feel much progress in English. A quote from Moto seemed representative of the puzzlement felt by many study participants:

We just learned something, how to write new types of essay. But we don’t understand how to write so far. I mean, I don’t understand…. I am a bad writer. I need practice more and more and more (Moto, Third interview, Spring 2002).

Even though Moto carefully added that his frustration might not happen to other students who were better writers, it was possible that, at certain points, all students felt frustrated at not being able to see any specific improvement in their English writing. Even in the case of June, who seemed to be the most devoted among the five participants, the only improvements she identified involved grammar and comma usage. As pointed out by
Jane, one ESL teacher, a discrete-point grammar focus could hardly be translated into writing practice. Likewise, knowledge about one type of writing did not necessarily lead to improvement in general writing skills. Most students were aware of these facts. However, their eagerness to see immediate, specific growth frequently led to their disappointment in portfolio assignments.

In the 107 portfolio assignment, another mismatch existed between the teachers’ expectations (as well as those expressed in the course packet) and what students did and perceived. Except for June, the other four participants did not report much benefit of the “selection” process in developing their portfolios. For Shim, since the submitted portfolios only contained three selected samples, he described the submitted portfolios as “artificial,” “not real,” and useless. Moto held similar opinions. For 107 students, the two procedures of selection and reviewing were not separated. Previous analysis already indicated that negative responses from students could be owing to the limited time and effort they spent reviewing and selecting samples for their submitted portfolios. However, there was another possible factor, i.e., the criteria students used in selecting samples. It was clearly explained in the course packet as well as by instructors that, the selected samples did not have to have the best grades, rather, they should represent what students themselves believed “would best demonstrate to your teacher your efforts to become a better writer and/or your progress as a writer and reader” (Carreon, 2002, p. 85).

Among the five 107 students, only June reported that her selections were based on the efforts she invested but not the grades. Moto and Jeong, instead of focusing on their own efforts, both seemed to place more direct focus on the objective features of
assignments. For example, Jeong chose essays because they were “longer;” Moto chose essays because they were “new” types of writing. It was possible that these objective features of writing tasks might lead to the certain amount of time and effort required of students. However, no definite relationship could be identified between objective features of writing tasks and students’ invested time and effort. For Shim and Tim, grades seemed to be an important concern in their sample selection processes. When grades were the major consideration, and when students did not focus on their own efforts and on how they could have improved more, it was not difficult to understand why students would consider portfolios as just another piece of schoolwork that was simply designed to keep them busy.

Students’ concern for grades also explained their lack of motivation and interest to spend much time and effort on the portfolio assignment. In 107, portfolios were less than 5% of students’ final grades; in 108.01, the two portfolios counted as 10% of the final grades, with 5% assigned to each. Both Jeong and Moto argued explicitly or implicitly that, for portfolio pedagogy to be successful and meaningful to students, students should be motivated or interested in developing portfolios. Moto suggested that students be given more freedom in making decisions about their portfolios. It might also be tempting to increase the proportion of portfolios in students’ grades. However, some teachers argued against using grades to motivate students. These teachers claimed that some students would probably use their portfolio reflective writings to please teachers instead of seriously reflecting and honestly discussing their efforts and progress.

As to the two requirements that made the 108.01 portfolio assignment different from the 107 version, Moto and Shim seemed to differ slightly in their attitudes towards
the first requirement: the 108.01 portfolio assignment requested that all materials were
collected into each portfolio. Moto persisted in thinking of portfolios as collections of all
the work he was involved in. His purpose was to have a complete picture on how he had
grown as an ESL writer. Therefore, the 108.01 portfolio assignment showed more
resemblance to his definition of portfolios. Shim’s view seemed different. He emphasized
that portfolios should essentially represent his writing processes. Therefore, to him, an
appropriate portfolio should only include drafts of his work. He argued that the 108.01
portfolio requirements were “unnecessarily painful” because some requested materials
were not significant to his writing processes, such as the peer review correspondences.
The “two submissions” was the second requirement that made the 108.01 portfolio
assignment different from the 107 portfolio assignment. Both students suggested that this
request was not necessary to them, because of their habitual practice of keeping all
materials in their own portfolios throughout the quarter. This reaction was probably
owing to the fact that these two students primarily considered portfolios to be collections
of their work.

For the two students in English 110, portfolios did not simply function as the
working folders that they were in 107 or 108.01. During the quarter, like the students in
EDU T&L 107 and 108.01, they did not think much about their portfolio assignment. To
them, portfolios seemed both far and near, far in the sense that the required portfolios
(perceived by them as the folders that contained the final drafts of their regular essays)
would not take shape and be submitted until the quarter’s end, and near in the sense that
the time and effort invested in their writing would materialize into the written texts
contained in their portfolios. During the quarter, portfolios were primarily an abstract
concept that represented both opportunities and challenges. On the one hand, students were given unlimited opportunities for revising at their own pace in completing their essay assignments. Both Fu and Raj emphasized the importance of this advantage to them as students learning to write in a second language. Raj also mentioned that the portfolio-based grading system provided more incentives for students to keep revising and improving their work. On the other hand, Fu also argued that students, in a portfolio-based grading system, had to be more self-disciplined and take more responsibility for their own learning. Fu reported that portfolios could be turned into a disadvantage if students abused the freedom provided by portfolios. However, she was still positive because she believed that portfolios would provide students an opportunity to learn to take more responsibility in their learning. In conclusion, during the quarter, both students seemed to value portfolios as a process that impacted students’ writing and learning, even though they did not emphasize exactly the same aspects.

Different from the 107 and 108.01 students, the 110 students did not need to save their rough drafts from different stages. Only the final drafts were required for portfolios submitted to the teacher. Both Raj and Fu argued that there was not much point in saving the rough drafts that were poor in quality and were not worth reviewing. This was an interesting reaction given that writing portfolios assumes that students will systematically reflect about their writing. For these two students, rereading and reviewing the rough drafts probably occurred before and during the revision processes. After all the revisions were completed and they did not intend to put any more time into a piece of writing, there did not seem to be much point for them to keep the old drafts. For the end-of-quarter
reflection, the final drafts seemed enough for reflecting upon their learning. It was unclear whether looking across at all drafts would have had a positive impact on their learning to write.

At the end of the quarter, portfolios demonstrated “the result of the process that you have gone through,” as Raj reported. What were immediately visible in the completed portfolios were not the processes but the products or “results.” Portfolios, in these two students’ eyes, became primarily collections of their work. At this point, compiling the final products into an actual portfolio, reviewing all the work, and writing a reflective essay to discuss progress or process, did not seem to be highly meaningful to Fu or Raj. As shown in Table 4.13, both students spent very little time reviewing their portfolios. It was not surprising, since they only had their final products to look at and especially because they both claimed to remember everything because they were still revising their essays several days before the portfolio due dates. Also, it is shown in Table 4.13 that neither student cited from their essays, even though the portfolio assignment handout encouraged (but did not require) students to cite from “various versions” of their essays. In the case of Raj, one of the two strategies he talked about in his reflective essay was “show vs. tell.” It seemed that in the context of the English 110 portfolio assignment, whether students felt the benefits of reviewing and reflection might also be related to their invested time and effort.

**Portfolio Reflective Writing**

*Perceptions and attitudes towards portfolio reflective writing.* All student participants in this study seemed to treat the regular writing tasks and the portfolio reflective writing
with different levels of seriousness. While the former needed to be revised multiple
times, the latter was mostly regarded as “free writing,” which did not have to go through
the same process of multiple reviewing and revisions. Except for June, all student
participants placed the first draft of their reflective writing into their submitted portfolios.
Most of the reflective writings contained some English language errors that seemed to
result from lack of proofreading. June went through her first draft and deleted some
sentences that described details in order to meet the 1.5-page limit. She did not change
the sentence structure or the wording in the remainder of her portfolio reflective writing.

Even though the content of portfolio assignments differed from each other in the
three contexts of EDU T&L 107, 108.01 and English 110, students’ perceptions and
attitudes towards the portfolio reflective writing seemed to share similarities. Moto and
Fu both seemed to be on the negative side. Moto’s overall attitude towards the portfolio
assignment was primarily negative. He repeatedly described that writing the portfolio
introductory letter was “boring.” In the case of Fu, she described the portfolio reflective
essay as a “process thing” that was “boring” and that “no one wants to read.” In the cases
of the other participants, the reflective writing was reported to be the most significant part
of the portfolio assignment. This reaction was probably owing to the fact that all of them
primarily treated portfolios as collections of their work and did not seem to value the
process of collecting or selecting. Raj, Jeong, and Shim all identified the letters/essays as
what made portfolios different from a simple folder or collection. Other students tended
to think of reflective writing as the only extra work they had for the portfolio assignment.
Most students had never experienced this kind of writing task before, nor had they ever
been taught how to write analytically and reflectively. Yet, they did not seem worried.
There were probably two reasons for their lack of anxiety. First, students were provided with very clear directions for this writing task. A five-paragraph formula was provided in the 107 course packet. It was not surprising that Moto and Shim followed this formula for their 108.01 portfolio introductory letters. Second, as mentioned earlier, most students did not seem to take this task seriously. As shown in Table 4.13, most students did not spend much time and effort on their introductory letters or reflective essays. Shim, as an extreme example, even used identical paragraphs in all three portfolio letters.

What had caused students’ perfunctory efforts on their reflective writing tasks? Part of the answer was an apparent lack of interest and low motivation. As explained by Jane, one of the 107 teachers, these students were not professional writers. They did not seem to have much of a gauge for the potential benefits that reflective writing could provide. Nor did they seem to be able to foresee any immediate consequence that sounded worth their time and effort in completing the portfolio requirements. Therefore, most of them had probably very little interest exploring and reflecting on their writing processes. Further, they took these courses not just to improve their English but also to fulfill particular GEC requirements. Thus, their attitudes would tend to be largely determined by how much impact the reflective writing would have on their GPAs. As mentioned earlier, in both 107 and 108.01, portfolios were a very small percentage of students’ final grades. In 110, even though portfolios carried much more weight in students’ final grades, students seemed to be certain that their grades would be primarily based on their regular essays. Most students suggested that, even if they spent time and effort on the portfolio reflective writing, they would probably not receive much reward in terms of getting a better grade. Meanwhile, they also reported that they would probably
not be penalized for spending less time and effort. For example, these students knew that teachers would not mark any grammar mistakes or errors that occurred in their reflective writings. Interviews with teacher participants indicated that these teachers were lenient in grading students’ portfolio reflective writings and would rarely take points off for minor or even major violations of the requirements about the reflective writing.

In some cases, students’ apparent low motivation and seeming lack of interest were not the only reasons for their seemingly perfunctory efforts. Take Moto for an example. Both in interviews and his 107 portfolio letter, he emphasized repeatedly that the teacher’s comments helped improve his work. However, he was not confident that he had become a more competent writer and could handle future writing tasks more appropriately and effectively. Given his apparent lack of confidence, he did not seem to be able to attribute the improvement in his written texts to exclusively his own efforts. If, in this scenario, he used examples from his essays (which he seemed to believe were still his teacher’s ideas) to show how he had developed as a writer, it would probably not sound like his own voice, but a voice he faked in order to fulfill the requirement. As indicated in Table 4.13, most students’ reflective writings did not include examples or citations from their work. It was also reported that all of the 107 and 108.01 students seemed to have difficulty identifying specific growth. In some cases, lack of examples probably indicated a lack of confidence in their improvement in writing.

As for the usefulness of this letter or essay, four students (i.e., Shim, Tim, Moto, and Fu) reported that they believed it would help the teachers to understand or assess students’ progress and effort. In terms of benefits to students, four participants (i.e., June, Jeong, Tim, and Shim) argued that writing the letter/essay reinforced what they had
learned through the course. Even Moto, who seemed to be mostly negative about the portfolio assignments, mentioned that writing the 107 and 108.01 portfolio letters did make him “think.” However, students’ attitudes were not always positive, because they did not seem to see much immediate benefit in the portfolio activities. Both Jeong and Raj admitted that if they had spent more time on the reflective writing, they would have benefited more from this task. However, to them, this would only occur in ideal situations. Their reality was primarily driven by a grade-oriented mechanism, that is, given the payoff, they could not help opting to spend as little time as possible on this task.

In terms of students’ perceived purposes of the portfolio reflective writing, most of them tended to think that it was designed to help teachers understand and assess students’ efforts and progress. Fu also suggested that it would help teachers to evaluate their own work. Moto, Tim, and Shim also mentioned that the purpose was for showing appreciation for teachers’ work. It was clearly stated in the 107 course packet that students should not comment on teachers’ work in the portfolio introductory letters. Some teachers also emphasized this point in class discussions. However, both 107 teachers noticed students’ tendency of including “profuse thanks” in their portfolio introductory letters. Mary said that about 80% of her students did so. Jane, the other 107 teacher, made the following observation about her students:

They also tended to interpret the task as praising the teacher for teaching so many things. We beg them not to do this! I still get portfolios that begin or end with profuse thanks to their wonderful teacher. I think it shows a certain suspicion about the purpose of the task – like maybe they think we really want to see how appreciative they are (Jane, Second interview, Spring 2002).
Towards students’ tendency of using the reflective writing to say “thank-you” to teachers, Jane’s response was not very positive. This tendency displayed in students’ reflective writings indicated to her that students misconceived the purpose of the task. However, not all teachers reacted negatively towards this tendency. The other 107 teacher Mary, for example, saw it as a sign of the warm relationship between students and the teacher.

**Features of students’ portfolio reflective writings.** To explore the features of students’ portfolio reflective writings, Table 4.14 was designed to show frequency counts in each category that emerged in their portfolio introductory letters or reflective essays. It was found that students primarily focused on self-assessment of their writing. In most cases, the second most frequently appearing category was writing task perception, which was found in all portfolio reflective writings except for Fu’s. In addition, there were other minor categories, which only appeared in some reflective writings. Students’ self-assessment comments were found to be about various aspects of their writing. Among all self-assessment comments, the greatest number fell into the general subcategory for almost all cases under study, with the only exception being Moto’s 107 portfolio reflective writing.

Among the particular aspects that students’ self-assessment addressed, one major difference was found between the five EDU T&L 107 and 108.01 students and the two English 110 students. In the latter group, neither Fu nor Raj focused on any mechanical aspect of their writing, such as grammar or vocabulary. Both of them chose to talk about strategies they employed in their writing processes. Fu’s central theme was how she developed authority. Raj primarily focused on his developing sense of the use of two
strategies: show vs. tell and dialogue. While recalling his development in writing, Raj did
mention that in the last year of high school, his teacher told him that he had grammar
problems; however, it was not what he perceived important for writing. Both students
also included multiple comments in the subcategory of audience awareness.

As for the group of 107 and 108.01 students, their self-assessment seemed mostly
focusing on surface features such as grammar and vocabulary and sometimes text
features such as organization. This phenomenon was not just found in these student
participants’ portfolio reflective writings. Jane, one of the two 107 teachers, observed that
her students’ reflective comments tended to fall into categories such as grammar and
vocabulary. Jeong, who was in Jane’s class, seemed to be an exception. Jane’s comment
on Jeong was that he “tried very hard to be analytical and talked about larger issues than
grammar and vocabulary.” Jeong was the only student from the 107 and 108.01 group
that included comments in the category of audience awareness, as the two students of 110
did. As indicated in the “Background” section of “Case study report,” Jeong was older in
age, seemed a more mature student, and also tended to be reflective of his learning. He
also had comparatively more experiences of taking writing-related classes in the United
States. However, in none of these aspects, he could be described as the most exceptional
in the 107 and 108.01 group. In terms of age, he was younger than Shim. In terms of
general education experiences, Shim had already obtained a Master’s degree in Korea. In
terms of writing-related education, Tim also went through college-level writing classes
prior to participation of this study. Jane, Jeong’s teacher, made an observation that might
be worth repeating here: Jeong’s reflection came from her comments on his papers.
However, this observation was not enough evidence that Jeong’s portfolio reflective writing did not involve any reflections but was copied entirely from his teacher’s comments.

For students of 107 and 108.01, their portfolio reflective writing also included self-assessment comments about their writing processes, which tended to be mostly in the subcategories of general intention or general strategy. As shown in Table 4.14, their reflections contained fewer general strategy comments than the reflections of 110 students did. As for the third subcategory, task-specific strategy, there was only one instance of it among all the reflective writings by 107 and 108.01 students. In contrast, both 110 students’ portfolio reflective essays included comments in the subcategory of task-specific strategy, even though they both included fewer comments in this subcategory than in the subcategory of general strategy.

Moto’s portfolio letters showed major improvement from 107 to 108.01, in both the number of self-assessment comments and the range of issues the self-assessment comments addressed. The self-assessment comments in his 107 reflective writing did not address any particular aspects of his writing except for some general aspects of his writing process. In the two 108.01 portfolio reflective writings, Moto discussed specific aspects such as grammar, organization, style, vocabulary, and task-specific strategy. In addition, Moto’s final portfolio reflective writing also showed some improvement in comparison to his midterm portfolio reflective writing.

Shim was a very special case in that his three portfolio reflective writings contained identical sentences and even identical paragraphs. For example, his comments on the course/teacher were exactly the same across all three reflective writings except for
the teachers’ names. The paragraphs on the group project were also exactly the same between the two 108.01 portfolio reflective writings. The high frequency of copying and pasting contained in his portfolio reflective writings was a strong indicator that he did not treat the assignment seriously and did not use this chance to engage in serious reflection of his learning. It was unclear whether those identical comments that appeared in different contexts were his sincere observations or just embellishments to fill up space or please the teachers.

Last, but not of least, it was noticed that some students’ portfolio reflective writings contained comments that were similar to or the same as their teachers’ comments written on their papers, such as Tim’s and Jeong’s. This occurrence might indicate some students’ tendency to focus their portfolio reflective writings on what the teachers had commented on or emphasized. However, there was not enough evidence that these students did not engage in any reflections on their learning.
Table 4.14: Characteristics of Study Students’ Portfolio Reflective Writings

Notes to Table 4.14:
1 June included two versions of her portfolio introductory letter: “Portfolio 1” and “Portfolio 2” for fear that the former exceeded the page limit. However, she argued that “Portfolio 1” better represented her efforts and progress. It was believed that “Portfolio 1” was a more authentic sample of her portfolio introductory letter. Therefore, the counts here were based on her “Portfolio 1.”

2 & 3 Moto and Shim both wrote three pieces of introductory letters. In order to save space, this table used “1” to represent 107 Portfolio Introductory Letter, “2” to represent 108.01 Midterm Portfolio Introductory Letter, and “3” to represent 108.01 Final Portfolio Introductory Letter.

4 The numbers in this table refer to the number of comments found in students’ reflective writings that fell in the corresponding category or subcategory.
Teachers’ Views

Even though teachers’ views were not the focus of the present study, their comments might help enrich the understanding of students’ attitudes and reported experiences. The following section reports the major findings from interviews with the participating teachers.

Generally, all teachers in this study believed in the value of portfolios for the use of writing courses. Most of them emphasized the reflective component of the portfolio approach and argued that it was important for students to reflect upon their learning. However, in terms of the actual portfolio implementation in their classrooms, teachers reported different views.

Teachers differed in their opinions on what foci in portfolio reflective writing constituted “real reflection” (Jane’s words) that would lead to learning and growth in students. One of the major differences centered on the issue of grammar. John, one teacher of the course 108.01, seemed to have a positive attitude about some students’ tendency to focus on grammar in their reflective writings:

I think grammar is an issue, in some cases, because for some students, they haven’t been aware their grammar still needs a lot of work. So this might become kind of a shock to them. And they might be overly concerned about grammar because they thought it was okay perhaps, especially if they are coming from another country. …. They thought it was okay. But now they’ve been told it was not. So this might have caused them to over-focus on grammar. But in a way, that’s good because they’ve got to do something. The impact of that might have a, what we call ‘positive stress’, constructive. It might help them, encourage them to look at their grammar more closely. I would not say that’s wrong, because that’s something they need. You can’t do everything at once. Even in one quarter, you can’t fix everything in one quarter. You’ve got to start somewhere. And if grammar is a big problem, well, that’s a good place to start…. And you are going to have to hope that the other issues will be recognized later on. And they will remember what we did in class later on. That’s also a very strong possibility. (John, Summer 2002)
John believed that ESL learners with grammar problems should strive to improve their grammar and that a reflection focusing on grammar would be beneficial to them. Jane, one of the course 107 teachers, however, did not seem to think that talking about discrete grammar points constituted “real reflection.” She argued:

A student might indeed have developed over the quarter, but showing how might be incredibly difficult. Development is not usually something you can point at in your writing. It is global. This puts students in a very difficult situation. What they end up doing, in my opinion, is writing about the thing we tell them not to do. We specify that we do not want them to point to discrete grammar points. For example, we don’t want a student to say, “I improved my grammar. See? I used a noun clause here.” Or “I improved my vocabulary, See? I used this new word here.” But ultimately this is what most of them write about. (Jane, Second interview, Spring 2002)

Her argument seemed in line with Moto’s opinion that it was difficult to see much improvement in writing after only one quarter’s study. It also lent support to students’ tendency to focus on discrete mechanical aspects of their writing or their tendency to use teachers’ comments. Among all of her students, Jane described Jeong as an exception in that his reflection focused on “bigger” issues such as audience awareness, rather than discrete grammar points. However, she also noticed that Jeong’s reflection actually came from her comments on his papers.

In spite of her feeling that students were only “pretending” to be analytical and reflective, Jane did not believe that students were to blame. She argued that the task students were asked to perform in their portfolio reflective writings (i.e., analyzing their writing and showing how they developed) was not only difficult but also different from the kinds of writing they had done throughout the quarter. This fact could probably provide an explanation for her leniency in grading students’ reflective writings, especially those that did not meet the exact requirements as stated in the original course packet.
As for the other 107 and 108.01 teachers in this study, students’ focus on grammar or vocabulary in their reflective writings did not seem to be an indication of “faked” reflections. They all agreed on the value of the reflective writing task to their students. However, both teachers of course 108.01 (Carol and John) found that students’ performances differed in their reflective writings.

Carol mentioned that for the first portfolio submission, two or three of her students simply turned in folders with “all of their stuff” (Carol’s word), without writing the introductory letter. She suggested that these students did not read the instruction for the portfolio submission and did not “even understand the concept they needed to submit the letter.” Carol described this behavior as “frightening because that was the point of the assignment.” When submitting their final portfolios, these several students did include an introductory letter.

In Carol’s class, “usually the better students reflect more and write more about their writing.” She described some of her students’ letters as “memorable.” However, on the other hand, there were also letters that did not go into depth or provide any detail. According to Carol, some students basically wrote: “Here is my writing, I enjoy the class, listserv was fun.” Carol agreed that Shim’s letter was a “very superficial response.” However, she also noticed that some students’ reflective writings exposed their inappropriate understanding of the two approaches for writing argument papers (point by point and block), which were the major content of the course. In this respect, Carol indicated that Shim’s letter at least summarized the major learning points well.
Carol believed that students needed more time to look back at their writing. To illustrate this point, she recalled her past experience of teaching courses 106 and 107 in two consecutive quarters:

Years ago, I had a consecutive …. 106 and 107. And so I had the same group of students, which is a rarely happened opportunity. …. So I was able to go back to their previous work and say: ah-ha, you are writing your portfolio, reflecting your writing; rather than looking at the 10 small weeks, let’s look at ten more, plus the break time and everything. So going back 12 more weeks beyond, we had about 22 weeks to look at, which is really kind of nice. I know one of the best portfolio classes I remember was that 107 class. They went back to their first 106 assignment and ended with their last 107 assignment. They could show, they could see themselves in the picture. And I think sometimes they are so involved with their tasks they don’t see the difference. And they don’t have enough time to reflect on that. (Carol, Summer 2002)

Carol emphasized the importance of time in terms of providing the distance for students to see differences in their writing, to understand how they had improved. The student participant Moto also expressed a similar point of view.

John, the other teacher of the course 108.01, also pointed out that the time factor influenced the realization of the major portfolio asset, i.e., reflection. He especially emphasized that students could not fully benefit from the two portfolio submissions owing to the short duration of the academic quarter. Another similarity he shared with Carol was that he also emphasized differences in students’ reflective writing performances. He reported that some letters were original and interesting and showed reflection. In John’s opinion, Moto had engaged in reflection while composing the final portfolio introductory letter, which showed that “the portfolio has worked, to some extent with this student [Moto].”
As for some students’ resistance to portfolios and portfolio reflective writing, John responded that portfolios and reflection might have been totally new concepts to these students. He described that these students, as adolescents, might not have fully understood “what learning is all about.” John suggested that some students might be still in the stage of working on an assignment in order to get “points” (John’s word).

John firmly believed that portfolios were useful in “helping students to reflect and to organize their assignments and keep a record of them.” He suggested that some students benefited more from the portfolio assignment than others; how much benefit students obtained depended on how much effort they put into it. John argued that, as a teacher, he could only hope that all students would make their best efforts. However, in his opinion, it was not surprising that some students might choose not to work hard on certain assignments. He also suggested that student attitudes might change as they became more mature.

Joy, the teacher of English 110, also noticed the different performances in students’ reflective writings. She reported that a few of her students’ reflective essays were basically lists of course objectives stated in her syllabus. However, Joy, like most other teachers, still believed in the value of the reflective writing for students’ learning. She argued:

I think for the people who were actually taking it seriously, it is meaningful because they did have the chance to look at their writing over the quarter and say: here is what I learned. You know, I don’t know how many people would actually come to that realization without having to write that paper. And even the people who did not give me specific evidence I’d like to think that they at least got something out of that assignment. You know, even if they were just writing to please me to give me what I wanted to hear and what they thought I wanted to hear, I’d like to think that they at least figured out what they should have learned. And some of them may just not be very good at giving evidence from their
papers. I mean I think that some of them probably really did learn something but not good at giving out evidence. You know, they hadn’t developed that skill yet. (Joy, Spring 2002)

Similar to John, Joy reported that students who took the portfolio task seriously did benefit from it. She acknowledged that some students might have been writing to give the teacher what she wanted to see. However, she believed that even these students had benefited from the portfolios because they, at least, “had figured out what they should have learned.” This opinion was similar to Carol’s comment on Shim’s 108.01 portfolio letters.

Mary, one of the 107 teachers, was the only teacher who did not report any complaints about her students’ reflective writings. She described her students as being “honest” and “really reflecting” in their portfolio introductory letters, which she enjoyed reading and cherished very much. She did not think that her students were just writing what she wanted to see. In Mary’s opinion, with the establishment of mutual trust and respect between teacher and students, students did not have to use the end-of-quarter reflective writing to please her. Mary also emphasized that she did not grade students’ portfolios purely based on “the quality of their letters.”

Mary’s comment on the reflective writings of the three student participants in her class (Shim, Tim, and June) was: they were “fine.” She described Shim’s letter as “good formulated” and “very precise.” She explained that since they spent half the quarter learning how to write summaries, students should be able to summarize their accomplishments in a “pretty condensed format.” She reported that June’s shorter introductory letter displayed her use of the strategies for writing summaries.
In summary, all participating teachers valued portfolios for the opportunities of reflection that they provided. However, they differed in terms of their evaluation of students’ reflective writing. One teacher believed that development in writing was “global” and “showing how might be incredibly difficult.” She did not seem to think that her students were capable of analyzing their development in writing, because they had never been taught to do so. In her opinion, students were only “pretending” to reflect in their reflective writings. On the other hand, another teacher reported that her students “really reflected.” Even though both teachers used the same term “reflect,” it was possible that they interpreted it differently and had different expectations for students’ reflective writings. All the other teachers in this study believed that reflective writing was a beneficial activity for their students. They acknowledged differences in students’ reflective writing performances. They reported this difference to be owing to students’ varied capability to reflect and analyze or their different amount of investment. Some teachers also pointed out that a longer time interval (than one academic quarter) would probably help students see their progress and benefit more from their portfolio assignments.

Summary

This chapter presented a case study report for each of the seven case study participants, follow-up case study report: Shim, and follow-up case study report: Moto. For each case study report, data were presented in three sections: background, portfolio, and reflective writing. The portfolio section contained one of two major subsections: 107 Portfolio or English 110 Portfolio. For certain students, there were additional subsections:
previous portfolio experience and/or “My own portfolio.” Along with background information, these extra subsections provided important materials for analyzing and interpreting students’ reported experiences and attitudes. For the two follow-up cases, data were presented in sub-sections 108.01 Midterm Portfolio, Midterm Portfolio Introductory Letter, 108.01 Final Portfolio, summary of portfolio experiences, and Final Portfolio Reflective Writing. Teachers’ views were also reported and synthesized to add more perspectives to understanding students’ attitudes and experiences.

All students’ portfolio reflective writings were coded and analyzed. The major pattern that emerged was students’ self-assessment of their own writing. Students of 110 seemed to display different foci in reflective writings than most students of 107 and 108.01 did.

Students’ reported attitudes about writing portfolios and about their portfolio reflective writings were compared across different contexts within the study. It was found that the attitudinal differences among students were closely related to how much time and effort they spent on their portfolio assignments. The limited time and effort some students spent were due to their lack of interest and low motivation to work on the portfolio assignment. There were various factors that might have caused these student reactions, such as the percentage that portfolios contributed to final grades and the short duration of an academic quarter.

Several themes emerged as the researcher analyzed and synthesized the data. Chapter V presents answers to the research questions raised in the present study as well as implications, limitations, and recommendations for further study.
CHAPTER 5

FINDINGS, IMPLICATIONS, LIMITATIONS,
AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FURTHER STUDY

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to investigate ESL students’ own voices in describing their experiences with writing portfolios in selected college composition classes. To better understand students’ self-reported experiences, teachers’ views were also elicited and analyzed. Hence, the major sources of data came from student interviews and teacher interviews. Another source of data was the students’ reflective writings contained in their submitted portfolios. Additional sources of data came from classroom observations and document (e.g., course packets and syllabi) analyses.

This chapter begins with the section of research findings, in which the proposed research questions are answered and discussed. The answers are based on data analysis results in Chapter 4. Following the research findings, this chapter includes five other sections: recommendations for further research, limitations, summary, researcher reflections, and epilogue.
Research Findings

In summary, data analysis suggested several general outcomes with respect to the proposed research questions. In this section, research findings are presented for each research question.

Research Question 1
What attitudes did selected ESL college students hold toward writing portfolios?

Students tended to interpret portfolios primarily as folders to store collections of their finished work and/or work in progress. As reported in Chapter 4, all student participants in EDU T&L 107 and 108.01 habitually kept all of their writing in working folders that were already read and corrected by their teachers. Before they started working on their portfolio assignment, most of them described the assignment as unnecessary. Interview data showed that some of them had doubts about the purposes and usefulness of the portfolio assignment. They usually did not think about the assignment until close to the due dates. After they finished their portfolio assignment, most students seemed to become more positive (although to different degrees), because working on their portfolios provided them with an opportunity to review their work. All students in this study included the required samples into their submitted portfolios. This reaction was different from the findings of Hamp-Lyons’ 1995 study where some ESL writers did not produce collections that fully conformed to the portfolio requirements (Hamp-Lyons & Condon, 2000). The present study, however, was based on investigations of seven students. The sample size might have been the factor that caused the difference in findings.
For some students in this study, conforming to the portfolio requirements in terms of selecting and collecting, however, did not seem to help much in eliminating their doubts about the benefits of the portfolio assignment to students. Most students reported not seeing much immediate impact from reviewing their portfolio work. They tended to perceive the assignment as designed to facilitate teachers’ assessment of students’ effort and progress. In terms of the benefits to students’ learning, June was the only student who was overtly positive and did not express any doubt at the end of the quarter. Follow-up study on Moto and Shim’s 108.01 portfolio experiences did not reveal any significant change in terms of their attitudes about the required portfolios.

Data presented in Chapter 4 showed that students’ attitudes were related to the time and effort they invested in their portfolio assignments. Thus, June’s positive attitudes and other students’ less positive attitudes could probably be explained by the different amount of time and effort they spent on their portfolio assignments. In 107, this difference could also be due to the criteria that students employed for selecting samples into the required portfolios. The four male students either used grades or some objective features of writing tasks, for example, length, while June primarily considered how much time and effort she spent working on a certain writing task. For those study participants who used grades as selection criteria, they tended to view the portfolio assignment as extra school work that teachers used to keep students busy. In other words, they did not view portfolios as a tool for instruction or learning that could help improve their writing skills.

In the cases of the four male students, in spite of their less positive attitudes towards the portfolio assignments, they all reported having their own “portfolios,” which
were folders that stored materials related to their writing courses, including all of their writing and/or course handouts. Their reported attitudes towards the self-acclaimed “portfolios” seemed to be more positive. Different reasons were reported for this positiveness. The two major reasons were as follows: (1) the “portfolios” that contained all of their writing could function as “writing dictionaries,” which they could refer to when they encountered similar types of writing tasks; and, (2) in the future, when they reviewed the “portfolios” that contained all materials, they would be able to see a complete picture of their writing development.

For the two students of English 110, a portfolio was not only a folder for storing their written work but had additional purposes. As reported in Chapter 4, it meant unlimited opportunities for revision, which both participants considered especially important to them as ESL writers. A writing portfolio also provided students the freedom to work at their own paces. It was also reported that learning not to abuse this freedom could be a challenge and required students’ self-discipline. Even though the advantage of freedom could turn into a disadvantage, one student of 110 viewed this potential problem in a positive way, because it would teach students to take more responsibility for their own learning. Data from teacher interviews showed that both students of English 110 took advantage of the opportunities offered by the portfolio-based assessment by engaging in substantial revisions of their work. This finding was also different from what Hamp-Lyons found in some ESL writers in her 1995 study (Hamp-Lyons & Condon, 2000). Again, it is important to recognize that the present study included a sample size of seven students. The sample size might have caused the different finding of the present study. However, it was not the focus of the present study.
Reacting positively towards the opportunities and challenges brought by a writing portfolio, however, students of English 110 did not seem to be equally enthusiastic and positive towards the final stage of collecting their work into an actual portfolio, reviewing it, and writing a reflective essay. At this final stage, the portfolios of 110, in these students’ eyes, were reduced to mere collections of students’ writings, as in the context of 107 and 108.01. Students reported perceiving the portfolio assignment more as extra school work that would help teachers assess students’ writing. This reaction also occurred among students of 107 and 108.01. Data in Chapter 4 showed that the two students of English 110 spent limited time and effort on their portfolio assignment, which might be a possible explanation for the small gains reported by the students.

Among the multiple implications of the writing portfolios, it seemed that a universal theme existed in all three contexts: students seemed to treat writing portfolios primarily as collection folders for holding their writing and writing-related materials. As such, writing portfolios were frequently identified by the student participants as tools for teachers to assess students’ effort and progress rather than as tools for teaching and learning. In terms of portfolios as an assessment tool, the findings from this study are similar to those of Song and August (2002), who stated that students considered portfolio assessment “more suitable and fairer than a single test” (p. 53). Students in this study did acknowledge the potential values of portfolios as learning tools that should enhance students’ reflective learning. However, some students pointed out that the use of portfolios as valuable learning tools was only an “ideal,” due to students’ self-assessed lack of motivation and interest in spending time and effort on their portfolio assignments.
This result supports the statement made by Linn, Baker, and Dunbar (1991) that students’ performance in assessment could be influenced by factors such as motivation.

**Research Question 2**

What were the characteristics of these ESL students’ portfolio reflective writings?

Students’ portfolio reflective writings tended to be brief in terms of content. The primary focus of their reflective writings was self-assessment of their writing. Students’ self-assessment comments were often general, even though there were also specific comments. For most students of 107 and 108.01, their specific comments primarily focused on grammar, vocabulary, and organization. Among the two students who participated in this study for two consecutive quarters, Moto’s portfolio reflective writings displayed improvements from 107 to 108.01. The improvements were reflected both in the number of self-assessment comments and in the range of issues the self-assessment comments addressed. Shim’s two 108.01 portfolio reflective writings were largely copied from his 107 reflective writing and did not seem to show much improvement. For the two students of 110, their self-assessment comments mostly addressed strategies they employed in their writing processes.

In all three contexts, students’ reflective writings, with a few exceptions, featured a tendency of not citing evidence or examples from their written texts. This tendency occurred even though students had been requested or suggested to cite from their writings. This phenomenon partly resulted from students’ unwillingness to spend much time on tasks that they deemed unimportant. The teacher of 110 in this study also pointed out that some students might not be good at citing evidence from their written texts.
Another cause for the lack of cited evidence in students’ reflective writings could be students’ understanding of free writing. Interview data suggested that both teachers and students primarily interpreted the reflective writing as free writing. When dealing with free writing, students may have considered it unnecessary to conform to some conventional rule such as providing evidence to support conclusions. On the other hand, it might not have occurred to the students to include cited evidence or examples in a piece of free writing. The present study, however, did not include a priority to answer this question.

Last, but not least, lack of cited evidence might also be an indicator of some students’ failure to identify specific growth in their writing. As data in Chapter 4 showed, students frequently had difficulty identifying specific growth in their writing. Therefore, it was reasonable that they could not present exact evidence of their writing improvement in their reflective writings. In addition, the fact that some students could not identify their specific growth in writing could probably explain why their self-assessment tended to be more general than specific. It was also found that some students’ portfolio reflective writings contained comments that were similar to or the same as their teachers’ comments on their papers. Such similarity indicated students’ tendency to focus their discussions on what their teachers had emphasized. However, there was not enough evidence to conclude that these students, as they were working on their portfolio reflective writing tasks, did not engage in reflections about their learning.

In all three contexts of this study, student participants’ portfolio reflective writings tended to focus on primarily self-assessment of their writing. Even though their self-assessment tended to be general and brief, there were comments addressing various
specific aspects of their writing. Students of 107 and 108.01 tended to show different foci than students of 110. Another common feature of students’ portfolio reflective writings was the lack of cited evidence or examples to support their self-assessment comments, which might have occurred for various reasons: (1) students were unwilling to spend much time on assignments that they considered unimportant; (2) students were not good at citing evidence from their written texts; (3) students did not think it necessary to provide evidence in their reflective writings; (4) it did not occur to students to provide evidence in their reflective writings; and (5) students had difficulty identifying their improvement in writing.

Research Question 3
What features did selected ESL students tend to focus on in their portfolio reflective writings?

As stated in the answers to Question 2, students’ portfolio reflective writings mainly focused on self-assessment of their writing. It was found that the foci of students’ self-assessment of their writing differed between the reflective writings in the 107 and 108.01 portfolios and those in the 110 portfolios. The reflective writings by the two 110 students did not focus on any mechanical aspects of their writing, such as grammar or vocabulary. Both chose to focus on strategies that they employed in their writing processes. Fu’s central theme was how she developed authority in her writing. Raj primarily focused on his developing sense of the use of two writing strategies: show vs. tell and dialogue. In addition, both of them included self-assessment comments that indicated their senses of audience awareness.
As for the group of 107 and 108.01 students, their self-assessment seemed mostly focusing on surface features such as grammar and vocabulary and sometimes text features such as organization. This phenomenon was not just found in these student participants’ reflective writings. Jane, one of the two 107 teachers, observed that her students’ reflective writings tended to discuss such issues as grammar and vocabulary. Jeong seemed to be an exception in that his self-assessment comments addressed not only the surface features and text features of his writing but also showed his sense of audience awareness. Jane commented that Jeong “tried very hard to be analytical and talked about issues larger than grammar and vocabulary,” even though she also noticed that Jeong’s reflections actually came from her comments on his papers.

107 and 108.01 students’ reflective writings sometimes also included self-assessment comments that described their writing processes, even though they tended to be mostly comments in the subcategory of general intention, for example, “for in-class writing, I tried to write my best in short time” (Shim, 107 Portfolio Introductory Letter), or comments in the subcategory of general strategy, for example, “learned and repeated the skill how to proofread to be an experienced writer” (June, 107 Portfolio Introductory Letter). It was found that the reflective writings by 107 and 108.01 students contained fewer general strategy comments than those by the two 110 students. As for the third subcategory in writing processes, task-specific strategy, there was only one instance of it among all the reflective writings in the 107 and 108.01 portfolios. In contrast, both 110 students’ reflective writings included comments in the subcategory of task-specific strategy, even though they both included fewer comments in this subcategory than in the subcategory of general strategy.
Moto’s reflective writings showed improvement from 107 to 108.01, both in the number of the self-assessment comments and in the range of issues addressed by these comments. His 107 self-assessment comments were only about general aspects of his writing processes. In his two 108.01 portfolio reflective writings, Moto’s self-assessment addressed specific aspects such as grammar, organization, style, and vocabulary. In terms of writing processes, there was a comment about task-specific strategy. From 108.01 Letter #1 (for Midterm Portfolio) to 108.01 Letter #2 (for Final Portfolio), he also showed some improvement in both the quantity and quality of his self-assessment comments. In addition, his Letter #2 was almost twice as long as his Letter #1, because Letter #2 contained three paragraphs that addressed what he learned from the group project.

As reported in Chapter 4, Shim was a special case in that his three portfolio reflective writings contained a large number of identical sentences and identical paragraphs. For example, his comments on the course/teaching were exactly the same across all three reflective writings except for the teachers’ names. His paragraphs on the group project were also the same between the two reflective writings in his 108.01 portfolios. The frequency of copying and pasting that displayed in his reflective writings was an indicator that he may not have treated the assignment seriously and may not have taken this chance to engage in serious reflections of his learning. Further, it was unknown whether those identical comments that were used for different contexts were his sincere observations or just embellishments to fill up space or to please the teachers.

For students of 107 and 108.01, the second most frequently appearing category was writing task perception, in which students described how they perceived/interpreted the writing tasks they had learned through the course. Comments in this category were
found to be either specific or general. All 107 students included various comments on the writing tasks they were involved in during the quarter, except for Moto in his 108.01 reflective writings. In the reflective writings by the 110 students, no comment in this category was found except for one instance, which was about the task of portfolio reflective writing instead of the regular writing tasks they had completed throughout the quarter.

In summary, students of 107 and 108.01 displayed different foci in their portfolio reflective writings than students of 110. Generally, students of the first group tended to primarily focus on mechanical aspects of their writing such as grammar, vocabulary, and organization. In contrast, the two 110 students tended to focus on strategies they employed in their writing processes. Another focus of 110 students’ reflective writings was on the issue of audience awareness. The same focus was only found in the reflective writing by one student from the 107 and 108.01 group. This particular student was more mature and tended to be more reflective about his writing. Another difference in their portfolio reflective writings was that the 107 and 108.01 students tended to include comments on the writing tasks that they learned through the course while the 110 students did not.

It might be tempting to conclude that students’ proficiency levels in English writing influenced their choices of focus for their reflective writings. However, students’ reports about teachers’ foci in instruction suggested another cause. According to students, the teachers of 107 and 108.01 spent class time discussing grammar issues while the teacher of 110 seldom did. Therefore, what students chose to focus on in their reflective writings could also be a reflection of what the teachers emphasized in class discussions.
As pointed out by the teacher of course 110, a few of her students’ reflective writings were basically a list of course objectives stated in the course syllabus. This kind of behavior did not seem to occur in any of the seven participants’ reflective writings. However, some of them did show signs of it to varying degrees. One example was Shim, whose three reflective writings primarily consisted of what was taught to students by the teachers. In addition, some students showed the tendency to focus their reflective writings on what the teachers had emphasized. This finding about the ESL students’ reflective writing behavior is similar to what other researchers (e.g., Potts, 1996; Sunstein, 2000) found in their studies of reflective writing by native English-speaking students.

**Research Question 4**

What attitudes did selected ESL students hold toward the portfolio reflective writing?

As reported in Chapter 4, except for Moto and Fu, all student participants suggested that the reflective writing was the most significant part of the portfolio assignment. This reaction was probably due to the fact that most of them basically treated portfolios as folders of their writing product collection. Raj and Shim both identified reflective writing as what made portfolios different from a simple folder or collection. Other students reported that reflective writing was the only additional task they had for the portfolio assignment.

For students of 107 and 110, with the exception of Raj, no one had ever had any previous experience with reflective writing. Yet, none of these students reported worries or anxieties about this task. Students tended to treat the reflective writing not as seriously as their other assignments such as regular essays or summaries. As a consequence, most...
students reported having spent little time and effort on this task. This reaction may have been due to students’ lack of interest and low motivation to spend much time and effort on this task. A point expressed by one teacher was worth repeating here: these students were not professional writers; instead, they were ESL students being taught composition skill development, and, reflection was a tool towards that end goal. They did not have much first-hand experience with the potential benefits that reflective writing could produce. Nor did they seem to be able to foresee any immediate consequence that appeared to be worth their time and effort. Further, their reported reasons for taking these courses (107, 108.01, and 110) were not just to improve their English but also to fulfill the particular GEC requirements. Thus, students’ attitudes tended to be largely determined by how much impact their reflective writing would have on their final grades. In both 107 and 108.01, portfolios were a very small percentage of students’ final grades. In 110, even though portfolios played very significant roles in the final grades, interview data indicated that students seemed to be certain that their grades would be primarily based on their regular essays. Students’ verbal reports also suggested that, even if they spent much time and effort on their reflective writing, they would probably not receive much reward in terms of better grades. Meanwhile, students also reported that they would not be penalized for not spending much time and effort on this task.

As for the usefulness of the reflective writing, students reported that reflective writing would help teachers understand and assess students’ progress in writing. In terms of benefits to students, four participants indicated that writing about their learning throughout the quarter reinforced what they had learned. Even Moto, who seemed to be mostly negative about portfolio assignments, mentioned that the 107 and 108.01 portfolio
reflective writings did make him “think.” Both Jeong and Raj admitted that, ideally, writing a reflective letter/essay would have been a beneficial activity if they had spent more time on it. However, they suggested that, in reality, spending two or three more hours on this activity would probably not have significantly increased their grades. They also pointed out that the same amount of extra time spent preparing for the final exam would probably have made a difference in their final grades.

In terms of students’ perceived purposes for portfolio reflective writing, most of them reported that it was designed for teachers to understand and evaluate students’ efforts and progress in writing. This perception seemed consistent with these students’ overall reported perceptions about the portfolio assignment. In addition, Moto, Tim, and Shim also mentioned that the portfolio reflective writings were designed for students to show appreciation to teachers’ work, which was what they did in their portfolio reflective writings (Shim, 107, 108.01; Moto, 107; Tim, 107). Both 107 teachers reported their students’ tendency to praise the teachers’ work in their portfolio reflective writings.

In conclusion, even though most students recognized the reflective writing as a significant part of their portfolio assignments, their verbal report indicated that they did not treat this task seriously, primarily because of their lack of self-motivation and personal interest in spending time and effort on this task. Student reports about the purposes and usefulness of this task seemed mostly teacher-centered. In other words, the task was reported by students to be primarily an assessment tool for teachers rather than a learning tool for students.
Research Question 5

To what extent could selected ESL students describe their writing improvement in their portfolio reflective writings?

Data from this study indicated that frequently students did not report much improvement in their writing after one academic quarter of study. This reaction could be due to the short duration of this study, which made it difficult for students to find enough time to reflect and to identify specific growths in their English writing.

As indicated in the answers to Question 3, some student participants had the tendency to focus their portfolio reflective writings on what the teachers had commented on or emphasized in class. As a result, the portfolio reflective writings by most students were, in some measure, more like summaries of what had been taught or discussed by teachers than about how their writing had been improved from their own perspectives.

For this reason, it seemed appropriate to eliminate this question. However, further studies that span across longer periods of time might address this question.

Research Question 6

What aspects of these ESL students' previous educational backgrounds impacted their reported learning to write via portfolio instruction?

Among the seven participants in this study, Raj, Tim, and Jeong had all taken college level English courses in the U.S. prior to participation in this study. For other participants, the previous writing instructions they received focused mainly on products rather than processes, and did not involve working on multiple drafts and revisions. All students seemed to welcome learning via portfolios, although to varying degrees,
primarily due to the opportunity of multiple revisions of their writing and also for the portrayals of the processes they went through in developing their writing samples.

As reported in Chapter 4, among the five 107 students, June seemed to be the most positive about the portfolio assignment. Other students either showed mixed feelings or tended to be negative. Interview data showed that most students did not seem to attach much value to the reviewing activity, the major consequence of the portfolio assignment as was reported by most students.

In the case of June, other than a six-month TOEFL preparatory course in New York City, EDU T&L 107 was the first English course that she took in the United States. Compared to the other participants, she and Shim (who spent five months taking ESL courses in San Diego) had less amount of exposure to writing in English. In the case of Fu, for whom English 110 was her first English course in America, the after-school English courses taught mostly by British teachers in Indonesia provided her with a lot of experience in English writing. The other student participants, prior to participating in this study, went through regular schooling in America, either at the secondary level, at the higher education level, or both. In their previous education, all of these students experienced writing portfolios of different types. However, data from this study did not seem to suggest any relationship between students’ reported benefits of the portfolio assignment and whether they had any previous experience with writing portfolios.

Joy, the teacher of English 110, observed that in terms of learning to write via portfolios, her ESL students did not show much difference from her native English-speaking students. In other words, being an ESL learner did not prevent students from benefiting from portfolios. As suggested by data in this study, the differences in terms of
reported learning via portfolios were probably owing to the time and effort that students were willing to expend. This finding is consistent with Hirvela and Pierson’s conclusions that students “who ‘do the work’ and take pride in developing their portfolios” felt that they had “learnt a lot” (Hirvela & Pierson, 2000, p. 124).

Research Question 7

What programmatic and instructional implications does this study have for the use of writing portfolios in college ESL composition programs?

Even though this study was not designed to provide solutions to be applied in any other settings without any further considerations, teachers and course designers who find themselves in similar contexts might obtain insights from this study. At the very least, this study could increase the experiential database from which teachers can operate as reflective practitioners. The following section discusses programmatic and instructional implications this study has for the use of writing portfolios in college composition programs.

Data from this study suggested that students’ previous educational background did not seem to impact their learning to write via portfolios. It also suggested that ESL students could benefit from the opportunities provided by portfolios. Data also indicated differences in terms of the extent to which students reported portfolios to be useful. The differences were, in many cases, due to the time and effort spent by the students.

It was also suggested that limited time and efforts spent were frequently caused by students’ lack of interest and low motivation, in spite of the recognized potential benefits of the portfolio assignment. As has been previously reported in the professional
literature, students’ “experienced curriculum,” i.e., the “product of students’ learning up to date,” might not necessarily match the expectations of teachers’ “delivered curriculum” (Yancey, 1998, p. 46). Data from this study indicated a gap between these two curriculums in all three contexts of this study.

The following part describes more detailed implications derived from this study. In this study, one of the reasons that caused the gap between the “experienced curriculum” and the “delivered curriculum” was that, during the academic quarter, students were overwhelmed with their regular writing tasks and writing portfolios seemed a very distant concept. Students did not need to think about them until close to the due dates. As a result, students tended to treat the portfolio assignment as an end-of-quarter supplementary task that was of trivial importance. In order for students to benefit from working on their portfolios, there probably should be multiple submissions. Students should be encouraged to reflect periodically on their learning in written forms and keep these reflective writings in their portfolios. Specifically, teachers might ask students to write letters or memos to themselves to answer particular questions about their writing. These answers would be used as part of student-teacher conferences. This is a promising strategy that should be researched.

After the first portfolio submission, an interactive discussion between teachers and students about writing portfolios might prove to be beneficial. Student feedback might provide for modifications to portfolio assignments that would be more effective and efficient. More student involvement, with teacher guidance, would potentially motivate students to take more responsibility for their learning.
More frequent submissions would probably require teachers to provide more feedback for students’ portfolios, which would result in extra tasks for a teacher’s workload. To reduce additional work, students could be encouraged to exchange portfolios periodically among themselves to share their reflections and to give each other feedback. Peer feedback has been reported as an approach in the professional literature. Literature has also suggested that students from some cultural groups might initially feel discomfort at procedures like peer review. Therefore, teachers might need to be cautious in using this approach. Data from this study indicated that, for some students, writing tended to be a private, individual activity, rather than socially situated. Some students might not be comfortable with the peer review activity, particularly students from certain cultural backgrounds. Students’ discomfort or resistance might also be a result of individual personalities and/or years of education that reinforced certain perspectives. Teachers should be aware that students might need constant support and encouragement to adjust to novelties. This is as true for writing portfolios as for all types of instruction.

It was worth pointing out that students should not treat portfolios as simply folders for storing their work. The implementation of a portfolio pedagogy should enforce the idea that reflection is an important and ongoing component of learning. Students need to review and reflect on their work periodically. As shown in this study, the reviewing activity that students engaged in might not be frequent or systematic or might not be related to any academic purpose. Even though this kind of reviewing activity might not be what writing teachers sought through the portfolio assignment, it could very well be the “prototype” of the desired reflection that could lead to learning.
Humans are born with varying levels of analysis skills. In terms of writing, students should be taught how to analyze a given text as well as their own writing. However, without the teacher’s instructions and students’ practices, without the efforts to establish a “culture” or context in which students are encouraged to reflect and share their reflections, it may be difficult for this “prototype” to develop into the “reflection” that could produce long-term benefits for students’ writing.

Another issue was related to the degree of student-centeredness (versus teacher-centeredness) in college writing courses that utilize portfolios routinely. As shown in responses to Research Question 1, despite some students’ less positive attitudes towards their portfolio assignments, they seemed to value their own “portfolios” to a greater degree, according to their self-reports. One student specifically argued for a portfolio system in which students would have the right to decide what went into their portfolios. It is difficult for teachers to predict what each individual student is like. Students should be involved in the decision-making process about what kind of portfolios they would like to work on. Certainly, as an assessment tool, a portfolio system should be built upon some standards accepted by both teachers and students. Agreement might or might not be reached after negotiation and discussion. Who should compromise is a highly contextual question for which no ready answers grow out of the present study.

Students’ eagerness to see immediate, specific growths in their writing skills frequently can lead to their disappointment in the portfolio assignment as a pedagogical approach. The short duration of an academic quarter and heavy workload may also make it difficult for students to find time for reflection. The secondary importance students attach to the portfolio assignment might lead to their decisions of not “wasting” much
time on it. When students do not spend enough time reflecting, they might not be able to see or feel any specific growth in their writing. Students need time and space to step back, to reflect, and to internalize what has been taught. Given the limited time of a single academic quarter at OSU, some students might be better served to work on a program exit portfolio rather than just a course portfolio. A program exit portfolio could mean a long-term engagement. During this longer interval, students’ language proficiency and cognitive development could experience more substantial changes, and they should also have much richer content to review. Further study of this matter is warranted.

Negative responses from a few students in this study do not warrant the conclusion that portfolios are unsuccessful devices in ESL writing assessment and instruction. As revealed by data from this study, portfolios provided students opportunities and incentives to improve their written texts. In addition, the reflective component provided students the chance to reflect upon their learning, to assess their strengths and weaknesses, and to become more aware of their writing processes and strategies. The self-awareness and self-assessment are important assets for ESL learners that can be brought by portfolio usage.

However, the results of the present study do warrant the conclusion that the implementation of portfolios should take into consideration of both the complexity of classroom contexts and students’ individual learning styles. As revealed from this study, the portfolio approach might encounter various difficulties in classrooms, such as students’ low motivation, their heavy workload, or the short duration of the course of study. There is no single solution to deal with all these difficulties. Tierney, Carter, and
Desay (1991) pointed out that “there is no ‘right’ way to implement portfolios” (p. vii). Pierce and O’Malley (1992) also argued that creating and maintaining portfolios required the consideration of various factors, such as the instructional goals or objectives to be assessed, who will be involved in the portfolio design, what samples should go into students’ portfolios, and how portfolio information will be used. Likewise, designing and implementing writing portfolios in college composition courses require the same amount of consideration, if not more, about factors such as the course content, course objectives, and the portfolio purposes. As shown in this study, there are different types of portfolios, such as assessment portfolios and student self-assessment portfolios. Each classroom will have its unique way of utilizing the portfolio pedagogy, depending on the purposes and contexts where it is implemented.

**Recommendations for Further Research**

This study employed a small-scale case study approach to explore seven students’ experiences with writing portfolios in college composition classes. Data from the present study suggested that students’ differences in previous educational backgrounds did not have a detrimental impact on their reported learning to write via portfolios. A large-scale quantitative study might come to a different conclusion. Further research could employ quantitative approaches to explore the relationships between adult ESL learners’ attitudes towards writing portfolios and various aspects of their backgrounds (e.g., whether students had previous portfolio experience before, for how many years they had learned English, their general language proficiency indicated by more standardized measures, such as TOEFL, their writing proficiency as indicated by more objective measures, such
as TWE, gender, areas of discipline, and levels of their study as either undergraduates or graduates). In order to increase the generalizability of the findings, there should be variability in the contexts of the study and control of key research variables. For example, sample selection should not be restricted to one university’s ESL writing programs. Understanding of relationships between students’ attitudes towards writing portfolios and various aspects of their backgrounds should provide important insights for teachers interested in the use of writing portfolios for ESL students as well as for ESL students themselves.

The present study included collecting data on the progress of two students for two consecutive academic quarters (approximately 20 weeks). Data did not reveal major changes in their attitudes over this time period. However, time might make a difference in terms of students’ attitudes about writing portfolios. Thus, further study should investigate a larger number of students’ experiences with writing portfolios over longer period of time. For example, four or five ESL students should be followed through different levels of writing portfolio programs in their college curriculums. Data collection should last for at least one year. In academic settings where the quarter system is used, it would probably take three or four academic quarters. In settings where the semester system is employed, it would take two semesters. Indeed, these varying academic terms might also be studied as a research variable.

In this study, it was found that mismatches existed between expectations held by teachers and their students. This study focused on depicting students’ voices. It is also important to understand teachers’ perspectives about various aspects of writing portfolios. For example, a large scale quantitative study should be conducted to
investigate teachers’ perceptions of the usefulness of writing portfolios to help ESL students improve their writing proficiencies and of the factors that influenced students’ learning to write via portfolios. Teachers from different composition programs could be surveyed. Based on survey results, follow-up interviews could be arranged with selected teachers to obtain in-depth information about instructors’ backgrounds with respect to portfolios and their views about portfolios. A similar study might be done in an EFL context such as China or Korea. While teacher input was somewhat important in the present study, particularly in an indirect way, student input was the primary focus of the present study.

**Limitations**

The present study focused on uncovering students’ reported experiences with writing portfolios in college composition courses. Due to students’ different levels of cognitive development and communicative competence in English, their verbal reports, presumably, might not necessarily provide an entire match to the actual consequences that writing portfolios had on their writing. There was no clear evidence of how well students’ verbal reports matched the reality reflected through their compositions.

In English 110, portfolios were designed to provide students with multiple opportunities for revising their writings. Therefore, presumably, the written texts contained in students’ submitted portfolios should have reflected the consequences of portfolio usage. However, in the other two contexts of this study (EDU T&L 107 and EDU T&L 108.01), the written texts contained in students’ submitted portfolios did not, in large measure, result specifically from portfolio usage. The portfolio assignments in
these two contexts were mostly designed for students to review their work and engage in reflective learning. This study did not focus on analyzing students’ written texts as evidence of improvement in their writing. This was deemed to be a limitation for a study that aimed at studying students’ experiences with writing portfolios. Further study should not only record the stories that students choose to tell, but also investigate students’ actual written texts that might be impacted by the use of writing portfolios.

**Summary**

This study aimed at providing detailed descriptions of students’ experiences with writing portfolios in three different college composition courses at one large public university in the United States. Data analysis revealed that students reacted differently towards the portfolio assignment. It was suggested that their attitudinal differences might be related to the time and effort they invested in completing their portfolio assignments. The limited time and effort spent by some students might partially explain the limited benefits of portfolio assignments as reported by these students. On the other hand, students in this study who praised portfolios and associated benefits were students who spent considerable time and effort on portfolio assignments.

Students’ self-reported attitudes towards portfolio reflective writing seemed consistent with their overall attitudes towards their portfolio assignments. Again, attitudinal differences might also be partially explained by the time and effort spent by these students on the reflective writing tasks. Their decisions to spend as little time as possible, in some of the cases, may also have been due to their lack of interest and low motivation to bring out their best potential performances in completing the task of the reflective writing.
Various factors might have caused these student reactions towards portfolios and portfolio reflective writing, such as the percentage that portfolios contributed to final grades and the short duration of an academic quarter.

Students’ reflective writings were part of their submitted portfolios. Different types of foci were found in the participants’ reflective writings. This difference might have been related to the teachers’ different emphases in discussions with students. Students tended to focus their reflective writing discussions on what the teachers had commented on or emphasized in class. The implications of this type of emphasis suggest a need for further investigations.

**Researcher Reflections**

One thing in particular that drew this researcher’s attention was that most of the study students did not seem to pay much attention to the reflective component of their course portfolios. In addition to students’ concerns over grades and time limitations, what other factors might have caused this reaction? One possible answer might be found in these students’ previous educational experiences, which might not have systematically emphasized reflection. These students’ educational backgrounds, along with their cultural backgrounds, might have contributed to their perceptions of teaching, learning, assessment, portfolios, and reflection. However, student perceptions might not have entirely matched their teachers’ conceptions. Data in this study revealed a gap between these two sides, which might have led to students’ confusions about the portfolio.
approach, or even resistance to it. In this study, it seemed that sometimes neither the
teachers nor students were aware of this gap and made any conscious effort to bridge it.

In addition to cultural and educational backgrounds, other factors might also have
played important roles in affecting students’ experiences with portfolios, such as race and
gender. Since this study did not focus on these aspects, no conclusions about race and
gender can be drawn from this study.

The present study did not specifically employ a socio-cultural perspective or
cultural analysis framework for guiding data description, analysis, or interpretation.
Using these additional perspectives might lead to different results.

Smagorinsky (1995) argued that research is a social construct, the process of data
analysis is social, and the results of data analysis are “provisional and contestable” (p.
198). While eliciting and interpreting student and teacher voices from an outsider’s point
of view, the researcher could have brought in potential biases caused by her personal
experiences and the theoretical framework she used. Therefore, as to what factors might
have impacted ESL students’ experiences with writing portfolios, further research might
generate different conclusions.

My further research into ESL students’ experiences with writing portfolios will
bear in mind the above considerations. In exploring future narrations of students’ voices,
I will develop greater awareness of biases inherent in this type of research. In addition, I
would like to investigate in detail how students’ previous educational experiences and
constructs such as gender, race, and ethnicity might impact their experiences with
portfolios.
Epilogue

Leki (2001), after reviewing multiple studies on L2 (Second Language) students’ experiences in writing classes, identified three reflective observations, which were expressed as a sense of:

- how instructive negative cases can be;
- the importance and value of qualitative research of the type that might uncover students’ experiences; and
- the relatively small amount of work on how students experience L2 writing course, that is, how dim our students’ voices are in the literature about them. (p. 26)

The power of the present study rests in large part with the portrayal of the “hidden transcripts,” as reported through ESL students’ own voices talking about their experiences with writing portfolios. The results of this study highlight the complexities inherent in different settings of portfolio usage for writing courses, as well as the wide range of possible student responses to writing portfolios. In addition, this study reveals attempts at communication between ESL students and their teachers that may have gone awry. Ideally, the study and its findings can help in establishing a knowledge base for understanding ESL students’ experiences with writing portfolios. Such a knowledge base can be used to stimulate further research and reflection among ESL composition teachers and program directors.

The present case study of a limited number of college students’ responses does not allow generalizations to other students or settings. The need for additional studies on the topic of writing portfolios in college composition classes remains high. Additional
studies can document the possible roles of portfolios in influencing students’ writing practices and writing performances. In addition, they can corroborate the impact of portfolios on college ESL students’ writing.
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Research Information
Research information

This research is titled **A Case Study of Selected ESL Students’ Experiences with Writing Portfolios in College Composition Courses**. Its major purpose is to describe and explore how ESL students react to writing portfolios used for college composition courses. It also investigates ESL students' reactions to reflective writing required for their portfolios.

The principal researcher is Dr. Charles R. Hancock, professor in Teaching and Learning at The Ohio State University. He can be reached by phone at 614-292-8047 and by e-mail at hancock.2@osu.edu. The assistant researcher is Yuerong Liu of The Ohio State University. She can be reached at 614-262-3420 and liu.342@osu.edu.

Participants will be selected ESL students who are enrolled in the portfolio-based English 110, or in EDU T&L 107, or in EDU T&L 108.01 at The Ohio State University. They will fill out a very brief questionnaire on the demographic information. The study will last for three academic quarters at OSU, Winter 2002, Spring 2002, and Summer 2002. In Winter and Spring 2002, each student participant will be interviewed three times: Week 1-2, Week 5-6, and Week 9-10. The student participants will be interviewed twice in Summer 2002. The interview will be tape-recorded and transcribed. Participants' class activities related to portfolios will be observed (Time TBA, depending on the syllabi). The participants' reflective writing in their portfolios will be photocopied and analyzed. All personal identification on the sheets will be removed.

Teachers of the student participants will be interviewed once or twice about how they believe the participants have been responding to portfolio assessment. Teachers' interviews will also be tape-recorded and transcribed.

Results of the study will be reported at no risk to the individual participants, whose identities will be concealed by pseudonyms. At the end of the research, audiotapes and videotapes will be kept for potential future research. Personal identification will not revealed, however, even in future research.

Participation is voluntary and participation can be withdrawn at any time without penalty or repercussion.

Further questions about the research should be directed to Dr. Charles R. Hancock at The Ohio State University at the phone number or e-mail address given above.

Each participant will be informed of the purpose of the study and the major activities in which they will be involved. They will be asked to sign a consent form and will be given a copy of that form for their records.
Appendix B:

Letter to Teacher Participants
LETTER TO THE CLASSROOM TEACHER*

Jan.15th, 2002

Dear [Teacher’s Name]:

I am Yuerong Liu, a doctoral candidate in Foreign and Second Language Education in the College of Education at the Ohio State University. Currently I am writing my dissertation. My topic is: A Case Study of Selected ESL Students’ Experiences with Writing Portfolios in College Composition Courses. The overall purpose of this study is to explore and describe ESL students’ interactions with portfolio assessment for college composition courses in order to suggest ways in which they might adapt themselves more adequately and effectively to the approach of writing portfolios and also to make suggestions for writing teachers and program directors that have ESL students in their classes or programs. The study will be conducted during Winter/Spring/Summer Quarter 2002.

I would appreciate it if you could let me interview you once or twice on how the participants perform in the portfolio activities: Week 3-4 and Week 9-10 (which would take about 1 hour in total). I would also like to observe class sessions when portfolios are discussed. For your students who agree to participate in my study, I will also photocopy and analyze their reflective writings that are put in their portfolios. The videotapes and students’ written texts will be used only for research purposes that will not put you or your student(s) at any risk. All information that you provide will be kept confidential.

If you agree to be a part of this study, please sign the attached consent letter.

Thank you very much.

Sincerely,

Yuerong Liu

* The present study was conducted during three academic quarters at OSU: Winter 2002, Spring 2002, and Summer 2002. The actual letters sent out to teachers varied in terms of dates.
Appendix C:

Letter to Student Participants
LETTER TO THE STUDENT PARTICIPANTS OF THE STUDY*

Jan. 15, 2002

Dear potential participant:

I am Yuerong Liu, a doctoral candidate in Foreign and Second Language Education in the College of Education at the Ohio State University. Currently I am writing my dissertation. My topic is: A Case Study of Selected ESL Students’ Experiences with Writing Portfolios in College Composition Courses. The overall purpose of this study is to explore and describe ESL students’ interactions with portfolio assessment for college composition courses in order to suggest ways in which they might adapt themselves more adequately and effectively to the approach of writing portfolios and also to make suggestions for writing teachers and program directors that have ESL students in their classes or programs. The study will be conducted during Winter/Spring/Summer Quarter 2002.

I would appreciate it if you would agree to participate in my study. All you have to do is to be interviewed (about 1-1.5 hours in total), to be observed in class activities when portfolios are discussed, to have your reflective writing analyzed, and to fill out a questionnaire about your background before the first interview (which takes about 2-3 minutes). There will be two/three interviews: Week 2-3, Week 5-6, and Week 9-10. The interview will be tape-recorded. The videotapes and students' written texts will be used only for research purposes that will not put you at any risk. All information that you provide will be kept confidential and not reported to others in a way that identifies you.

Your participation is greatly encouraged and will be deeply appreciated and will be compensated with $50 in cash or gift certificate in the same amount.

Please sign your name in the attached consent letter if you agree to participate in this study.

Thank you.

Sincerely,

Yuerong Liu

* The present study was conducted during three academic quarters at OSU: Winter 2002, Spring 2002, and Summer 2002. In Winter 2002 and Spring 2002, student participants were interviewed three times. In Summer 2002, student participants were interviewed twice. The above letter is a sample of the actual letters sent out to students. The actual letters sent out to students varied in terms of letter dates, interview times, and approximate interview schedules.
Appendix D:

Letter of Consent
CONSENT FOR PARTICIPATION IN RESEARCH

I consent to participating in research entitled: A Case Study of Selected ESL Students’ Experiences with Writing Portfolios in College Composition Courses.

Dr. Charles R. Hancock, Principal Investigator, or his authorized representative, Yuerong Liu, has explained the purpose of the study, the procedures to be followed, and the expected duration of my participation. Possible benefits of the study have been described.

There is no discomfort or risk associated with the activities or the discussions with the researchers.

All information that I provide will be only used for research purposes and will be kept confidential and not reported to others in a way that identifies me.

I acknowledge that I have had the opportunity to obtain additional information regarding the study and that any questions I have raised have been answered to my full satisfaction. If I have further questions, I may direct them to Dr. Charles R. Hancock (614/292-8047 or hancock.2@osu.edu) and Ms. Yuerong Liu (614/262-3420 or liu.342@osu.edu).

I understand that I may refuse to participate, and I may choose to stop at any time. If I refuse to participate or choose to stop, I will not be penalized.

I have read and understand the above, and I agree to participate in this study. A copy of this form has been given to me.

Date: ___________________________ Signed: _________________________

(Principal investigator or his/her authorized representative)

Signed: _________________________             Signed: _________________________

(Witness)
Appendix E:

Sample of Student Interview Transcript
I: Can you describe your portfolio selection process for me?
June: How did I choose? First I chose three. First one is essay, second one is summary, third one is in-class writing. I had two essays. I chose the better one into my portfolio.
I: How did you judge that one to be the better one?
June: I don’t know. I spent time on this.
I: Did you get a better grade?
June: No same grade.
I: But you know you spent more time and effort on that.
June: Yeah I think so. Then I like it more that the other one. In the case of summaries, I chose summary two. The other one is better than this one – I mean grade is better, totally better. But I chose this one because first one is very easy for me and second one is little bit difficult. I spent more time on this one. Yeah, grade is not good. Anyway, I invested more time and more effort and whatever. So I chose this one. And in class writing, I picked up anything because they are all the same.
I: Can you talk about how you feel after you finish the introductory letter?
June: I don’t know….
I: After you finished choosing samples for your portfolio and writing the introductory letter, did you feel that you learned something?
June: Actually I don’t know what is the good effect or what is the effect for me. I don’t know. But I think… it’s a chance to review my work.
I: So after you review your work, what was your impression?
June: First, my impression, I a little bit regret for myself.
I: Why?
June: Because I think can get better grades. I mean I can do more good job. I think. But I did not do my best, first I realized that when I read my writing.
I: Why was what?
June: Because…. I don’t know. It’s kind of excuse. But it’s my first quarter; so I am too busy and then I am not used to everything, to school, to homework; so I can concentrate my work this quarter. But I tried, I tried, I know, but I can’t. So you know, I will do next quarter something. I have to take 108 next quarter. It’s time to think about that, I will do more good job next quarter.
I: So one thing you felt is you did not do such a good job?
June: Yeah.
I: In what way do you still you have to improve?
June: (long pause) I don’t know.
I: So what did you write in this letter?
June: About why I chose sample, and second why I improve, what improvement. Then I think improve, first problem is grammar, I can mistake a lot about same grammar. Especially I have some problem with comma, yes because I am not used to put comma.
So I mistook several times, same mistake. But after portfolio or after writing, I think about it whenever I write something I become careful, I am careful with my grammar. Yeah it’s kind of improvement.

I: Now going back to this letter, how much time did you spend writing this letter?
June: I think it was very easy first, but it’s not easy. So actually the maximum is only one page and a half. So I thought it is one hour and thirty minutes. But it actually takes a little bit long time.
I: Why it was not easy as you had expected?
June: Because I have to think about my whole work. You know, I have to review everything. I think about my improvement. Actually I did not realize my improvement. Actually I did not have time to think about it during the quarter. So it took longer time. It’s a little bit long time. Over three hours.
I: How much time did you spend in selecting the samples?
June: About two hours.
I: Do you think it is meaningful to write this letter and put it in your portfolio at the end of the quarter?
June: Yeah it’s meaningful.
I: In what way?
June: It’s the same answer as before. It makes me become better.
I: Now let’s talk about portfolio. What is more meaningful to you among all the things you have to do for a portfolio?
June: I think writing this letter. I think so coz when I select my document I was thinking a lot of things related to other classes.
I: Why were you thinking of other things?
June: Because it’s related to that, to other school work. I can’t explain very well. (Pause). When I select my essay, at the same time, I did other things too because I had other classes. When I selected my essay, I thought about other things too. It’s kind of excuse. I did not do my best because I had other things to do. But the result, if I did not do my best about essay, I have to have good result at other things. But I have not good grades at other things. But I don’t think so. If I do one thing good, other things are good too. I don’t know.
I: Can you explain in more detail?
June: Because when I looked at my document or portfolio, I think about other one. Then, it’s the same. I am a little bit regretful after this quarter. I think I had to spend more effort…. But I did not. When I selected this portfolio, at that time, I did some other things. For example, I had some other major course right now. When I wrote essay No. 2, I had a big exam in management theory. I worried about management theory more than this one, English. So I am worried about two, but I focused on the other one. When I focused on the other class, I am thinking about my essay too, because both of them are important to me.
I: So were you saying that you were not able to spend enough time on English course?
June: Yeah.
I: How does this fit into the picture of constructing a portfolio?
June: (Long pause) When I prepared for this portfolio, I realized that during the quarter, I was being lazy. At that time, I thought it was because I didn’t have enough time to do other things. But I had time. Just… I was busy to think about, to write. You know, if I
tried more to write early, to study early…. But it does not matter now. I did not. That’s why I am regretful. Then so when I prepared for portfolio, I regret my attitude or behavior. So portfolio gave me this time to think about that.

I: So you mean, if it was not for portfolio, you did not have this chance to think about that.

June: Yeah.

I: But for this course, portfolio is only about 3% of the grade. So it’s not going to make too much difference to your grade?

June: I know. But I think… I don’t know. Thinking is more important.

I: So grade is not important?

June: (Laughing) anyway….

I: I remember your teacher said that writing this letter gave you a chance to show your creativity and freedom. Did you feel that?

June: Yeah, I did feel different when writing this letter than writing other essays. Because the essays have some structures, I had to fix this structure. It’s kind of more difficult for me to write essays. I only wrote freely whatever I want. I want to write like that. But if they want a fixed essay or fixed summary with fixed words, I have to always count words. Actually I don’t like that. But portfolio, I kind of have free, I can write whatever I want, whatever I think, so….

I: when I was looking at the instruction for writing the letter, it was still structured. What do you think?

June: It’s kind of structured. But everything else is even more structured.

I: For this course, portfolio is only 3%, which is really little. But in some other writing courses, portfolio could be a major tool to assess student writing. Which do you like more, to use portfolio as a basis to evaluate your progress as a writer or use midterm and final?

June: Actually I don’t like the midterm and final. When I am writing, I need more time, to think about that. If somebody kept… gave me a fixed time, I have to write within the fixed time, it’s kind of difficult. The midterm and final were just too short, only one hour and thirty minutes. And they want long writing.

I: When you do out class writing, how do you usually do it?

June: I have outline first, then write.

I: DO you do some search, say library or Internet?

June: No.

I: Do you feel pressure under the midterm and final condition?

June: A little bit. I worry about timing. Because I control time, I can write and finish conclusion. If I don’t control time, I worry about it. It’s a little bit difficult for me.

I: Now I want to go back to the portfolio part. What is the most significant thing about portfolio that makes it different from a mere collection of your work?

June: The simple collection of work is easy. For portfolio I chose three. I think why I have to choose this one. Then write about that. It’s more complicated. I have a lot of thinking but I have to write simply and clearly. It’s difficult to organize my thoughts into one page. It’s kind of difficult.

I: What is your impression of portfolio? Do you think it’s a good idea?

June: Yeah I think so.

I: Why?
June: It’s better. I said that if I mistake about something, I can make up. It’s very good.
I: What about this letter? Some people think it’s a waste of time? Do you agree?
June: I don’t think it’s a waste of time.
I: Do you think putting the self-assessment checklist would help you? I know it’s in the
course package but you are not required to put in your portfolio?
June: I think it’s helpful. But actually I did not use it. We have before when I write some
essay. We did not use it. Actually when I looked at it, I think it’s very helpful because
you know, when I write something, I can check this out, I can check my grammar, I can
check my mistake, I can check my content, what is included in there. But if checklist, it’s
required, it’s very helpful. But I did not use it.
I: Why?
June: I don’t know.
I: Because the teacher did not make you do it?
June: I think so.
Appendix F:

Sample of Teacher Interview Transcript
I: Is this the first time you used portfolios to teach ESL writing?
John: No. I’ve used portfolios before in 107 and 108.01 here at OSU.
I: I believe that 108.01 hasn’t used portfolios for a while. This summer it started to require portfolios again.
John: Yeah, I am not exactly sure about the history. You know, I’ve only been here for three years. I don’t know what they were using here before. I haven’t been teaching 108.01 all the time either. The first year or two I don’t know I have taught it. So I don’t really know when they used it last. Mr. X would know more about that.
I: What do you think is the advantage of using portfolios to teach ESL writing?
John: Well, I think one of the main purposes of using the portfolio is to have students reflect more on their writing and to monitor and to be aware of the progress they are making and how far they have gone and how far they need to go. So it’s a matter of looking into your writing products and evaluating what you have done, and being aware of your strengths and weaknesses. I think by teaching portfolio, it helps you to focus more on these issues. This kind of self monitoring is one very recognized learning strategy, language learning strategy, to monitor, to be aware of what you are doing with language, whether it’s writing or speaking. It’s considered a strategy.
I: So you think that portfolios can help students to become more self-monitoring and more aware of their progress?
John: Well specifically, the very fact that they have to see all their assignments, they can’t throw them away and forget about them. They might have done something they don’t like, they would prefer to throw it away and forget about it. But it does not let them do that. They have to face it. They have their assignments there. They have to put them in order, they have to look at them again. And just having them physically and not losing them or throwing them away, I think, helps them to focus on what they have done and to remind them of what they have done. Just to have them. The fact that they have to include them might encourage them to improve or revise their assignments or to put more effort into revising them because they know they have to show them again. They might be more motivated to show that improvements have been made. Whereas if they can just throw them out and forget about them, nobody is going to know that kind of thing. So I think, just physically having to keep and order the assignments and account for them may encourage them to try to improve more and do more revisions and also, might encourage them to reflect: well, you know, I didn’t do so good on the first draft. Why? What do I need to do? Just having the physical products, putting them in order and keeping them, knowing that the teacher is going to see this too, might encourage them to reflect some more. The other component of a portfolio that I’d like to put into is the actual letter that the student writes to the teacher, which is a summary of what they have done and what they feel they’ve learned, what they feel they still need to learn, and to refer to their specific assignments as the samples for what they feel they’ve done well and what they
feel they’ve done better, and use their assignments as example. Again it’s just a part of this process of reflection.

I: So by writing that letter, students can reflect what they have done during the quarter?

John: That’s what we would like to think, that’s what we hope. We force them to reflect more.

I: So that’s the goal. Do you think the students have really been reflecting by writing this letter?

John: Well, you know that will be a question to ask students too. I imagine you are going to do that.

I: Yes, I asked some students both in 107 and 108.01. But some of them were telling me that writing this letter does not make any difference; at the end of the quarter, I am so busy and I just have to finish it and get done. When I was reading some students’ letters, I was disappointed because I didn’t feel that I can see much individuality there. I don’t feel that they have really been reflecting how they have been progressing as an ESL learner. What is your response towards students’ reflection letters?

John: Obviously, you have to take each one as an individual case. Some letters are very original and interesting. Some letters show reflection. I think if you look at Moto’s second letter, I think you are going to find some good points there. In my opinion, there are some good points in that letter. I think he has talked about specific things, like organization, flow, paragraph flow, vocabulary, grammar. These are the things that he hasn’t thought about much before. And he’s got something to take with him now in the rest of his college years that he can work on. In my opinion, this letter shows that portfolio has worked, to some extent with this student. I feel that portfolio and the letter and the focus on reflection, and the focus on examining one’s strengths and weaknesses in his case. From reading that letter, I think he’s sincere. I don’t think he made it up, because I know his writing and I recognize what he’s talking about – I see it in his writing. So I feel, in his case, as an example, it has been… it has achieved its goal. Now this is part of teaching. Have you ever done any teaching?

I: Yes, I was a teacher for about 3 years.

John: There is a saying in English. We say: you can lead a horse to water but you can’t make it drink. This is part of teaching. You see, you can’t force people to learn. You are always going to have a certain percentage of the students that don’t get what they could out of the course. They don’t get everything they could. This always happens. A student, for example, like, goes away with maybe a B or a C, could have done much better, in most cases. You know, why doesn’t everybody get an A? Because not everybody is interested or put in the effort. Probably they are capable of getting an A. So this happens in every course, whether it’s portfolio as an issue or whether it’s math problems, whatever they are learning. There is a certain percentage of students that don’t learn what they should have or what they could have. This is part of teaching. I don’t think this is a problem of portfolios. This would go for anything you teach. There are students who do laboratories and they fake the results. They don’t finish the experiments. You know, there is always people who don’t learn and don’t take advantages or opportunities to learn, whether it’s a portfolio or whether it’s a laboratory, or whether it’s anything. If you are disappointed, that’s part of being a teacher. As a teacher, I am often disappointed, because I feel that students could do a lot better.
I: I asked Moto whether by writing this letter you have become more aware of your progress and weaknesses. He said no. He just finished that letter within a short period of time. He felt it did not make too much difference to him. Some other students also told me that they just treated it as school work. Some of them did not seem to realize that they need to be reflecting. Why is that?

John: Well, that’s a complicated issue. I think you have to understand adolescence. Again I don’t think this is an issue with regard to portfolio. Adolescents don’t, how can I put it, you just have to understand them, they don’t always say what they mean. Uh…. they don’t always understand why we do things either. They are not used to critical thinking. This is a kind of critical thinking. Just like critical reading. This is new. This is part of college. I think they are used to doing things in high school, just to get points. You know, in high school, they have all these points for everything. I don’t know what it’s like in Korea, in Japan, where some of my students are from. Some of them have done high school here. You know, I have kids in high school, they just graduated a year or two ago. Everything is for points. I think they just do things for points to make the teacher happy. So they don’t really understand what learning is all about, reason for learning, or why they are even in college. This all has to do with adolescence, in my opinion. It does not necessarily have to do with portfolios. They might not understand why they have to learn math or algebra or why they have to learn English. They might not really appreciate why they are even in college, let alone why they have to reflect on their writing. These are new concepts for these kids. And it’s part of growing process and maturing process, that hopefully takes part through college. If you speak to these students in their last year of college or their last couple of quarters, you might find different attitudes. And more mature attitudes.

I: You mentioned critical thinking. Were you referring to writing this letter?

John: Of course, writing this letter is part of critical thinking. They have to look at their writing in a critical way, they have to analyze it, they have to read between the lines, and look at their own process. It’s all what we call critical thinking. Because, just this kind of thinking and analysis is new for a lot of new students.

I: Some of these students might have never heard of critical thinking. Do you think that ESL students should be taught how to do critical thinking?

John: Of course. You see, reading and writing come together in college, because most writing is related to your reading. If you do a research paper, you need to read up on a subject and know something about it and use sources in your reading, include what other people have learned. So reading is a very important part of writing. So, as soon as we talk about reading, we also talk about critical reading. Once you’re in college, hopefully, the professors are not just going to ask you to repeat and memorize what you have read. You have to do something with it. You’ll have to analyze what they have read, arrange that information in some other way, focusing on some issues, which requires them to do what we call critical thinking and critical reading. So we have to do critical thinking and critical reading before we can do writing. So this is something, which is part of ESL writing, because you can’t separate it from reading.

I: Are these students aware that they have to do critical writing?

John: You can look at our course packet, and there is a section on critical writing and critical reading. If they read their course packet, they should have an idea what we are doing about. Whether they actually read the course packet, is another story. This gets me
back to our first point: you can only present the information, but you can’t force people to learn. If people wanted to just get by minimum, there is not much you can do as a teacher. This goes with any course.

I: When grading the portfolio, do you take into consideration of the letter?

John: Sure. The letter, I think, is the most important part of the portfolio. You know, what else is in the portfolio? All they have to do is just collect their stuff and put it in order. I don’t care if it is fancy binder. I don’t even care 100% how neat it is. I am really focusing on the letter and see that everything is in. Portfolio, you know, have they got everything, if they skipped an assignment, then that’s going to affect their grade of their portfolios. We are looking at completeness, that it’s complete. Then we are looking at the letter. That’s basically what it is graded for.

I: So there are two criteria: complete in content, then the letter.

John: And finally if it is complete, if the letter is really nice, but the whole thing is just a mess, then they are going lost a bit, something for not putting it together in a neat fashion. That’s part of learning to be a professional, which is another thing they are going to be learning in college. Do things professionally, do thing in order and neatly. That might affect grade a little bit. But other than that, it’s basically content, do they have everything, have they done all the assignments, is it there. Just saving these things is part of professional organization, you know. If they have saved them, that’s what we’re trying to show them, you know, to go through the quarter and keep everything in a neat place, you don’t lose it. These are just study habits that would have reflected in the quality of their portfolios: have they saved their stuff, do they have it complete. After that, if they put together in a reasonably neat fashion, then I am looking at the letter.

I: If they have grammar mistakes in the letter, do you penalize them?

John: That’s not much of an issue. Because this is a one-draft letter, we don’t have several drafts. I am looking more for the thoughts behind it, the content, not so much the grammar.

I: If a student does not do well on the papers, is it possible that he gets a good grade for the portfolio?

John: Well, sure. I had a student who had a great deal of trouble, didn’t do well on any of these papers. But he worked really hard and he was very conscientious. And he tried very hard to improve. So he would be a person who would get a very good grade on the portfolio. He put everything together. He wrote the letter. He explained the difficulty etc., what he was doing to improve. So whether he got a good grade on the essays or not has nothing to do with his grade on the portfolio.

I: So can I understand that portfolio is more focused on the process, on how much effort was put in rather than the final products?

John: Well, the essays are graded apart. So you are not going to penalize them twice. The portfolio has a grade. So I am not going to take points off the portfolio because they had a poor mark on the essay. That would be “double jeopardy”. I would be penalizing them twice. That does not make sense.

I: I see. So the teacher, when looking at the portfolio, is really looking at how much effort a student has been putting into and how much progress there is?

John: Yes. I would agree. We are looking at progress. You’ve got to realize it. 10 weeks, you can’t do a great deal in 10 weeks, especially with regard to writing. What I want to see as far as progress, is whether people are starting to think about writing and recognize
the issues, things like organization, flow, and style, connection, grammar, paragraph. If they start to think about these things, that’s what I am looking for. I don’t expect a whole lot of improvement in one quarter.

I: While writing the letters, what did most students tend to focus on? Grammar or a bigger picture? As an international student, I tend to focus on small detail but lose sight of the whole picture. What about these students?

John: Well, I think grammar is an issue, in some cases, because for some students, they haven’t been aware their grammar still needs a lot of work. So this might become kind of a shock to them. And they might be overly concerned about grammar because they thought it was okay perhaps, especially if they are coming from another country, because sometimes the level that people expect in their home country is not as high as the level that it is expected of them here. They feel a bit of a shock. They thought it was okay. But now they’ve been told it was not. So this might have caused them to over focus on grammar. But in a way, that’s good because they’ve got to do something. The impact of that might have a, what we call ‘positive stress’, constructive. It might help them, encourage them to look at their grammar more closely. I would not say that’s wrong, because that’s something they need. You can’t do everything at once. Even in one quarter, you can’t fix everything in one quarter. You’ve got to start somewhere. And if grammar is a big problem, well that’s a good place to start.

I: So it’s even an individual thing. Some students poor in grammar, it would be a good idea if they reflect on their progress on grammar?

John: And you are going to have to hope that the other issues will be recognized later on. And they will remember what we did in class later on. That’s also very strong possibility. You don’t always know when what you learn is going to come in handy. It might come in handy later on. It happens all the time. We learn things. We don’t know why we learn them. We might even forget them for a while. But then when we need those, that knowledge, it comes in handy. This could be what happens with the other issues, like organization. It might come in handy later on.

I: Portfolio as a way of assessment versus in-class exam, would you like to comment on how they are used in this class 108.01?

John: Well, students have to learn how to write under time pressure, because they probably are going to be doing this in their other subjects all the time. Even if it is a short answer on exams or even if it is a short paragraph, they are still going to be writing under the pressure of time. So they have to be able to do that to survive. You know, they might get a job later on where they’re also going to have to do a lot of writing under the pressure of time, emails or whatever. So this is part of the skills we need to learn. We do have a balance, not only with the portfolios but the essays are assignments they are trying to work on with as much time as they want. They do these things in their own times. So most of the evaluation is based on that kind of writing. But we do balancing with the midterm and the final. So I think we have a realistic balance.

I: 107 has one portfolio submission where students select 3 pieces from all the work they’ve done and then write a letter. In 108, students put everything in the portfolio. Why is there such a difference?

John: I don’t think there is a big difference. It’s just a matter of…. For 107, they have to choose their favorite, which they feel they have made the most progress on. Maybe that makes them reflect more. Maybe that’s a better approach. On the other hand, they have to
put everything in 108.01. Maybe they have to be more meticulous and save everything
and keep it in order. So it will develop other kinds of skill, to follow their things and keep
them in order. These are habits they need to learn as part of being an organized person
and student and professional. They each have their pros and cons. By having to put
everything in there, they might be more conscious of doing their homework, doing all
their quizzes, and having everything, coz they know well, if I don’t have everything, I
can’t put it in my portfolio. So that might encourage them in that way. On the other hand,
if they have to select, it might make them think a little harder about what assignment they
learned more from, and what assignment they didn’t, and why. They each have their pros
and cons.

I: 108.01 had two portfolio submissions. What difference does that make to students?
John: Well, I think unfortunately, the quarter is so short. We can’t take as much
advantage of this as we would like to. The idea being that in your own reflection, you
should see some progress. The first time you do your reflection, you are not going to be
as aware of issues as the second time. So just by doing it twice, we hope the students will
see how they’ve learned to reflect and what issues they’ve learned to look for and they
can see the difference: while on my first letter, I did not even think about that or this. So
you see, by comparing the two times of reflection in the quarter, they can see progress in
their own understanding of writing and what I need to do. Now if the quarter was longer,
if it was a semester, I think that would be even more effective. But because of the
shortness of the quarter, it loses its effectiveness.

I: In the submission guideline, students are suggested they could go back to their first
letter while writing their second letters. None of the 2 student participants did this. So did
students generally do this?
John: Maybe they don’t. You know more about that than I do.

I: Oh I just talked to 2 students.

John: There isn’t as much time in the quarter to be able to do all of this. When I get the
portfolios I do not see the students any more. So if the quarter is so short, I did not even
have a chance to ask them that question.

I: Well, when you read their letters, did you feel that they were trying to make
connections to their first letters?

John: Well, it’s hard to tell. Sometimes you might see it. Sometimes you don’t. You
can’t expect students to do everything. They just don’t take everything that seriously as
you would like. And to be able to monitor this, in a ten-week quarter, there are so many
things that a teacher has to do with students, it’s really impossible task. You really can’t
monitor everything. That’s what a lot of the teaching is like. It’s like when you seed, you
throw the seed out, you just hope it rains and it grows. But there is only so much you can
do. You see, we have only ten weeks. Students have very… their needs are so great. So
there is no way to do everything to your satisfaction.

I: Do you think by two portfolio submissions, writing two letters can help students get
into the habit of stopping and thinking?

John: That’s what our hope is. You might as well try. There is nothing much we can do
about making the quarter longer. I don’t think it hurts. Any writing they do is going to be
good for them, because this is a writing course. And the more writing they do, the better.

I: Whether they really reflect or not or reflect a little or a lot?

John: That’s up to them, isn’t it?
I: As long as they write, that’s going to help them?

John: Well the goal is for them to reflect. But we need some kind of evidence. Their writing is the evidence of their reflection.

I: Do you see any common patterns in their 1st letters and 2nd letters?

John: Not really. I can’t really generalize.

I: What about Moto’s first letter and 2nd letter?

John: I think he did much better in the 2nd letter.

I: What is the problem with the first letter?

John: I don’t know. Maybe it was just too early. But just the fact that there is a difference is encouraging. I see more reflection in the 2nd letter.

I: These international students for whom portfolio concept might not be a familiar concept in their previous schooling, did they come to tell you about some concerns and ask questions about portfolios?

John: Not any more than any other assignment. I think most of the questions are just how to do it. They don’t understand. They think in details, even what colors should their folders be. They think these details are important. So that might cause them some stress. They want to know exactly perfectly how to do it. What students are used to doing is probably following instructions, getting instructions on everything. So little by little, we try to make them into more independent people. They don’t have to do everything….At least personally, I don’t want to teach them the idea that if they just have to do everything that the teacher says, then they will be okay. Because that is not what writing is about. Writing is a very individual, personal skill, activity. You just can’t write something because the teacher says the first word is like this, the second word is like that. I can’t tell you what every word is going to be. So it’s hard sometimes for them to be able to put this together without being told exactly how to do it. Personally, I just try to make them use some of their own judgment, their common sense. And I don’t tell them what kind of folder, whether it’s 3-ring, whether it’s pocket. I don’t give them these kinds of details. What I usually do is pass around a few portfolios from previous classes to show as examples. But you know, then some students have trouble understanding that an example is just an example. It means one of many. And they think it has to be exactly like this. After they handed it in, they realized what they did was okay as far as the color, the technical detail, as long as they put it in reasonable order. And then the second turn came, they don’t ask.

I: So making them submit mid-quarter portfolio makes them learn?

John: Well that’s the way we learn, isn’t it? We learn by making mistakes and getting feedback. So for example, in Moto’s case, the first time he handed in, it was very sloppy, it was not in order and it was… he lost points for that. So now you see the second time, you see a big difference. So that’s how you learn. Sometimes you have to make mistakes in order to learn. I would rather this happen than I tell them exactly what to do and I give them a 3-page handout on how to do it. And everybody gets an A because they did exactly what I said. I would rather they use their common sense and their own judgment and learn from their mistakes.

I: Did you instruct them how to write this letter?

John: There are instructions given out.

I: Did students still come to tell you that they did not know how to write?
John: You know, this is part of learning. It depends on your style of teaching. I try to encourage students to think things on their own, work things out on their own, as much as they can. Especially at the age and the stage they are at in their education, they are not used to doing that. It’s a matter of responsibility. I tried to encourage them to take more responsibility in their learning process. They will tell me that they don’t understand, they read the course packet but they don’t understand anything. Well I refused to believe that they didn’t understand anything. If they have a question, I want a specific question, what exactly don’t you understand. You said that you don’t understand anything, you must have a learning disorder, you need to see a psychologist or whoever the person is, and to get a certificate that you have a learning disorder, if you did not understand anything. So I will answer a question if it is specific. But if it is “explain everything to me”, we don’t have the time in the course for that – that’s why we have a course packet. So I expect students to work things out on their own and to try – they have to take a step and try and take some initiatives and give it a try. I think that’s a better way of learning. Again, I can’t explain everything 100%, there is no time. Like I said, that’s why we have an example, we have a course packet, and we have explanations. I think it’s better for students to give it a try and see what happens. And to be responsible if you need to read it again. If you need to read it three times, you might have to do that. But I think the course packet is clearer than I could explain myself.

I: Did students bring up any specific questions related to the letter?

John: Of course.

I: They are more related to the content or to the format of the letter?

John: Usually, you see, the questions they ask, the answer would be in black and white. For example, how long is my essay, well that’s in course packet. So if the answer is in black and white, I just tell them to read the course packet, because they probably either did not read it or they did not really it carefully. So you see, the students would like to save the time of reading it and let me tell them everything. So this is the kind of battle that goes on in some classes. You have to show the students that they are responsible for these details. They have to start doing things on their own. This is learning in college now. We don’t just do, as they say, spoon feed everything, put it in a spoon and put it in your mouth. Now they have to learn to be responsible and learn to use the resources they have and to get the information from the resources.

I: Do you think this is typical of ESL students who have low English proficiency and don’t feel comfortable writing in English?

John: I think they are at a stage that they are going through from high school to college, I think there is a transition they have to go through. There are different expectations.

I: Does the difference in expectations also exist cross-culturally?

John: That could be. I don’t know what colleges are like in their home country.

I: Do you think these students are different from American students in that respect?

John: I don’t know. I have only taught American students, I taught one grammar class, and I taught freshmen comp a couple of times.

I: Is it 110 here?

John: Something like that. I don’t think there is a big difference. But I haven’t got a lot of experience teaching Americans. My intuition is that there is not much difference. It’s not just cultural, it’s part of their maturity, going from high school to college. I think that’s a great part of it.
I: So you don’t think the students’ home culture is influencing their adaptability to the learning styles required here?

John: Certainly, it is influencing somewhat. But some of these students have been here a few years. They’ve been here long enough to adapt to a lot of American, cultural differences. A lot of these students are not recent arrivals from a different culture anyway. So you see there are a lot of different factors involved. It’s a quite a mixture of students you have in these courses, especially 108.01.

I: Do you see differences between students who have been here for a while and students who have just arrived?

John: Uh, not big differences.

I: Okay finally how do you think of portfolios in helping ESL students improve their writing?

John: I think they are useful in helping them to reflect and to organize their assignments and keep a record of them. I think this is a part of learning to write, to keeping your notes, keeping your drafts. These are good habits to get into when it comes into writing. Keeping a record of what you’ve done. So they are helpful in those aspects of writing. And then in reflecting on your writing process, sure they are helpful. But like I say, anything you do, students are not going to always appreciate or even understand sometimes why they’re learning things, and they might not put as much effort as you would like to see. This goes with anything you teach.

I: Thank you!
Appendix G:

English 110 Syllabus

(Winter 2002)
Instructor:

Mailbox: 421 Denney Hall (my box is below my name)

E-mail:
Office: 461 Denney
Office Phone: 2-1696
Office Hours: Monday & Wednesday 1:45-3:15, and by appointment

Course Description:
English 110 is a course designed to help you become the best possible writer in a wide variety of writing situations. In part we will accomplish this goal through a quarter-long exploration of arguments in several types of discourse – academic, public, and personal. Our theme for the quarter will be “everything’s an argument,” and we will explore the extent to which this statement is true. Although our focus in class will be on the act of writing and you will be writing both informally and formally, you will also be reading and discussing texts with an eye toward how writers craft language, ideas, and arguments. In addition, you will act as editors for your classmates through peer response.

Required Texts & Supplies:
- Writing Lives/Reading Communities. Eds. Halasek, Singleton, et al. (SBX)
- The Allyn & Bacon Guide to Writing, 2nd Ed. Ramage and Bean. (SBX)
- 2 or 3 diskettes (IBM or Mac format)
- OSU email account

Suggested Additional Sources:
- A dictionary
- A thesaurus

Evaluation:
Your final grade in English 110 will consist of the following elements:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Component</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Portfolio</td>
<td>80%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participation &amp; Quizzes</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Writer’s Notebook”</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Course Requirements:
Formal Essays: You will write and revise three 3-5 page essays during the quarter. For each of these essays, you will have the opportunity to write and revise two preliminary
drafts with help from me and a peer group in the class. Each draft you turn in should be typed, double-spaced, and follow MLA guidelines for citations.

**Final Essay**: You will write a 2 page, typed essay at the end of the quarter about your development as a writer.

**Portfolio**: Your formal essays and final essay will be compiled in a portfolio due at the end of the quarter. This gives you the advantage because you are allowed to revise a paper as many times as you want to before it receives a grade.

**“Writer’s Notebook”**: A collection of your informal writing this quarter, including homework preparations, peer response sheets, and in-class free-writing.

**Readings**: Learning to become better readers can help us grow as writers. Thus, you will have reading assignments throughout the quarter from *The Allyn & Bacon Guide to Writing* and *Writing Lives/Reading Communities*. You will respond to these writings in class discussions and in your writer's notebook.

**Participation**: Your participation in this class is extremely important to both the success of the course and your performance in it. “Participation” is more than simply occupying a seat in the classroom. It involves coming to class prepared, doing homework, asking questions, offering comments during class discussions, completing evaluations, and actively taking part in class writing activities, group activities, and peer editing.

**Peer Response**: When we write "in real life," we write for an audience. Therefore, you will be a part of a peer group, in which you will read and comment upon your peers’ work and receive comments on your own papers that will help direct you in the revising process. For each of the three sessions (one for each major paper), you will be required to respond to the essays on peer response sheets that will be collected and graded as part of your homework grade.

**Class Policies**:

**Attendance**: Attendance is a vital part of this course, important to the success of the class and your development as a writer. You are expected to be here on time and to be prepared for each class. Excessive absences are unacceptable. You are allowed 2 unexcused absences; use them wisely. For each additional unexcused absence, your final grade will be lowered by one-third of a letter grade. Two tardies equal one absence. In addition, **it is department policy that if you accumulate a total of five or more unexcused absences you will receive an "E" for the course**. You are responsible for staying aware of materials presented in class during your absence and keeping track of your total number of absences. If you miss a deadline, you are responsible for contacting me as early as is reasonable to make arrangements to turn in the work you have missed. If the absence is excused, your grade will not be affected. The following situations, when accompanied by
documentation, will be excused: illness, family tragedy, religious observance, travel for intercollegiate athletics (if you’re on the team).

Conferences: You are required to attend one individual conference during the first few weeks of the quarter, and you are always welcome to conference with me at any time during the quarter. Peer review groups will also meet three times, once for each paper. Attendance is mandatory at these meetings, and the attendance policy stated above will apply.
Appendix H:

Questions for Guiding Student Interviews
Student interview questions:

Note:
1. The interviews were conducted using a flexible, conversational approach that allowed interviewees to express personal perspectives and provided opportunities for the researcher to pursue subjects of particular interest. Therefore, the following pre-determined questions only served as a guideline for student interviews. Questions were not necessarily asked in the same order. Some respondents might answer some questions without being asked. Frequently, the questions raised to the students were dependent on the responses from the students.
2. Sometimes a question may be raised in different ways. The researcher sometimes had to try different words to make it easier for a student interviewee to understand a particular question. So in the following list, sometimes a question is presented in multiple ways.

1st interview (107/110, week 1 or 2, after the teacher introduced the portfolio assignment in the class, 30 minutes)

Introduction:

Hi! I’d like to talk with you during the next half hour about your general writing experiences and your ideas about portfolios. I’d also like to tape record our interview so that I can analyze it later. I hope you won’t mind. Your responses will be kept confidential. So please don’t worry. I will ask you some questions. If there are questions you don’t want to answer, feel free to let me know. If you think I am not being clear, please tell me so that I can clarify. In general, it will help me with my study if you give me more than the simple “yes” or “no” answers. So please talk a lot.

Do you have any questions before we start?

Are you ready? Okay, let’s start.

1. How do you like writing in your native language?
   OR
   Do you like writing in your native language? Why?
   OR
   Do you think you enjoy writing in your native language?
2. For how long have you studied English?
   OR
   When did you start studying English?
4. What are the major difficulties that you have while writing in English?
5. What kind of instructions did you receive for writing in your native language in your previous schooling?
6. What kind of instructions did you receive for writing in English in your previous schooling?
7. Now let’s talk about portfolios. What does the word “portfolio” suggest to you? OR
   What do you think it means?
8. What, if anything, have you heard about portfolios from other students who had portfolio experiences before?
9. What do you think are the purposes of the portfolio assignment in 107/110?
10. What do you think of these purposes?
11. (Depending on students’ responses to Question #10) What aspects of the portfolio assignment are/aren’t appealing to you?
12. Do you have any previous experiences with portfolios?
13. If yes, where and when?
14. (Following Question #13) Do you think it was helpful to you?
   • If yes, in what ways was it helpful?
   • If no, why not?
15. Given a choice, do you want to stay in this class or transfer to another class that does not use portfolios? Why?
16. Do you think that portfolios might give you extra work?

2nd interview (107/110, week 5 or 6, after mid-term exam, about 20 minutes)
1. Have you thought much about the portfolio assignment in the past month (months)?
2. Have you started working on your portfolio assignment yet? Do you have a portfolio now?
3. Do you think keeping a portfolio is helpful to you?
   • If yes, in what way?
   • If no, why not?
4. Do you now think that portfolios make you work harder?
5. What doubts/concerns, if any, do you have about the portfolio assignment?
6. What does the term “reflective writing” suggest to you?
7. What, if anything, do you believe that you can gain from reflective writing?
8. Have you ever done any reflective writing before?
   • If yes, describe the experience please.

3rd interview (107/110, week 10, after students submitted their portfolios, about 30 minutes)
1. (For 107 students) please describe your process of selecting samples for your portfolio.
2. (For 107 students) How much time did you spend on the sample selection part?
3. How much time did you spend on writing the portfolio introductory letter/reflective essay?
4. What did you write in your introductory letter/reflective essay?
5. Did you have any difficulties while writing the letter/essay?
   • If yes, what are they?
1. Can you please describe your general impressions of the 108.01 portfolio assignment?
2. What did you have to do for submitting the midterm portfolio?
3. In 107, you only had to submit portfolios once. What do you think of the requirement of the two submissions in 108.01?
4. What do you think of the other differences between 107 portfolio assignment and 108.01 portfolio assignment?
5. In the portfolio submission guideline, it is said that “through this process of reviewing and selection, you will be able to identify your strengths and weaknesses.” So before you submitted your portfolio, were you able to identify your strengths and weaknesses?
6. How much time did you spend collecting samples and reviewing them?
7. How much time did you spend writing this letter?
8. What did you write in your portfolio introduction letter?
9. Did you talk to the teacher about your first portfolio submission?
10. What comment did you get from your teacher about your first portfolio submission?
11. Are you going to do something different for the next portfolio submission?
12. Do you think portfolios are playing a significant role in this class?
13. What do you think is the point of having you write the letters twice this quarter?
14. Any other comments you would like to share with me?
2nd interview (108.01, week 10, after students submitted their final portfolios, about 30-40 minutes)

1. What did you have to do for your final portfolio submission?
2. What was your impression after you finished your final portfolio?
3. Now what do you think of the requirement of the two submissions?
4. Now what do you think of the other differences between 107 portfolio assignment and 108.01 portfolio assignment?
5. Now how do you understand the purpose of the portfolio assignment?
6. Now how do you understand the purpose of the portfolio introductory letter?
7. What impact does the portfolio assignment have on you?
8. What impact does writing the letter have on you?
9. What is the difference between your first letter and your second letter?
10. Did you go back to your first letter when you wrote your second letter?
11. While writing the second letter, did you try to relate to what you wrote in the first letter?
12. In the portfolio submission guideline, it is stated that your letter has to be reflective and informative. Do you think your letter has met these two criteria? Explain.
13. Now what do you think is the point of having you write the letters twice this quarter?
14. If you were the teacher of 107 or 108.01, would you be requiring portfolios?
15. Any other comments you would like to share with me?
Appendix I:

Questions for Guiding Teacher Interviews
Some teachers were interviewed once during the quarter of their participation of the study. The following is a list of the questions that guided the interviews. Teacher interviews, like student interviews, were conducted in a flexible conversational approach. Depending on the responses of the teachers, questions might not be necessarily the same across different teachers.

Teacher interview (At the end of the academic quarter, after teachers finished reading students’ submitted portfolios, 40-50 minutes)

1. Is this the first time you used portfolio in teaching English writing to ESL students?
2. What is the advantage of using portfolios to teach ESL students academic writing?
3. Do you think that your students realized that?
4. Students I have been interviewing oftentimes do not feel that portfolios have been helping them, what do you think is the reason for this?
5. (For 108.01 teachers) What is the advantage of the two portfolio submission?
6. What are the grading criteria for portfolios?
7. If a student did not do well in his regular essay/paper, is it possible that he would get a good grade for his portfolio(s)?
8. In what ways do you think that the students are benefiting from writing the introductory letters/reflective essays?
9. Do you think students were mostly writing what you want to see in the introductory letters/reflective essays?
10. Have you observed any occasions where students were not really reflecting on their learning in the letters/reflective essays?
11. How would you like to comment on the informative-ness of the letters?
12. (For 108.01 teachers) Do you see any difference between students’ first letters and their second letters?
13. Students I have been interviewing oftentimes do not feel that the introductory letter makes any difference. What do you think of this?
14. Can you please comment on the portfolio(s) submitted by student participant A/B/C?
15. Can you please comment on the portfolio introductory letters/reflective essays submitted by student participant A/B/C?
16. Can you comment on how the use of portfolios might be improved for ESL English writing classes?
Some teachers also participated in an extra interview at an earlier stage of the quarter. Following is a list of questions that guided the extra interviews. Again, the questions were not necessarily the same across different teachers.

Additional teacher interview (Week 3-4, 25-30 minutes)

1. (For English 110 teacher) Why do you choose to use portfolios for this class?
2. Have you ever taught classes that used portfolios? Describe them please.
3. If you used portfolios before, can you please let me know whether this portfolio assignment is going to be the same as the previous one(s)?
   • If same or similar, how?
   • If different, how?
4. Have you taught other ESL students before?
   • If yes, in terms of writing practice, do you think they differ from the native English speaking students? If so, how? Do you see some typical patterns in their writing practice?
5. If you used portfolios before, have you seen any problem that ESL students had with the portfolio approach?
6. What about ESL students’ reflective writing? What did they tend to reflect on?
7. With regard to the student participant A/B/C, what do you think of his/her writing ability?
8. Has s/he come to talk to you about any problem that s/he has with the portfolio assignment or anything else about this class? Other comments about him/her?
9. Have other students come to talk to you about their concerns or doubts about the portfolio assignment after you discussed this assignment with them?
Appendix J:

Student Demographic Information Sheet
Student Demographic Information Sheet (To be issued before the first interview)

1. Name: _____________________ (first name only)
2. Age: _____________________
3. Years of stay in the U.S.: _____________________
4. First language: _____________________
5. Ethnic origin: _____________________
6. Major academic discipline: _____________________
7. Reason for taking this composition course:
   _______________________________________________________
8. Self-evaluation of your writing skills (on a scale of 1-10, 1 being the lowest, 10 the highest):
   _______________________________________________________
9. Typical marks received from past instructors on your writing assignments:
   _______________________________________________________
10. Self-evaluation of your motivation to improve your writing skills (on a scale of 1-10, 1 being the lowest, 10 the highest):
    _____________________________________________________
11. Previous experience with portfolio approach to writing:
    _____________________________________________________
Appendix K:

Student Reflective Writing Sample
A Growing Process

I have never been in English class before. This is my first “real” English class. In this class, I learnt so many things. I learnt how to see other people’s perspective about my essay. I also learnt how to develop authority in my writing. I think this is the most important one. If you do not have a good authority in writing you paper, it is really hard to make people interested to read your essay.

In my first essay, I wrote a persuasive essay about the controversy whether Ohio State should change the quarter system into the semester system or not. This essay had caught my attention. I was not paying attention to the issues around the campus. I learnt a lot from this essay. I became more aware of the issues around the campus and realized that I learnt a lot in adapting someone’s idea and how to develop an authority in my essay so people will be interested in reading it.

The next essay was my evaluation essay. I needed about three hours to come up with an idea for this essay. This essay was my favorite. It really showed what I had been through in my transition years from a little girl to a teenage girl. I was trying to evaluate the idea and developing the authority by giving my personal experience in the beginning of the essay.

My last essay was telling about the worst tragedy on my life. I wrote about the riot in my country four years ago. I learnt how to describe something vividly to people. I tried to develop my authority by describing how scary it was and the feelings of people surround me. I was hoping to make people who read my essay feel the scary plot of the riot.

Through all of my essays, I have been able to tell people mostly what I want. I have the opportunity to let my “little voice” out. I think the way to understand the whole me is by understanding what I wrote. I am not a great writer. I am just an ordinary person who wants to share my little experiences
Appendix L:

108.01 Comments on First Portfolio Submission
Comments on First Portfolio Submission

Introduction: As explained in the Course Packet, you will be required twice this quarter to submit your 108.01 portfolio to your instructor. The first submission will be shortly after the midterm exam (your instructor will give you the exact date), i.e. very soon, so it might be helpful to review what you should do for this first submission.

Remember that the portfolio is a collection of all of your written work in 108.01, and the main purpose behind the assignment is to allow you a chance to review and reflect on the work you’ve done thus far. Through this process of review and reflection, you will be able to identify your strengths and weaknesses, and that information should be helpful to you as we head into the final weeks of the course. To make this ‘review and reflect’ process more meaningful, you will be expected to put in writing what you have learned as you have looked over and thought about the contents of the portfolio as well as your effort in the course. All of this information will be contained in the Letter of Introduction you will include in your portfolio notebook. More information about this letter appears later in this handout.

The Course Packet instructs you to arrange the contents of your portfolio neatly and systematically. Label every item in the portfolio clearly, e.g. “First draft of Paper #1,” “First listserv posting on Never Fade Away,” etc. Also, place your Letter of Introduction at the beginning of the portfolio.

Portfolio Contents: Each 108.01 instructor may have some different assignments or requirements, so what you will see below is a checklist of possible items for inclusion in your portfolio. As you include each item in your portfolio notebook, put a check next to it in this checklist. Remember that, because of differences in the sections of the 108.01 course, you might not have all of the items below. Check the ones you do have and have included in the portfolio.

- First draft of Paper #1
- Second draft of Paper #1
- Third (final) draft of Paper #1
- Synthesis worksheet
- Midterm exam essay (if returned in time after the exam)
- Midterm exam worksheet
- Listserv postings about e-education
- Listserv postings about Never Fade Away
- Grammar/editing homework/quizzes
**Letter of Introduction:** As explained earlier, the purpose of this letter is to discuss the results of your review of the work you’ve done in this course so far. Reflect, in writing, on your work, and focus, in particular, on two things: your **effort** and your **progress**. For instance, as you look over your drafts of Paper #1, what improvement do you see as you move from one draft to another? Better thesis statement? Improved refutation? Improved grammar? Also, how much effort did you put into the writing of the drafts? You might also comment on the areas where you feel you have not yet made the progress you hoped for, such as grammar. The questions above apply to the listserv postings as well. How do you feel about your postings? Have you worked hard on them? Are you satisfied with what you wrote? Are they contributing to your development as a writer?

This letter can be informal, as it consists of comments you’d like to share with your instructor. **You are not writing an essay in this letter;** rather, you’re trying to give your instructor some comments that will help her or him form a clearer picture of the work you’ve done so far in the course and of your feelings about your work.

One thing in particular that you might try to do in the letter is to tell your instructor the things you would most like him or her to know about your writing and your effort so far—especially things that you feel she or he might not yet be fully aware of. In other words, use the letter of introduction as an opportunity to communicate freely and meaningfully with your instructor about your 108.01 work.

Something else to bear in mind is that you might compare and contrast your work in different areas of the course, such as comparing your writing of the first paper with your writing of the listserv postings. Which writing has been your best so far? Why? Which do you like more? Why? Of the various kinds of work you’ve done in the course, which do you feel best represents your effort and your ability or progress? Why? These are some questions you might address in your letter.

However, do not use the letter as an evaluation of the course or your instructor. This letter is about you and your work in the 108.01 thus far. What do you like about the work you’ve done so far? What are you disappointed in? What areas need improvement as you move into the rest of the course? What would you like to work on more as the course progresses? Are you satisfied with your effort at this point? Have you worked sufficiently hard in your writing and reading for the course?

This letter should be helpful to both you and your teacher. Writing it should give you a great chance to think carefully about the work you’ve done up to this point, and such reflection can help you prepare for the work ahead in the remainder of the course. It should help your teacher better understand your work by telling her or him about your work from your perspective.

Finally, make the letter as detailed and informative as possible. Don’t just rely on general statements; give examples from the contents of the portfolio.

Once again, the letter can be very informal. Use the conversational tone or style you would in a letter to a friend. Aim at writing about 2 pages (though you can write more if you’d like) and, again, try to make this very informative writing, writing that will give your instructor deeper understanding of the work you’ve done so far in 108.01
Appendix M:

108.01 Comments on Second Portfolio Submission
EDU T & L 108.01: Comments on Second Portfolio Submission

Introduction: The second portfolio submission will be much like the first. That is, you will once again be required to submit a folder containing all of your written work in the 108.01 course (except for the Problem/Solution Project). This includes the work you submitted in your first portfolio. Thus, the portfolio contents should cover the entire course, and not just those you’ve written since the first portfolio submission. The main difference in this portfolio submission is that you will be looking back at your work over the entire course, and in your introductory letter you should focus on discussing the work you did and progress you made throughout the 108.01 course.

As with the first portfolio submission, neatness will be important in this second submission. In other words, label all of the contents clearly and arrange them in an orderly, systematic way.

Portfolio Contents: Here is a checklist of the required portfolio contents. To ensure that you include all of the required materials, it would be a good idea for you to place an X or check mark next to each item as you include it in your portfolio. At the end of the checklist, you will see a spaces where no item labels are included. Here you may put materials assigned by your instructor but not included among the required portfolio elements. If you include of these additional materials, you can write the label for them in the space provided, e.g., “Extra editing assignment.”

- Paper #1 outline (if assigned by your instructor)
- Synthesis worksheet for Paper #1 (if assigned by your instructor)
- First draft of Paper #1
- Second draft of Paper #1
- Third draft of Paper #1 (if you were required to write three drafts)
- Midterm exam essay worksheet
- Midterm exam essay
- Paper #2 outline (if assigned by your instructor)
- First draft of Paper #2
- Second draft of Paper #2
- Third draft of Paper #2 (if you were required to write three drafts)
- Introductory letter for first portfolio submission
- Grammar work (editing exercises, homework, quizzes)
- Never Fade Away homework/exercises (if assigned by your instructor)
- Copies of two additional articles for Paper #2
- Listserv postings about E-education/Online education (at least two postings)
- Listserv postings about Never Fade Away(at least five postings)
Introductory Letter for Second Submission:

This letter will follow the same principles as your first portfolio letter. That is, reflect on the writing contained in the portfolio. Discuss what you see when you look back over the writing you did in this course. What progress did you make? What strengths and weaknesses in your writing do you see now, especially compared to when you started this course? It would be especially helpful to compare the writing you did after the first portfolio submission with the writing you included in the first portfolio. For example, you might compare and contrast your writing in the two argument papers. This might mean comparing the two final drafts, the two first drafts, etc. You could also compare your later listserv postings with your earlier ones. As you make these comparisons, discuss not only the changes you see in your writing, but changes you might have made in your approaches to writing. For instance, did you follow different steps in your writing of Argument Paper #2 than you did for Argument Paper #1? If so, why? What about your listserv postings? If your approach changed, in what ways, and why?

Before you write the second portfolio letter, it would probably be a good idea to reread your first portfolio letter. Then, in your second letter, you could perhaps respond to points made in your first letter. For instance, suppose that in your first letter you mentioned that you didn’t work hard on the listserv postings. What about your writing of the listserv postings since then? What differences occurred? Why? Hence, rereading your first portfolio letter might give you some ideas as to what to discuss in your second letter. These are just some suggestions for the letter.

Remember that this is a letter to your 108.01 instructor. In other words, it’s not a formal academic essay; it’s informal communication between you and your instructor in which you try to tell her or him what you would like to be known about your writing and your effort and progress in this course.

The letter should be 2-3 pages in length, and it should be about your writing in 108.01. Do not use it to evaluate the 108.01 course or your instructor.

Finally, do your best to submit to your instructor a portfolio that you feel proud of, one that is neat and orderly and that contains an informative and reflective introductory letter.
Appendix N:

Sample of Observation Field Notes
Observation field notes

Class: English 110 (Freshmen Composition), Ohio State University
Place: 308 Denney (computer room)
Time: 3:30 P.M., March 11, 2002
Participant of the study: K (coded)
Teacher: Joy (pseudonym)

Before the class, K told me “I don’t always comment in the class, only when I know what’s going on.”
Joy told me that K was very quiet.

Joy told me that there were 15 students in the class. At this particular day, only 13 showed up, 8 males and 5 females. One male student was 3 minutes late.

3:30 pm. Class started. Students looked at their computers. Some were checking the result of basket games, whispering. Joy announced the first activity of the class: working in a group to come up with a discussion question based on the reading and post it on the WebCT discussion board. Students organized into groups. K’s group had three males and 1 female. None of them brought their reading book with them. So Joy went to the office to get one for them. While she was gone, the four of them were just chatting about what happened during the weekend. K did not talk, just listening, once in a while casting a look on his computer.

Joy gave K’s group the book. Everyone took his/her turn to glance at the book, while the other people were still chatting. K got the book. He began to flip through the book, stopping at one page to think. Then the female student came up with one question. Everybody, including K, said it was a good question. One person began to type the question on his computer and he asked K how to spell “Appalachian.” K mumbled a bit and then cleared his throat and offered help. He was browsing through WebCT.

Researcher reflections

From previous interviews with K, I have the impression that he was trying to leave a good impression on me. Is he trying to tell me in advance that he might not be talking but still participating?

The whole time during the activity, nobody was talking much. Nobody seemed to be very interested, especially K, who was frequently looking towards his computer and browsing through the internet over things not directly related to the class.

4 P.M. Students began to respond to the questions posted on WebCT. It took K 4 minutes to start responding. Before he was just looking at the questions and then looking at the
responses already posted. He was frequently tousling his hair, seeming to be thinking hard.

One student in another group, then another in K’s group, stood up and left. K was still thinking and typing.

All the time, Joy was sitting in front of the computer away from the students, typing into her computer.

K finished responding to three messages. He was stretching, looking around, seeming tired, bored, and needing a break. Then he went online to view his score for another class: physics? Then he was checking his email.

His neighbor was checking the yahoo games website.

Most people started to relax.

Not much talking among the students, except some low whispers between two female students. One female student was applying some hand lotion, putting down her hair.

K did not look around, just focusing on the computer most of the time.

Researcher reflections

Students were communicating on-line. This was the usual pattern for this class. But students seemed to be not having enough interaction among themselves and between them and the teacher.

Is it because that K was aware of my existence that he was shy and tried not to look around?

The previous two interviews left me the impression that K was confident and viewed writing as fun. But he did not seem to enjoy this class? At least not this time.
4:20 P.M.
K was yawning and stretching and sliding his chair back and forth. Joy was reading from the handout about the portfolio assignment. Everybody in the class got the handout and the consent form for allowing Joy to use their portfolios for future writing classes. K was writing something on his handout. Yawning again.
Joy finished explaining the portfolio assignment. “Any question?” Silence for one minute.
Male student: “We don’t have a campus address, how can we get our portfolio back?” Joy answered.
2nd male: “What kind of folder do we use to put our portfolio?” Joy answered.
Joy: “Any more questions?” Silence for two minutes. Students were mostly looking at the handout.

4:26 P.M.
K joking: “Can we hand in the evaluation forms after we get the grades?” Nobody laughing, no expression from anybody.
Joy (slightly smiling): “No.” K was among the last three to finish the evaluation form.

According to Joy’s lesson plan, in the remaining period of the class, students can discuss their problems with essays or portfolios with Joy. However, nobody seemed to want to discuss anything. Everybody left after finishing the evaluation form.

K finished. Smiling, he explained to me (researcher): “Everybody is busy at the end of the quarter, having homework and finals and stuff”.

4:35 P.M.
Class over. Joy came in to collect the evaluation form. She said: "Maybe nobody needs to talk to me about his problem at this moment.”

Researcher reflections

K, along with his classmates, was bored, not seeming to be worried about the portfolio assignment or the reflective writing at all – different from what I (researcher) expected. K told me earlier that he had never done any reflective writing. But he or his classmates did not seem to worry at all about this new type of assignment – Joy’s handout has very detailed instructions as to what they are supposed to include.

End-of-quarter syndrome?

Students did not seem worried about their composition classes - they knew they could wait until close to the due dates to start working on/worrying about the portfolio?