

# Journal Writing Errors of Senior High School Students

Jasmin M. Sumipo

School Principal, Mater Dei College High School, Bohol, Philippines

**Abstract**— This study aimed to help senior high school students achieve deftness in writing in terms of grammatical correctness. Likewise, this study sought to find out the common journal errors of the students with the hope of designing instructional modules to improve the students' written ability. Error analysis method was used in this study. The journal entries of the total population of students enrolled in Reading and Writing classes served as the sources of data. The common errors in the areas of journal format construct, content and style, lexico- syntactic structure, and correct mechanics and punctuation, were noted and tabulated. Analysis and interpretation were then made based on these errors.

The results showed that the students used either meta-cognitive or reflective formats. With regard to content and style, outputs revealed the use of simple sentences in paragraphs and violation on the principles of unity and coherence. Majority of the students committed errors on the lexico-syntactic structure. Capitalization and spelling were the most frequent errors in the students' written composition; this only showed lapses in the observance of correct mechanics and punctuation.

The researcher concluded that the reading and writing students lack the writing competence expected of senior high school learners as shown on the errors in their journal entries. In fact, written entries were hardly comprehensible at times due to the varied lapses on correct writing conventions.

**Keywords**— Journal Writing Error, High School.

## I. INTRODUCTION

Writing is, in many ways, a life process which is more superior to a lot of processes in life such as talking, walking, laughing, or crying. The tragedy of it is that many people get to college hardly convinced of the important part writing plays in life and living (Roldan , 2009). The worst case is, when they finally get to realize the significance of writing to achieve success, it would be too late for them.

Mater Dei College, as an institution of higher learning, faced the same dilemma that other schools experience- that of —equipping the students with all the necessary skills for them to become successful in their future fields of endeavor. Aside from the task of training the students on technical skills, educators are supposed to equip them with other needed skills. On top of these are the four macro skills of English, namely listening, speaking, reading, and writing.

Being one of the four macro skills of English, writing is an area of concern in the teaching of language. This research was also conducted based on the premise that among the four modes, writing seemed to be the least preferred activity by students and the least focused skill by teachers. Between the expressive modes of speaking and writing, the latter is, observably less favored. In fact, Locker and Kaczmarck (2003) stated that writing, as compared to speaking, can be seen as a more standardized system which must be acquired through special instruction. Mastery of this standard system is an important prerequisite of cultural and educational participation and the maintenance of one's rights and duties.

The senior high school level is said to be the ideal place where students are taught accuracy of language since fluency in language is presumably achieved in the elementary and junior high school levels. It is sad to note, however, that this presumption of language fluency among senior high school students often proves to be wrong. The students' writing skill, it seems, is at the mercy of the pages of their journals. This is not to underrate the use of journal writing; in fact, journal writing can be one of the best tools in achieving writing proficiency. Axelrod & Cooper (2001) conveyed the importance of keeping journals when they said that in the process of journal writing, students get to remember what is important, to identify with the characters of a story or film, to clarify and extend their ideas, to express their opinions and emotions, and to connect not only with themselves but also with their peers and mentors.

Writing in journals is creating a connection to the writer himself and extending this connection to other people.

The above-mentioned scenarios prodded the researcher to conduct this study in the hope that she will be able to come up with instructional materials which will not only guide the students in achieving deftness in writing in terms of grammatical correctness but will also challenge the learners to go beyond the printed page and make a connection within themselves and with others in the community.

## II. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK OF THE STUDY

This study is theoretically supported by the process approach to writing, the theories of structural grammar and transformational grammar, schema theory, and theory of whole language.

**The Process Approach to Writing.** The process approach to writing involves demonstrating and approving practice in cognitive strategies which student writers can use to manage the composition of a text and monitor its development. It is also based on the view that writing is the result of utilizing thinking strategies to manage the composing processes of idea generation, planning, translating, and reviewing (Araceli et. al., 1999: 70-71). As advocated by Flower and Hayes (1980), the process approach focuses on providing steps for students to be guided in the writing process.

**Whole Language Theory.** Another significant theory on which this research is anchored is the Whole Language Theory which emphasizes (a) the wholeness of language as opposed to views that fragmented language into bits and pieces of phonemes, graphemes, morphemes, and words; (b) the interaction and interconnections between oral language (listening and speaking) and written language (reading and writing); and (c) the importance, in literate societies, of the written code as natural and developmental, just as the oral code is.

**Structural vis-à-vis Transformational Grammar.** Structural grammar is an approach to the written and spoken languages that focused on the mechanics and construction of sentences. As such, structural grammar is not concerned so much with the implications of the words used to create the sentence, but with the construct of the sentence itself. This concern with sentence structure provides a basis for the creation of most written documents, and makes an assumption that what is seen on the surface is

also the straightforward meaning behind the words of the sentence.

The function of structural grammar can be contrasted with that of transformational grammar. Also known as TG grammar, the transformational approach to grammar looks beneath the surface of the words used in the sentence, and seeks to identify any implied as well as expressed meanings in the arrangement of words. TG grammar is also usually considered to be the logical progression in comprehension of the written and spoken word, taking the process of analysis one step beyond the boundaries of structural grammar.

There are many reasons for keeping a journal. Some people do it to keep a record of events that occur in their lives so they can look back on them later. Others do it because they plan to write a book and want to have a record of events as an outline. Journals can also be effective therapeutic tools. Writers often keep journals to write down anything that may come in handy for a story ([www.ehow.com/way\\_guidelines-writing-journal-format.html](http://www.ehow.com/way_guidelines-writing-journal-format.html)). Among the common journal formats are reflective, double-entry, meta-cognitive, structure or guided, personal, and free style.

Reflective journal is often kept by people who like to analyze and make sense of the world going on around them. Reflective journals tend to be simple in format. It has a date heading followed by the descriptive passage of the topic the writer is reflecting upon. The writer's reflections on the subject take the bulk of each entry. This type of journal writing can help one gain a deeper understanding of events in one's life.

Double entry journal have two columns. Column one details an event or something the writer heard that held some particular meaning. The second column is where the writer details the purpose for the entry. This type of journal writing is ideal for keeping track of things you hear that you found particularly meaningful.

Metacognitive Journal is ideal for the writer who likes to learn. A metacognitive journal shows what the writer learned and how he learned it. Writers who keep a journal of this type do so typically to reinforce the knowledge they gain. Metacognitive journals can be written in two columns, detailing what one learned in one column and how in the other, or one simply writes linear entries detailing both elements together.

Personal Journal is free form. A writer may write about anything that interests him or has an effect on his life or anyone else's life. He may rant about your friends or

parents, allow his thoughts to flow on any topic without fear of repercussion. A personal journal is where one lets his thoughts run wild. A writer can format a personal journal in any way you want, even if he chooses no specific format at all.

Structured or Guided Journal. In this writing form, the journal itself provides the questions and topics, and the writer fills in the blanks and elaborates. This type of journal is used for recording special events such as weddings and baby showers. Writers add article clips, mementos or photos for a scrapbook feel. Pet journals are often guided, allowing pet owners to chronicle the lives of their furry friends. Gratitude journals are often guided as well, allowing the writer to give thanks in written form to anyone who has positively influenced his life.

The above readings provided the theoretical foundation for the present research.

#### The Problem

The main thrust of this study was to determine the journal writing errors of the Grade 11 Senior High School Students of Mater Dei College, Tubigon, Bohol, of school year 2017-2018 as basis for designing instructional materials for enrichment.

Specifically, this study sought to answer the following questions:

1. What journal format construct is used by the Grade 11 students?
2. Do the participants observe correct content form and style?
3. What are the common grammatical lapses committed by the students?
4. How are correct mechanics and punctuations observed?
5. What instructional materials may be developed based on the writing competencies of the students?

### III. METHODOLOGY

This study made use of documentary analysis of the data gathered. Samples of students' compositions will be picked out by stratified sampling from the ten reading and writing classes of all Grade 11 Students enrolled in the second semester of academic year 2017-2018.

Mater Dei College, located at Cabulijan, Tubigon, Bohol, is the locale of this study. The school offers complete education from nursery, kindergarten, elementary,

junior high, senior high, college, and graduate school. To date, the school is among the biggest in the province in terms of senior high school student enrollees.

The 100 randomly-selected journal notebooks of students who took up reading and writing classes during the second semester of 2017- 2018 served as the source of the data in this study. Each journal notebook has five to ten journal entries for the whole semester. Sporadic observation of classes in an informal and unobtrusive manner towards the end of the second semester was also done for insight building on how the writing ability of these students can be improved.

Error analysis was used in this research. From the 100 journal notebooks of reading and writing students, common errors in journal writing such as journal format construct, content form and style, grammar, and mechanics and punctuation were listed. Common errors were grouped together under different headings to facilitate presentation, interpretation, and analysis of the gathered data.

### IV. DISCUSSION AND ANALYSIS

Compositions taken from reading and writing students showed lack of competency primarily because their exposure to the process of writing is minimal. In fact, they never undergo the process of writing such as pre-writing which would have given them ample time to brainstorm and to plan ahead what they will write about and how to write about a given topic. The only step they do is writing itself. After they have written in their journal notebooks, they also do not bother to edit or revise their written output. This do not adhere to the process approach of writing which underscores the importance of giving students time to plan what to write before the actual writing process, and a time to revise the whatever was written before it is submitted for teacher's evaluation.

#### Journal Format Construct

All journal entries of the students fall on reflective journal or meta- cognitive journal. Most of the journal entries using the reflective format, however, did not have dates, headings, or any descriptive passage of the topic which the writers were supposed to reflect upon. Another thing which was noted by the researcher was that students often equate reflection with reaction. So, what was supposed to be reflective journal became more of a reaction paper.

The rest of the journal compositions which format fell into meta- cognitive journals do not, however, follow

the prescribed the two-column entry, or at the very least contain the two important components, that of the learning and how students learned. Students merely wrote what they have learned, but they failed to include how they learned the lessons as well as how they can connect this new learning to their old schema.

Though a personal journal would have improved the students' ability to write, and would have been a good avenue to express students' thoughts without focusing on any format, students do not usually keep a personal journal. In most cases, they only write journal compositions because these are requirements to pass the course.

#### Content Form and Style

The journal compositions of the students are generally structured or guided in form. Students merely wrote their answers to questions which were already prepared by teachers. They usually wrote a two to four sentence paragraph in response to guide questions. Although some would write a one very long run-on sentence or many short, choppy sentences or even fragments. Students were not given opportunity to write other forms or styles of writing such as narration, description, argumentation, and persuasion.

Most of the subjects had a simple style of writing, that is, they used simple words. Their sentences as well are of simple construction according to structure. The principles of unity and coherence were oftentimes violated by senior high students. These were made evident in the following samples. A short discussion of the errors also follows.

Entry 1. (In response to the question, "What characteristics have you imitated from your parents?")

The characteristics I have imitated from my parents is being a good example of my brother. My younger siblings are being responsible, respectful, God-fearing and act in a good way. And they are good models in my family.

The writer should have focused on his personal characteristics. In the second and third sentences, however, he wrote about his siblings. Obviously, there are errors in unity and coherence aside from the grammatical lapses.

Entry 2: (An answer to the question, "What is the most important insight you learned from the parable?")

The most important insight you have learned from the parable is that we should thank God for what we are. The pencil maker told the pencil to be good. So, the pencil should always be remembered these words. We, the people, can do many great things.

The writer failed to use the correct pronoun in the first statement and he also attempted to shift to the first person point of view by using the pronoun "we". In the following two sentences, the author wrote about the pencil maker and the pencil, while in the last sentence, he shifted again to the third person pronoun "we".

Entry 3. (Written output on the question, "What would have happened if Joseph died ahead of Pierre?")

If Pierre died ahead of Joseph, I think Joseph would be sad. Jacques was a good person I think. He would take care of Joseph as what Pierre did. It's not easy to witness the death of someone who mean so much to us. Joseph must continue living and move on.

The writer was clearly confused with the characters involved in the story. Like the first two entries, the writer kept on shifting his point of view. He also violated the principle of unity by mentioning ideas which were not related to the topic.

#### Grammar: Lexico- Syntactic Structure

With the end-view of understanding the ideas that the students want to express through their journal entries, the researcher noted down the common sentence structures used. The essentials of both transformational and structural grammar were taken into consideration through analysis of the common grammatical lapses with the purpose of correcting them. Moreover, errors in word usage and spelling were also noted as these aspects would show a writer's mastery of the language and facilitate reader's understanding.

The grammatical lapses were listed in order of the most frequent errors as gleaned from the journal entries of the reading and writing students. The errors in grammar as well as mechanics were painstakingly gathered from a total of 100 journal notebooks. Three samples of errors and

suggested corrected forms were presented to facilitate discussion and analysis.

Table.1: Subject Verb Agreement

Erroneous Form	Corrected Form
I didn't know those things <u>hurts</u> my mom's feelings.	I didn't know those things <u>hurt</u> my mom's feelings.
All things in the world <u>has</u> purpose.	All things in the world <u>have</u> purpose.
Even when they <u>goes</u> away,	Even when they <u>go</u> away,...
...	

Subject-verb agreement is a grammar rule that requires the verb to agree in number and person with the noun. So if the subject of a sentence is singular, the s-format of the verb must be used. If the subject of a sentence is plural, the verb must be in the plural or based form. Singular nouns, except for a few exceptions, do not end in s, while singular form of verb commonly ends in s.

Table.2: Pronoun- Antecedent Agreement

Erroneous Form	Corrected Form
If Joseph had a new owner, he won't follow <u>it</u> .	If Joseph had a new owner, he won't follow <u>him</u> .
Jason will not think of <u>itself</u> as something insignificant.	<u>himself</u> as something insignificant.
I scolded my niece because <u>he</u> wanted money.	I scolded my niece because <u>she</u> wanted money.

Pronoun- Antecedent Agreement. A pronoun usually refers to something earlier in the text (its antecedent) and must agree in number — singular/plural — and in gender –male/ female- with the thing to which it refers. In the first example, the pronoun should be him (or her) since its referent is the noun, owner. The reflexive pronoun itself is erroneous because its referent is the noun, Jason as shown in the second example.

Table.3. Verb Tenses and Forms

Erroneous Form	Corrected Form
They know how to <u>honored</u> their parents.	They know how to <u>honor</u> their parents.
You have <u>explain</u> to him the situation.	You have <u>explained</u> to him the situation.
I can <u>encouraged</u> him to go on living.	I can <u>encourage</u> him to go on living

Verb Tenses and Forms. Another common error gleaned from the journal entries of students were verb tenses and forms. Students usually make use of a base form after the auxiliary verbs “have”, “has”, and “had” and the state of being verbs instead of using the correct past participle form. On the contrary, they make use of past participle form after the infinitive “to” instead of using the base form. Modals like “might”, “must”, “can”, “could”, “would”, and “will” are often paired with the past form instead of the correct base form.

Table 4. Prepositions

Erroneous Form	Corrected Form
Joseph will not work <u>to</u> others.	Joseph will not work <u>with</u> others.
She has a presence <u>in</u> mind.	She has a presence <u>of</u> mind.
I learned <u>of</u> the character.	I learned <u>from</u> the character.

Prepositions. Though they are the littlest words in the English language, prepositions are among the most troublesome parts of speech. Mastery in the use of prepositions, however, can be achieved only through reading and exposure to the English language. Hence, students' exposure to stories, passages, and selections would be particularly helpful to make them learn how to use correct prepositions.

Table.5. Diction and Pluralization

Erroneous Form	Corrected Form
As humans, we have to be <u>greatful</u> .	As humans, we have to be <u>grateful</u> .
<u>Childrens</u> can easily follow.	<u>Children</u> can easily follow.
My life might be <u>ignorant</u> .	My life might be <u>boring</u> . (any appropriate adjective)

Diction and Pluralization. Other frequent errors which were highly observable among the journal entries were on diction and plural forms. Wrong choice of words is a sign that one has a limited vocabulary. It is also an indication that one needs to read more on that language so that he gains mastery on its vocabulary. Students also commit errors in forming plurals, especially of irregular nouns and verbs.

Table 6. Sentence Structure

Erroneous Form	Corrected Form
We will experience pain in life we have to move on. Pierre love Joseph he takes care of him. And making her the princes.	We will experience pain in life , but we have to move on. Pierre loves Joseph. He takes care of him. The king made her the princes.

Sentence Structure. Common errors in sentence structures include run-on sentences and fragments. Run-On. A run-on (sometimes called a "fused sentence") has at least two parts, (in other words, two independent clauses), but the two parts have been placed together instead of being properly connected. Moreover, another common sentence error is sentence fragment. A fragment fails to be a sentence in the sense that it cannot stand by itself. It does not contain even one independent clause. It needs to have a logical subject, or be attached to a complete sentence to be correct.

Table.7. Mechanics and Punctuation

Erroneous Form	Corrected Form
The <u>Foreman</u> of Provincale Company knows Pierre very well. I realized that <u>lazyness</u> is not good. I hurt other people_ feeling.	The <u>foreman</u> of Provincale Company knows Pierre very well. I realized that <u>laziness</u> is not good. I hurt other <u>people's</u> feeling.

Mechanics and Punctuation. In composition, mechanics refers to the conventions governing the technical aspects of writing, including spelling, punctuation, capitalization, and abbreviations. The most common errors in mechanics and punctuation as gleaned from the journal entries include capitalization, apostrophe, and spelling.

The observance of correct grammatical conventions may not be the end all and be all of writing, however, it proves beneficial to both the writer and thereader. The writer can convey his message clearly through correct grammar. The readers, on the other hand, can easily comprehend the message that the writer hopes to impart. This is in consonance with the theories of structural and transformational grammar. The structure of language provides the framework so that meanings, whether expressed or implied, are easily understood.

The Schema Theory was also seen as one of the factors that contributed to the knowledge on journal format,

style, grammatical structures, and mechanics of writing. Hence, lack of exposure on different types and format of journal led to the limited variety of journal writing styles.

REFERENCES

- [1] Abelos, A. (2008) . Essentials of writing in the discipline A Workbook in Communication Skills 2. Malabon City: Mutya Publishing House, Inc.
- [2] Alamis, et. al. (2010). Academic writing skills. Manila: UST Publishing House
- [3] Axelrod, R. & Cooper, C. (2001). The St. Martin’s code to writing sixth edition. Boston, Ma: Bedford/ St. Martins, Boston, Ma.
- [4] Brandon, L., & Brandon, K. (2005) Sentences, paragraphs, & beyond a work text with readings. Boston, MA: Houghton Mifflin Company.
- [5] Chapman,C. &King, R. (2009) . Differentiated instruction strategies for writing in the content areas 2nd ed. Thousand Oaks California: Corwin A SAGE Company
- [6] Langan, J. (2005). College Writing Skills with Readings Sixth Edition. NY: Mc Graw-Hill Companies NY
- [7] Locker, K. &Kaczmarck, S.K. (2003) . Business Communication- Building Critical Skills. Boston: Mc Graw Hill
- [8] Ney, W. (1988) . Transformational grammar. essays for the left hand. Illinois: Jupiter Press
- [9] Roldan, A. (2010) . College reading and writing. Pasig City: Anvil Publishing, Inc.
- [10] Rumelhart, D. (1998) Schemata: the building blocks of cognition. New York: International Reading Association, Inc.
- [11] Uy, Corazon &Valdez, S. (2008). Fundamentals of Writing for College. Manila: Mindshapers Co. Inc.
- [12] Yatvin, J. (1992). Developing a whole language program for a whole school. Virginia State Reading Association