


Writing Acceptable Descriptive Texts: A Case Study through Pre-service English Teachers' Reflective Journal

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A B S T R A C T

This study is a case study held in one of the writing classes of semester two students of the English Language Education Study Program in one of the universities in Yogyakarta, Indonesia. The aim of this study is to know the process of students in writing acceptable descriptive texts in English through their reflective journal. This study is essential to be done because we need more insights on the process of writing acceptable descriptive texts for pre-service English teachers. In obtaining the data, the researcher provided a reflective journal template that must be filled in by the students in the process of writing the descriptive texts. The result of this study can be categorized into four different points which are 1) the outlining process of pre-service English teachers writing their descriptive texts; 2) the drafting process; 3) the review process; and 4) the finalization of writing acceptable descriptive texts. Hopefully, the result of this study can give more insights and improvements to the teaching and learning of how to write descriptive texts especially for pre-service English teachers.

Keywords: pre-service English teachers, reflective journal, descriptive texts

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INTRODUCTION

Writing is one of the four compulsory skills for students, especially for those specializing in English language education. Practicing writing is a good way to ensure that students are ready to practice other language skills such as speaking, listening, and reading comprehension. Fareed et al. (2016) stated that improvement in writing skills is a prerequisite for language development performance. Ismayanti & Abdul (2020) added that writing is considered a sign of a student's proficiency in learning English because a proficient structure of a text indicates successful learning of a foreign language. Furthermore, through writing, students can express themselves, foster creativity and critical thinking, and gain self-confidence. Considering the importance of writing skills, pre-service English teachers must master writing skills well because they will teach writing skills to their students in the future. One of the writing skills that pre-service English teachers will teach is descriptive text.

A descriptive text is a type of writing that defines, explains, and describes an object or subject. The goal of a descriptive text is to provide the reader with a precise description of a certain object, person, or location by describing it physically (Daulay et al., 2023). Ariyana et al. (2020) stated that descriptive texts create an accurate representation of something. Language features used in descriptive texts include the use of simple present tense, linking verbs, adjectives, compound adjectives, and degrees of comparison (Ismayanti & Abdul, 2020). This text is one of the popular texts to be taught to students in junior and senior high school level. Because of that, pre-service English teachers need to know how to write acceptable descriptive texts. Throughout their study in university, pre-service English

teachers need to take a writing course. In semester two (2), they will be provided with the knowledge and skills on how to write acceptable different kinds of texts including descriptive texts. Therefore, this is one of the text types usually being taught in the beginning of semester 2.

Writing descriptive texts is considered a challenging skill, especially in situations where students are learning English as a foreign language (EFL). Students may encounter several obstacles, including lexical errors, grammatical errors, prepositional errors, and errors in tense usage. According to Fareed et al. (2020), Daulay et al. (2023), Nurfidoh & Evie (2021), Situmorang & Manurung (2020), and Mayekti et al. (2022), the main problems faced by undergraduate ESL students in writing descriptive texts include inadequate linguistic skills (such as mastery of grammar, syntax, and vocabulary), punctuation errors, capitalization errors, writing anxiety, lack of ideas, reliance on their first language (L1), and a poorly organized structure. These problems are influenced by various factors, including inadequate teaching strategies and testing procedures, lack of reading and writing practice, large class sizes, lack of enthusiasm, and lack of ideas.

Many strategies can be used to guide students in writing descriptive texts and minimize errors in their writing process, one of which is using reflective journals. Reflective journal writing involves daily event notes, personal reflections, environmental observations, and responses to experiences (Jannah, et al., 2020). It is described as a discovery process. As a learning tool, reflective journals can improve grammar, vocabulary, creative writing skills (originality, fluency, flexibility, and elaboration), and learning outcomes; promote a conducive learning atmosphere; develop critical thinking and self-reflection; and provide opportunities for professional development (Yeh, et al., 2022; Hussein, et al., 2020; Allan & Driscoll, 2014; Sani, et al., 2017; Ni'ma, et al., 2020).

Previous studies on the use of reflective journals in the writing class show that reflective journals have benefits on students' writing process. Apsari (2018) studied the implementation and advantages of reflective reading journals in the writing class. The students can express their ideas better and improve their writing cohesion and coherence (Apsari, 2018). Sudirman, et al. (2021) added that students agreed that using reflective journals helped them respond to writing subjects with critical reflections and self-discovery. Writing reflectively in their journals taught them to concentrate on writing elements, including unity, order, coherence, cohesiveness, content, and concept organization. Moreover, reflective journals enable EFL students to evaluate a variety of learning tasks and determine both the positive and negative aspects of the learning process. The process of writing a reflective journal became an additional stimulus for the students' intellectual and critical thinking development. The reflective writing components enhance writing abilities, promote self-reflection, and advance both macro and micro linguistic development.

Another research that proves the effectiveness of reflective journals in the writing class was done by Firdaus et.al (2018). They found out that reflective journals have a good effect in helping senior high school students write narrative texts in English. Another benefit of the use of reflective journals is that reflective journals prove to be able to increase students' motivation in studying (Amirkhanova et. al, 2016). Furthermore, reflective journal writing enhances the teaching and learning process (Trye, 2021). Reflective journal writing is categorized into one of the strategies in reflective teaching. Reflective teaching strategies prove to boost students' motivation in participating in discussions, increase their critical thinking skills in writing their work (AdilMekki, 2020). These studies show that reflective journals benefit other areas in education. In addition, because reflective journals promote critical thinking skills, it is in line with the spirit of Kurikulum Merdeka, the current curriculum used in Indonesia.

Based on the studies above, research on the process of writing texts was usually done in the context of teaching how to write texts to students at junior high school and senior high school level. Little research on this topic is done in the context of writing descriptive texts by

pre-service English teachers in university. Therefore, the researchers believe that this is something novel and decided to do a study investigating the process of pre-service English teachers writing acceptable descriptive texts through reflective journals. This study aims to know the process of the pre-service English teachers in writing acceptable descriptive texts which includes the outlining, drafting, reviewing, and finalizing the descriptive text. Therefore, the research question proposed by the researcher is "How is the process of the pre-service English teachers in writing acceptable descriptive texts?".

METHOD

This research adopts a case study approach, focusing on pre-service English teachers' use of reflective journals to develop their ability to write acceptable descriptive texts. The study involved 20 pre-service teachers enrolled in a second-semester writing class. The primary research instrument was a reflective journal template designed by the researchers to guide students in documenting their writing process.

To analyze the data, the researchers employed thematic analysis following Braun and Clarke's (2006) framework. The process began with familiarization, where the researchers thoroughly reviewed the reflective journals. Next, initial codes were generated to categorize the data, followed by identifying, reviewing, and naming recurring themes. This systematic approach ensured a detailed and comprehensive understanding of the reflective journal entries.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

In meeting the objective of this research which is to know the process of pre-service English teachers writing acceptable descriptive text, four points were considered. The processes of pre-service English teachers in outlining, drafting, revising, and finalizing the descriptive text were analyzed. The result of the analysis is presented and discussed in the following paragraphs.

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The outlining process of writing descriptive texts

The researchers found various answers regarding the outlining process in the reflective journal. For instance, the students identified or introduced the topic. They also provided a brief description of the topic they described. Furthermore, they added their connection with the topic. Figure 1 shows the answers from the pre-service English teachers in the outlining process.

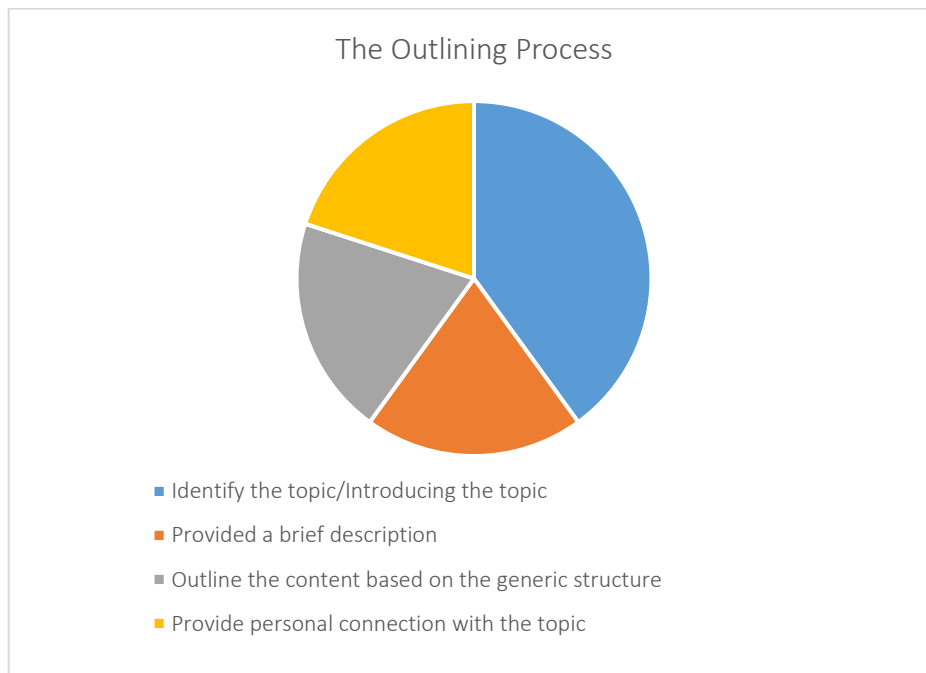


Figure 1. The Outlining Process

In outlining, most students first introduced the topic they would like to describe (40%). Then, they briefly described the topic (20%). Pre-service English teachers know they should align their outline with the generic structure of descriptive text (20%). In addition, they understand that they should add their connection with what will be described to differentiate the text from a report text (20%). Figure 1 clearly shows that the students did some relevant activities. In this context, writing an outline provides the basic structure for constructing a well-structured and cohesive text (Altınmakas & Bayyurt, 2019). The road plan helps the writer as they create their works. Outlining often entails a few essential steps. First is brainstorming, the process of generating concepts and exploring ideas (Anggraini, 2020; Rahmawati, 2022). The next step is to arrange these concepts into a logical structure or sequence. This could entail classifying, ranking, or putting ideas hierarchically.

The outline will then be expanded with additional information for each section and point. This can comprise rough drafts of paragraphs, summaries, or even bullet points. The students can now begin to envision the composition taking shape. Refinement comes next, during which the outline is examined and altered. This could entail changing the sectional hierarchy, adding or deleting points, or modifying the degree of detail. Lastly, the plan acts as a roadmap for the actual writing process, offering guidance and aiding with focus maintenance (Ramadhanti et al., 2020). All things considered, outlining is essential for keeping ideas coherent, organizing ideas, and ensuring that the finished product successfully conveys the desired message to the reader. Therefore, outlining helps students manage their time effectively, breaking tasks into manageable steps and facilitating steady progress in their writing assignments.

Before drafting their work, students as authors plot, strategize, and brainstorm during the pre-writing stage of the writing process. It entails coming up with concepts, gathering information, and structuring ideas. Writers can investigate their subject and establish a distinct path by employing clustering, freewriting, and outlining strategies. In this phase, individuals think about the goal, readership, and writing style in addition to any specifications or limitations. Prewriting lays the groundwork for writing by organizing authors' thoughts, highlighting important details (Alemu, 2020; Uludag et al., 2021), and creating a plan for efficiently expressing their message.

Depending on their work's setting and goal, students use various techniques to introduce the subject of their writing. They usually start with a hook to establish relevancy

and create intrigue. The topic is introduced, and this hook connects the reader's past knowledge. Students then give the background information or context required to orient the reader and set the stage for the discussion, following the hook. Additionally, this could be explaining the meaning of important phrases, describing the topic's extent, or emphasizing its importance. All things considered, a strong beginning should grab the reader's attention, give crucial background information, and express the writing's goal and direction with clarity. It establishes the framework for the text and skillfully leads readers into the topic's investigation.

The drafting process of writing descriptive texts

Based on the reflective journal, four popular student activities were found. They are 1) writing based on the outline, 2) paying attention to the structure, 3) gathering information about the topic, and 4) rereading the text. Figure 2 presents this data.

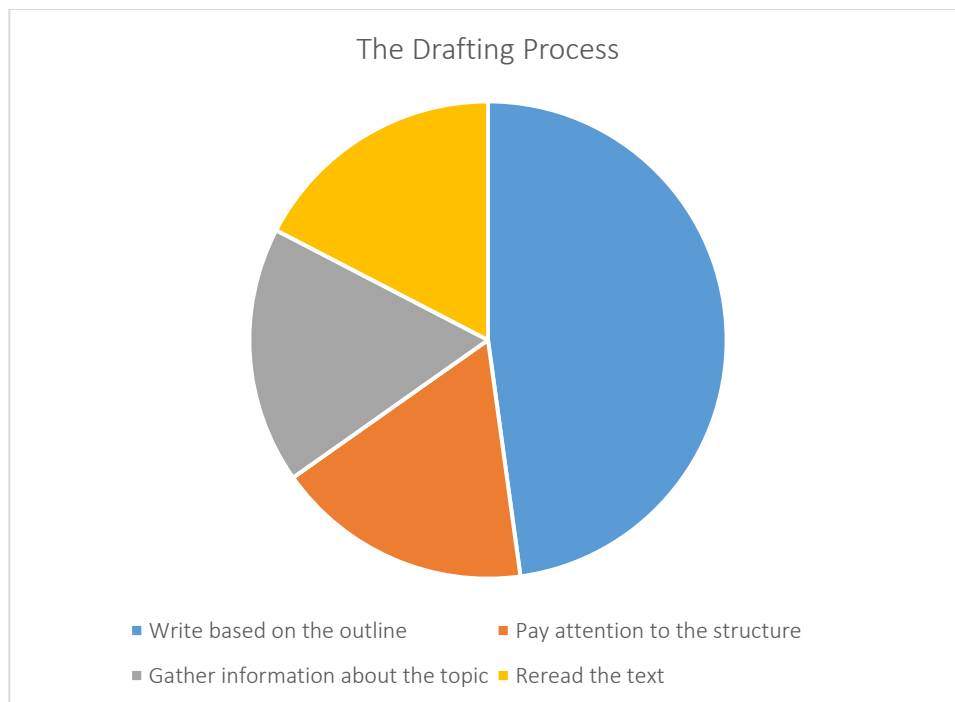


Figure 2. The Drafting Process

In the drafting process, most of the students considered their outline. So, the students stuck to their outline (48%). They also gathered information about their topic (17%). The students also knew they should write their draft according to the generic structure of descriptive texts (17%). After finishing their first draft, they reread it (17%). It is essential to comprehend generic structure because it offers a foundation for efficiently arranging information within various text formats. By identifying typical forms like introductions, body paragraphs, and conclusions, authors can improve the cohesion and clarity of their work. Comprehending these patterns also assists writers in fulfilling the demands of genres or formats, as well as the expectations of their audience. Furthermore, students as authors can better communicate with various audiences by customizing their writing style and material to fit various situations, thanks to their expertise with generic frameworks. Becoming proficient in generic form enables writers to communicate their thoughts more effectively and convincingly, increasing the writing's total impact.

In this context, students also reread the text to get the meaning. For some reason, students should read the material again before writing. First, it ensures they fully grasp the subject matter they will discuss by helping them recollect and comprehend information more deeply. Students who reread can also pick up on important ideas, arguments, and themes

they might have missed the first time (Gustanti & Ayu, 2021). This helps them to decide more intelligently what to write about and how best to organize their points of contention. Furthermore, reading the work again aids students in picking up on subtleties such as tone, style, and authorial intent that can guide their writing decisions. Students can also produce more logical and informed writing by reviewing the text again and filling up any gaps or inconsistencies in their comprehension before beginning to write. Rereading before writing generally increases understanding, fortifies analysis, and raises the calibre of the finished work.

The review process of writing descriptive texts

Based on the pre-service English teachers' reflective journals, four issues were found in the draft of the descriptive texts. Those issues include common grammatical errors and punctuation problems. Other than those, some of their texts still look like report texts and do not include personal connections or points of view. Figure 3 informs the data of the reviewing process in writing descriptive texts.

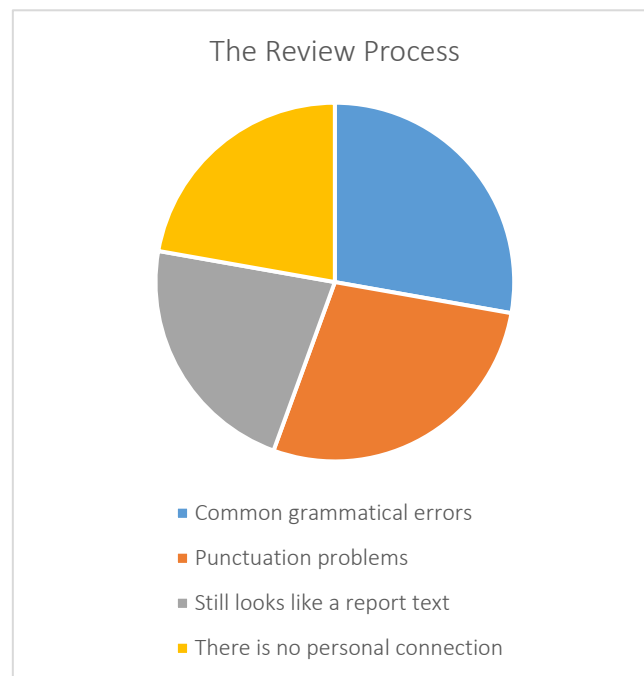


Figure 3. The Review Process

In the review process, other students and the lecturer gave feedback on a student's writing. It was found that many students have common grammatical errors (28%). Also, punctuation issues were a problem for many students (28%). Another popular feedback in the review process deals with whether the students' texts are descriptive or report texts because many still look like report texts (22%). Many students also did not include their connection or point of view in their texts (22%). These findings align with the grammatical errors that can substantially impact a written work's clarity, credibility, and efficacy. These faults can vary from simple errors in grammar or spelling to more substantial issues, such as errors in subject-verb agreement or flawed sentence structure (Alghazo & Alshraideh, 2020; Pardosi et al., 2019). Identifying and circumventing prevalent grammatical mistakes is crucial for generating articulate and refined written work.

Fragments and run-on phrases are other grammatical mistakes that interrupt the writing flow. When two separate clauses are erroneously connected without the appropriate conjunctions or punctuation, the result is a run-on phrase. Conversely, incomplete sentences that lack a subject, verb, or cohesive idea are known as fragments. These mistakes can confuse the reader and make writing challenging to read. To avoid grammatical errors,

writers should reread their work thoroughly, paying special attention to syntax, punctuation, and sentence structure. Grammar-checking software and style guidelines can also be useful for ensuring accurate grammar usage. Additionally, requesting comments from peers or instructors can assist in identifying and correcting grammatical faults before concluding a piece of writing. By correcting grammatical problems, writers can guarantee that their work is clear, cohesive, and professional.

In this context, teachers face dilemmas because they cannot provide detailed feedback on each student's work due to many factors, both internal and external. Since feedback on students' writing faults is essential to the learning process, teachers ought to provide it. Feedback helps students grow as writers by giving them specific information about their areas of strength and growth (Hyland & Hyland, 2019). Teachers can assist students in identifying patterns of errors and comprehending the fundamental grammar rules or writing standards by emphasizing errors. Students can do this to improve their writing and learn from their mistakes. Furthermore, by encouraging students to view mistakes as chances for improvement rather than failures, feedback promotes a growth mentality in them. Students who interact with the feedback to enhance their writing abilities are encouraged to reflect on themselves and use critical thinking (Herda et al., 2024). Prompt and helpful criticism helps students become better writers, improving their capacity for successful academic communication and success.

The finalization process of writing descriptive texts

The reflective journals show what the pre-service English teachers did in finalizing their descriptive texts. The most common activity in this part was revising the draft based on feedback from the student's friend and lecturer. They also reread their first draft before revising it. Then, they fixed their mistakes. Lastly, they checked their final draft. Figure 4 displays the data on the finalization process activities.

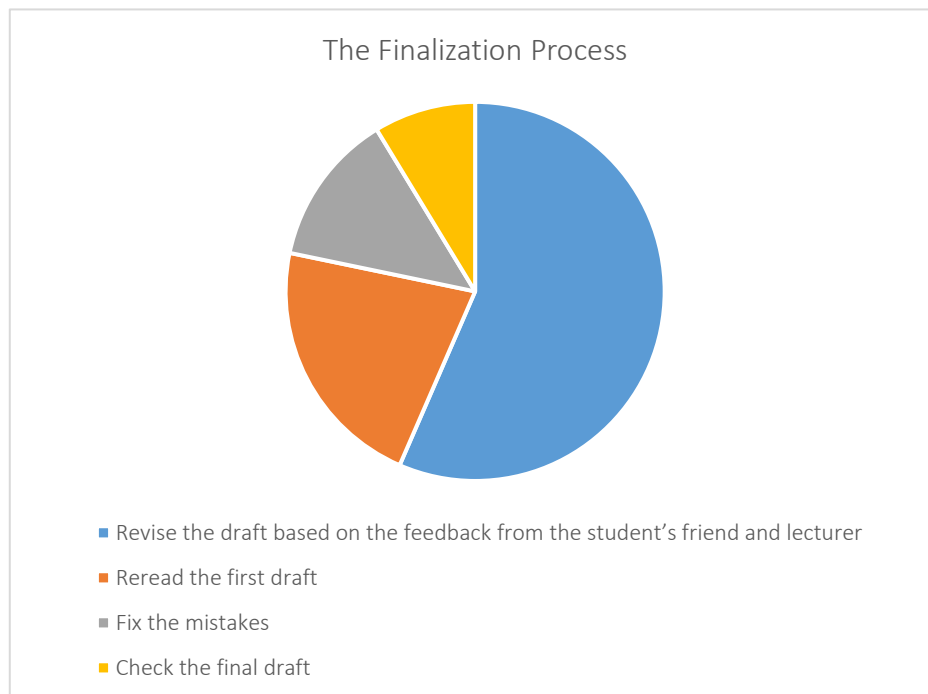


Figure 4. The Finalization Process

In finalizing their draft, most of the students revised it based on the feedback from the student's friend and lecturer (57%). They reread their first draft before revising their draft (22%). In addition, they fixed their mistakes (13%). After that, they checked their final draft (9%). A critical stage in the writing process, finalizing work through error analysis, entails

detecting and correcting grammatical, structural, and stylistic inaccuracies to create a cohesive and refined composition. This stage comprises a comprehensive process of proofing, editing, and revision to verify that the text is devoid of errors and successfully conveys its intended message to the target audience. However, a final evaluation is performed by students to ascertain that all errors have been rectified (Herda et al., 2024; Shen & Chong, 2023) and that the composition adheres to the intended benchmarks of excellence and professionalism.

Seeking assistance from peers, instructors, or writing tutors to obtain feedback and recommendations for enhancement may be necessary. Writers prepare their work for submission or publication once they are content with the final product. They do so with the assurance that they have created a flawless and refined composition that successfully conveys their intended message to the target audience. Finalizing writing through error analysis is a rigorous undertaking that demands meticulousness, critical reasoning, and an unwavering dedication to excellence (Karim & Nassaji, 2020; Shen & Chong, 2023; Zheng et al., 2023). Through meticulous evaluation, revision, and enhancement of their written work, authors can produce refined and impactful compositions that endure in the minds of their readers.

CONCLUSIONS

This research was done to gain insights on the process how pre-service English teachers write acceptable descriptive texts incorporating an instrument namely reflective journal. Firstly, it is found that the students introduced their topic, give a brief description, and followed the generic structure of descriptive text in the outlining process. Secondly, in drafting their text, most of the students followed their outline, searched for materials on their topic, and add personal connection to their text. Third, in the reviewing process, grammatical and punctuation errors were found. Some texts also looked like recount text. Lastly, in finalizing the descriptive texts, the pre-service English teachers considered the feedback given by their friends and lecturer. They also reread their first draft, fix their mistakes, and checked the final draft before submitting it.

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