

# **Portfolios and Small Group Learning: Motivating Students in a Writing Class**

**Susan Lopez-Nerney & Carol A. Binder**

Language teachers are constantly searching for more effective ways of teaching writing. This is especially true when students have low motivation, that is, they have little confidence in their writing and may resent traditional methods of teaching this skill. To overcome this problem, we incorporated the use of student portfolios and small group work in our English for Academic Purposes (Engineering) writing class with the hope that these teaching strategies would make learning writing a more positive experience for our students. Findings of our research into students' reaction to these strategies and their attitude towards writing suggest that the use of the writing portfolio in EG1471 has been effective in instilling student pride in their work. It gives them a tangible record of their work – with its successes and failures – and consequently a clearer direction to follow in the path towards becoming better writers. Small group learning activities provide students who are poorly motivated with much needed support in a writing class. Besides additional information and alternative points of view, it offers camaraderie through the difficult and frustrating process of writing.

## **INTRODUCTION**

Motivating students in a language class has been a perennial problem for teachers, including those of us at the Centre for English Language Communication (CELC) at the National University of Singapore. The motivation of students is a core concern for English Proficiency teachers at CELC because students in these courses have a history of failure where communicating in English is concerned and they are often resentful of having to take an additional course to improve their writing and, therefore, have little desire to improve it. Such students often find writing classes to be neither helpful nor enjoyable. The teachers know how to teach the skill of writing, but when their students are not eager or even completely unmotivated to learn, they often struggle to find ways to teach their students what they need to know. Therefore, the

question that constantly engages all of them is: how can we motivate our students to learn?

This paper presents a brief description of our writing course, our students and some recent changes adapted to motivate them; our rationale for incorporating portfolios and small groups in the course, how we implemented these strategies and how the two strategies worked together; findings from our research observations; and finally, a few comments on the impact on the future of the course.

### **Course Description**

English for Academic Purposes — Engineering (EG1471) is a writing course which aims to improve the students' writing skills through the use of process writing, which involves three stages: pre-writing (generating ideas and outlining); writing (drafting, reviewing and revising); and post-writing (editing). It focuses on writing paragraphs and long texts. The course is required for engineering students who fail the university's Qualifying English Test (QET). These students are placed into classes of 15-18 students for the 48-hour, one-semester course. In AY 2001-2 we served about 300 students; in 2002-3, our students numbered about 415.

### **Student Profile – Past and Present**

Over the years, the profile of the students in our course has changed. This has influenced our course goals and our teaching strategies. In the past, the students in this course were mostly local, first-year students, all of whom had been educated in English-medium schools. Since the late 1990s, we have seen more and more international students coming into the course. By 2000, the students' countries of origin were almost evenly divided between Singapore (31%), Malaysia (30%) and the Peoples' Republic of China (PRC) (26%). The remaining students (13%) were from other, mostly ASEAN, countries. In general, our classes are becoming more and more international.

This shift in our students' background has a number of implications. Firstly, since our students are from both English-language environments (Singapore) and non-English environments,

their amount of exposure to *general* English is vastly different. Secondly, the amount of *academic* English the students have had also varies greatly. The local students have done all their education in English. The students from the PRC have all been through a six-month intensive English course prior to going to university, in addition to their English instruction in the PRC. The students from Malaysia and other countries have primarily had only limited amounts of English in their previous schools. Thirdly, although all of our students have been tested (Qualifying English Test) to be weak in English, their levels of English – not only in ability but also in knowledge – are wide-ranging, that is, weak and weaker. Finally, regardless of their background and level, our students all tend to have low motivation due to frustrating past experiences with English. As one of our students declared, “I felt really tired at times to fail English again and again. Sometimes, I have in fact mentally gave up on this language” (sic).

EG1471 was originally designed for local students with extensive exposure to academic English. Now that we cater to a more heterogeneous group of students, the course has had to change to meet the students’ more varied language needs and abilities. By doing so, we hope to empower and motivate them to become better writers in English.

### **Changes in EG1471**

In 1999, two major changes were made to the course. The first involved changing the readings assigned in the course. Since then, student interests have determined the topics for the readings – and even the readings themselves – so that they could build on the students’ knowledge of certain topics and the readings could be used for ideas for writing on topics of their interest. The second change was the overt teaching of writing as a process. Previously, the students learned to write by focusing on grammar and the structure of a written text, a teacher-centred approach. Process writing, on the other hand, gives students more ownership of their writing while allowing for the learning of grammar and organisation and the development of content. Due to the many positive effects of this approach, we made it an integral part of the course. Of the many positive effects of this approach, our reason for making it an integral part of the course was its potential to

encourage the students to become better writers, whatever their level.

Despite these two major changes, however, we still had difficulty motivating our students. Therefore, in Semester 1 of AY 2001-2, we added portfolios and small group work to our teaching strategies in the course although we were not sure exactly how to incorporate them or even if they would indeed be solutions to our problem. At the end of the term, we surveyed our students to get some baseline data so that we could decide if we should continue with the portfolio and small group work in Semester 2. From this survey, we determined that we should continue with these strategies and that the two strategies should be used together to motivate our students.

Accordingly, in the second semester of Academic Year 2001-2, we formally incorporated the portfolio and small group work into our course.

## **MOTIVATION, PORTFOLIOS AND SMALL GROUP LEARNING**

Even though the concept of motivation in language learning has been much studied, it is still “a vexed concept, difficult to define, problematic to measure” (Cray, 2002). In 1972, Gardner and Lambert defined motivation as the factor responsible for the language learner’s overall goal or orientation when learning a second language. They distinguished between instrumental and integrative motivation. To them instrumental motivation is the learner’s desire to learn a language for utilitarian purposes while integrative motivation refers to the desire to learn a language to integrate successfully into the target language community. Ames and Ames (1989) define motivation as “the impetus to create and sustain intentions and goal-seeking acts.” Further, Włodkowski brings up the concept of intrinsic motivation, which he defines as “an evocation, an energy called forth by circumstances that connect with what is culturally significant to the person” (Włodkowski, 1999: 7). He adds that this motivation is governed largely by emotions (socialised through culture) which “influence task engagement, the visible outcome of learner motivation.” Still, in whatever way it is defined, teachers are often able to recognise certain behaviours in their students as being indicative of

motivation. As Wlodkowski (1999: 5) remarks, “when learners are motivated, things go more smoothly, communication flows, anxiety decreases and creativity and learning are more apparent.”

Research has shown that many factors affect motivation. Oxford and Shearin (1994) cite six factors that affect motivation in language learning:

1. Attitudes (sentiments toward the learning community and the target language).
2. Beliefs about self (expectancies about one’s attitudes to success, self-efficacy and anxiety).
3. Goals (perceived clarity and relevance of learning goals as reasons for learning).
4. Involvement (extent to which the learner actively and consciously participates in the language learning process).
5. Environmental support (extent of teacher and peer support, and the integration of cultural and outside-of-class support into learning experience).
6. Personal attributes (aptitude, age, sex, and previous language learning experience).

Wlodkowski (1999) cites how adult motivation operates on three different and increasingly motivating integrated levels, namely:

1. Success + volition (i.e., for motivation to be sustained, adult learners must experience choice or willingness along with success in the learning activity).
2. Success + volition + value (student has to learn something he/she values).
3. Success + volition+ value + enjoyment .

We define motivation as the student’s engagement in classroom activities that leads to improvement in his/her writing in EG1471. Thus, motivation refers to the student’s regular attendance in class, active involvement in classroom activities, articulation of his/her own/original ideas in written assignments, a concerted effort to meet the requirements of the course, and often, satisfaction with the work produced in the course.

## Portfolios

In EG1471, we want our students to learn how to write more effective texts. Since research on writing portfolios and small group learning indicate that they enhance motivation and consequently learning, we used them in our course though with some adaptations to suit our specific needs. We assumed that if students found these activities helpful and enjoyable, they would be more motivated to learn and become better writers.

A writing portfolio is typically defined as a collection of a student's best work and implies that the student is able to discern good writing. Portfolios, in general, can enhance learning by giving students a sense of ownership (Fiske & Todd, 1994), confidence and freedom (Burch, 1999). They can improve students' attitudes and motivation (Channiam, 1998). Although the portfolio can be used to achieve a variety of goals (Fiske & Todd, 1994), its benefits and aspects that are most relevant to us are the following:

- A portfolio can demonstrate the effort that the student has put into his writing tasks. This effort can be seen in the quality, and in some cases, quantity of work presented.
- A portfolio also contains some aspect of reflection on the student's part. Students are used to receiving our feedback but do not often spend time reflecting on their own strengths and weaknesses as writers. Reflection generated by a portfolio helps them to focus on areas that have improved and those needing more effort.

As students need to file their best work in their portfolios, they need to look at their strengths instead of their weaknesses in writing, which in turn motivates them (Crosby, 1997). Also, by selecting their best work for the portfolios, they need to be more aware of what constitutes good writing. By doing this, they are "forced" to become more analytical about writing in general and evaluative about their own writing. When the portfolio is complete, students can assess it with the understanding, knowledge and appreciation of the effort that went into the writing tasks.

We adapted the portfolio to address our need to motivate our students. The portfolio assessment formed part of the continuous

assessment for this course. We asked our students to include all the writing tasks they did during the semester in their portfolios. These tasks included not only their paragraph and long text assignments but also their small group work on reading and grammar, vocabulary quizzes, and all other writing or related activities that were done throughout the semester. Appendix 1 describes the types of tasks that students were expected to perform even though these were not graded. What was graded were the efforts they put in to improve their writing, for example, one of the paragraph writing assignments which was continuous assessment. If they had done a few drafts in order to improve their writing, say 3 or 4 drafts, each of which was commented on by the tutor, then they would have been considered to make a tremendous effort to improve. The portfolio should show the progress students had made as they wrote a paragraph from the first draft to the final product.

Although the students needed to include all their tasks in their portfolios, they still needed to select their three best pieces of writing for a grade. While the teachers reviewed and gave feedback on everything that was included in the portfolio, they graded only the three texts the students chose.

Although typically a grade is given only at the completion of a portfolio at the end of the course or semester, this delayed assessment can produce negative feelings towards the portfolio system (Burch, 1999). Cantrell (2002) suggests that students submit a portfolio at mid-term for an “informative” grade, which does not count towards the final grade but which indicates a student’s standing at that point. Therefore, at mid-semester, we collected the students’ portfolios to give them and us an indication of their status at that point.

At mid-semester, we also asked the students to reflect on the progress they had made *and* on their behaviour in regards to participation and attendance. This was part of our attempt to make the students become more aware of their responsibility for their learning.

Unlike the typical writing portfolio, however, ours had another purpose to serve. As attendance in class was not compulsory, we needed to emphasise the importance of work done in class in order to motivate the students to come. The portfolio,

therefore, served as a record of all the work the students did. Thus, the amount of work serves as an indication of students' level of participation and attendance in the course.

### **Small Groups**

Small group learning can be characterised as follows. A group of three or more students work together on common tasks or learning activities that are best handled through group work. There are activities that are structured so that students need each other to accomplish common tasks. Reaching a decision is such a task; coming out with a polished version of a text is not. In carrying out these tasks, students use cooperative, pro-social behaviour, that is, cooperation/collaboration, not competition. Students are individually accountable or responsible for their work or learning (Millis, 1996). In small group learning, knowledge is created through interaction instead of transmission of information from the teacher (as in the traditional modes of learning).

Previous research has shown that the value of learning in small groups is generally accepted (Johnson, Johnson & Holubec, 1994; Kagan, 1992). The use of small groups as an instructional methodology is seen to offer a variety of benefits (Hamm & Adams, 1992; Johnson & Johnson, 1989; Slavin, 1995). Among the ones most relevant to our course are the following:

- Small group learning promotes the development of higher-level learning and problem solving skills (ICCAI 95 Article, n.d.; Michaelsen, Black & Fink, 1996). We have noted that many of our students come into the course with superficial/immature ideas of the world around them. Moreover, they show a lack of ability and/or willingness to go beyond the strategies of writing which they had practised before coming to university. They need to be challenged to re-examine their ideas in order to produce well-argued and interesting writing.
- It develops interpersonal and group skills (Crookall et al, 2000; Michaelsen & Black 1994). Such skills are crucial to a student's success in university, where increasingly group work comprises a large amount of student assignments. Many of our local students have much experience with small-



group work, but those who come from other countries may not be so experienced.

- The increased amount of interaction in small group learning means more opportunities to speak and listen. This enhanced practice improves communication skills (Hamm & Adams, 1992). Many of our international students, especially those from the People's Republic of China, are not fluent in English. They need as much practice as they can get in communicating in English.
- Finally, small group learning increases motivation for and enjoyment of learning (Hamm & Adams, 1992). As mentioned earlier, our students have low motivation for learning to write well in English.

When we introduced small group work in EG1471, we believed that it would help motivate our students to learn better in three specific areas of their course work: gathering ideas for their writing through reading and discussing, focusing on their specific grammar weaknesses, and revising their writing through peer review.

In particular, we believed that gathering ideas for writing as a group rather than as individuals would provide the students with more resources to use for their writing. More importantly, their discussions could heighten their understanding of ideas brought into the group (through self-explanation, internalisation, social grounding) and would improve their communication skills. Peer review would also provide the opportunity to do all these. It would also increase awareness of the reader and purpose of writing and improve negotiation skills.

An important feature of the small groups in our course is the freedom students have in choosing the topics (both for reading and grammar activities) for discussion as well as their specific tasks in the group, i.e., who is responsible for carrying out the reading/grammar discussion, etc. In this way, students take responsibility for the learning that takes place in their groups.

## **Purpose of Study**

As part of our regular tasks as teachers of the course, we conduct an evaluation of the course at the end of each semester. This time around we were specifically interested to find out whether or not portfolios and small group activities were indeed helpful to our students in developing their writing skills. Our assumption was that if students found these activities helpful and enjoyable, they would be more motivated to learn and become better writers. Thus, our study aimed to ascertain how students regarded portfolios and small group activities in terms of helpfulness to their writing and enjoyment as learning activities.

## **HOW WE USED SMALL GROUPS AND PORTFOLIOS IN EG1471**

In Semester 2 of Academic Year 2001-2, EG1471 had 12 tutorial groups or a total of 151 students. We taught 7 of these groups (90 students). These students were the participants of our study. In these groups we set out three main tasks for ourselves:

1. To introduce the students to strategies of small group learning and portfolios.
2. To ensure that the small groups were carrying out their goals and students were maintaining their portfolios.
3. To give the students the opportunity to reflect on their experiences and evaluate the outcome of these experiences for themselves.

At the beginning of the semester, we divided the class into small groups (3 - 4 students per group) on the basis of their interests as well as our initial evaluation of the students' competence, which was based on their writing samples. We explained the goals of using the portfolio and small groups in the course, as well as procedures to follow. We also gave students a handout containing this information (Appendix 2). We assured the students that they would have one hour a week of class time to do their group work. Finally, to ease the students into their groups and familiarise them with the dynamics of working together, we did a team management activity in class. The small groups started operating in the third week of class.

Throughout the semester we were fairly consistent in scheduling in one group activity hour per week. We monitored group activities by checking that the groups had tasks planned each time they met and whenever it was necessary; we helped the groups prepare for their activities. We also reminded students to compile all their work in their portfolios.

We used small groups in three areas of students' course work: gathering ideas for their writing through brainstorming and discussion of readings chosen by students, discussing grammar problems, and revising their writing through peer review.

Data for our study came from five sources:

1. Surveys at the beginning of the semester, halfway, and at the end.
2. Samples of our students' writing at the beginning and at the end of the course.
3. Student's self-assessment at the beginning of the course and halfway through.
4. Informal interviews with our students at the end of the course.
5. Our own observations.

## **FINDINGS**

### **Portfolios**

As mentioned earlier, we asked the students to do a self-assessment/reflection halfway through the semester. Results of this mid-term assessment are shown below:

- Most students saw themselves as putting effort in their writing, i.e., increasing the number of tasks, and into the course in general. They were trying to participate actively in class and in learning and were feeling more confident about their writing.
- There was no clear pattern as to how students felt about their portfolios; half of the students were proud of their portfolios, while the other half were not.

When we surveyed our students at the end of the semester, we found that about three-quarters of our students found portfolios to be a helpful strategy for improving their writing. However, only half of our students indicated that they enjoyed the process of keeping and putting the portfolio together.

Our interviews with students gave us a little more insight into their feelings about the portfolio. Most students had a high degree of personal satisfaction with their portfolios. They felt – and could see – that they had accomplished a lot during the semester. They could see the problems that they had and how they overcame some of them to become stronger writers. This gave them a great deal of satisfaction. One student even wrote, “It’s (the portfolio) the most perfect thing I’ve ever done!” Also, although they felt it was difficult to select their work to be graded, they found this exercise to be very helpful as they had to use all their knowledge about writing to make the right choice, and it made them feel very responsible.

Our observations on the portfolios may be summarised as follows:

Portfolios are a good reflection of our students’ work and effort. It was very clear to us who had worked hard and who had not put in much effort, both in quality and quantity of writing tasks. The students who worked hard and attended class regularly, had far more writing tasks and group work in their portfolios than those students who had not. It appears that some students did not care much about their final grades in this English module and, therefore, chose not to attend class regularly or did not come to class prepared for their group work and writing activities.

Portfolios enable us to track our students’ progress. All the work throughout the term was included so we could compare work from the beginning to the end of the course.

Even though many of the portfolios were rather “thin” at mid-semester, students rallied and pulled together mostly good portfolios by the end. As their portfolios came together, most students seemed to feel more motivated and confident about what they were doing and many students worked to develop good,

complete, attractive portfolios, which gave them a sense of achievement.

The only real negative aspect that we came across was that some students did not organise their work well even though they were given a template to follow. The writing task materials were haphazardly put together and were not carefully selected. This perhaps was because some students only tried to organise their work at the end of the semester rather than keep it organised from the beginning. As a result, it was difficult for them, and us, to see their progress easily.

Overall, we feel that the use of portfolios in our course was helpful to both our students and us, as teachers, as they gave us a good indication of our students' progress and effort. Portfolios helped students see their improvement in writing, as only the best writing tasks were selected to be graded. They helped create the need for awareness of what constitutes good writing. Much of the improvement in writing had been accomplished by the students themselves using the tutor's feedback to guide them. They created a sense of accomplishment, which in turn boosted confidence.

### **Small Groups**

At the start of the course, our students were not familiar with the group learning strategies used in our course. Only about half our students had some familiarity with group planning for writing and peer review, and even fewer had done group reading and group grammar activities.

#### ***Student Reaction to Group Work at the End of the Course***

Our end of the course survey showed that, in general, our students found group planning and peer review helpful and the group reading activities enjoyable. There were some variations within the specific activities. Group grammar work clearly was the least favoured activity.

### ***Group Activities in the Writing Process***

When doing their writing assignments, the students did two group activities: planning and peer review. Planning included brainstorming as a group while peer review consisted of having the group members comment on their writing.

Students considered these two activities more helpful than enjoyable, especially the peer review. They valued the comments that their peers gave them as they found these comments helpful in the revision process. The suggestions for improvement from their peers were also welcomed by the writers.

In addition, having someone else read the texts revealed errors/weaknesses the writers overlooked. Besides, as one student pointed out, "Editing my friends' work and my own work helps to see other people mistakes so that it will not occur in mine."

Group planning was not often done, as students after having brainstormed as a group for a couple of writing assignments, initiated brainstorming spontaneously.

### ***Group Reading***

Clearly students found most enjoyable choosing their own topics and the readings, and discussing these. Student interviews showed that they enjoyed the freedom of choosing their own topics and because they chose the topics they were interested in, they learned more from the activity and also enjoyed doing it. However, sometimes arriving at the group decision on the topic and reading could be difficult. Another student commented that the discussions they had were often light-hearted so it was a relaxing activity. The downside was sometimes they got sidetracked and wound up talking about matters not related to the topic of discussion. However, as the students noted, these discussions (and distractions) helped them get to know each other better. Finally, students also remarked that discussions forced them to use English in class, hence improving their language skills.

Students also found the discussion helpful because it gave them ideas and more examples to use in their writing. It also exposed them to interesting points of view, especially if the group

was “internationally” constituted, i.e., Singaporeans, Malaysians and PRC students.

### ***Group Grammar Work***

What did students think of doing group grammar work? This group activity was the least favoured in terms of its helpfulness and enjoyment. Many students admitted they did not get to do this activity in their groups because of lack of time and inclination. They also did not find it helpful because their work on the grammar point “lacked focus”. Sometimes they would do the grammar exercises their group mate brought in, but they did not see the point of doing so. Sometimes they would run into questions which none could answer. Consequently, it was suggested that, “it’s better for the teacher to do it”.

### ***Difficulties in Group Work***

The students gave several problems they encountered when doing group work in the course. These included the following:

- The attendance problem – when group members were absent, it was not possible to do group work; the “lucky ones” were those whose group members were there and participated.
- Group rapport problem – when groups did not gel for a number of reasons (absenteeism, lack of camaraderie, contrasting personalities).
- Irresponsibility – group members not doing their assigned tasks (not bringing in their readings/materials for discussion).
- Inability to deal with grammar questions.
- Logistics – difficulty of getting copies of the readings to group members.

### **Teachers’ Observation**

On the whole, we would say that group learning activities, as we set them up in EG1471 had only limited success. Although a majority of our students did indicate in the surveys that they found these activities helpful and enjoyable, what we observed in our classes suggests that these activities worked only with very few groups and then only for selected activities.

The groups that were successful in carrying out their tasks had the following characteristics:

- The members of these groups were usually present in class.
- They generally came prepared to class. Thus, they would usually be actively engaged in some discussion or peer review during the group activities hour.
- They also tended to be friendly with each other, and generally sat together in class.
- Whenever group exercises were assigned (such as a team oral presentation), they usually did better than the rest. It seems their positive engagement in their group activities bred success, which then fuelled their desire to continue working together as a group.

Not all the groups had the good fortune of having these characteristics. As such, they were unable to exploit the benefits of group learning. However, the “successful” groups tended to concentrate on only selected activities, namely, discussion of reading selections and peer review. These were the activities that engaged them most, and by their own account, the ones they found really helpful and/or enjoyable.

Finally, having a regular schedule for group activities each week seems like a good practice, especially for the successful groups. But, one hour seemed insufficient for their tasks. Students usually spent some of the time setting up the group work, like deciding which reading selection to work on. Besides, they tended to do their work more slowly than anticipated, that is, they read slowly.

Overall, group work in EG1471 produced mixed results, with only a minority of groups being successful, i.e., only a few really outstanding groups. Our findings indicate that:

- This strategy worked best when the group members worked well together. This occurred when members were present, came prepared and enjoyed some camaraderie within the group. When these conditions were absent, group work failed miserably.



- Group reading work was most enjoyable, especially choosing topics for reading, selecting the readings and discussing them.
- Peer review was considered most helpful in improving their writing.
- One hour a week is not sufficient to accomplish group learning in our course. Our goal of having students read and discuss a selection in order to gain ideas for use in their writing as well as discuss a grammar point needs more time.

## CONCLUSION

The use of the writing portfolio in EG1471 has been effective in instilling student pride in their work. It gives them a tangible record of their work – with its successes and failures – and consequently a clear direction to follow in the path towards becoming better writers. Small group learning activities provide students who are poorly motivated with much needed support in a writing class. Besides additional information and alternative points of view, it offers camaraderie through the difficult and frustrating process of writing. Students in general found both the portfolio and small group work to be helpful and somewhat enjoyable; therefore, we believe that these two methods helped to motivate our students to learn how to become better writers.

In view of these findings we are encouraged to continue using portfolios, but with more structured activities and teacher input. More specifically, we will include the portfolio as an integral part of the student's continuous assessment for the course, along with the graded writing assignments. We will evaluate the portfolio on the basis of its completeness, quality and quantity of work, and presentation. To help the students put the portfolio together, we will prescribe a format for organising its contents. For reading in small groups we will introduce a format that includes questions for vocabulary, comprehension and discussion. This would help facilitate discussion especially for weaker students. Finally, we will also introduce a short, (about 5 to 10 minutes) small group oral presentation on pre-determined grammar topics for common errors such as, subject-verb agreement, the use of the present perfect tense, and follow this up by a practice exercise that students prepare.

In introducing these motivating strategies in EG1471 we acknowledge that not all students would respond positively. But we would continue with those that work better with the majority of the students and make changes if necessary, to enhance learning further.

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## **Appendix 1. Additional Writing for EG1471 Students**

These were writing exercises that were not graded.

1. Timed Writing Exercises
  - a. A one-hour exercise that assessed students ability to plan a text based on excerpts of a reading selection.
  - b. 5-10 minute writing exercises based on a point discussed in class.
2. Short writing exercises indicated in the course materials, e.g., writing topic sentences and developing outlines for paragraphs
3. Additional drafts generated by students to improve their texts (Students were required to at least one revision of their graded writing assignments. While all students complied with this requirement, some went on to do additional drafts, e.g., 3 to 4 revisions.)

## **Appendix 2. EG1471 Information on the Portfolio and Small Groups**

Both the small groups and the portfolio are important parts of EG1471. They have been included in the course in order to give you more freedom/choices and to help you become stronger, more independent writers and readers.

### **Portfolio**

For your portfolio, you need to have a separate folder in which you can keep your papers neatly organized. You should have a section in your portfolio for the following:

- A. **WRITING:** All your writing work – the planning exercises you have done, all the rough and FINAL drafts of all written assignments; self-editing checklists
- B. **READING:** Copies of all the readings you and your group have done, plus any work you did on the readings, e.g. discussion questions, notes on the reading activities, if any
- C. **GRAMMAR:** All the work you did to improve your grammar, e.g. grammar notes you took, grammar exercises you have done, either by yourself, in your group, or our classroom grammar exercises/quizzes
- D. **MISCELLANEOUS:** Other stuff you have done in the course, that doesn't fall into any of the above 3 categories, like self-assessment, and which reflect anything else you have done to improve your writing

I will collect your portfolio twice during the term – once just before mid-term and again just before the end of term. I will look at the completeness of your portfolio, make comments on some of your work, and put a mark on the paragraph and essays that you feel are the best. (I will give feedback on all of your writing throughout the term; however, only one paragraph and two essays will receive a mark.)

## **Small Groups**

The small group that you will be a part of actually will function like a team. Although there will be a leader in each group, everyone in the group will help determine the scope of the group's activities.

There needs to be a leader and a recorder; however, the leader can also be the recorder if that's what the group decides. Leadership of the group may rotate but not too often! The recorder needs to keep a record of what is done each time the group meets. This record will be collected twice during the term.

We'll keep the present group for the first half of the term. In the second half, you can decide if you want to change groups. Otherwise, the small groups will keep the same members throughout the term – unless there is a problem that cannot be resolved.

The group will function together primarily to work on readings of their own choice, some grammar exercises, and peer review. However, the group may decide to do other activities together as well.

## ***Readings***

Group members should take turns selecting articles for the group to read and discuss. You may get articles from newspapers, magazines, newsletters, or the internet, but keep in mind what your group members are interested in. Shorter articles can be read and discussed during class time, but longer articles may need to be read outside of class. To prepare for the discussion of your article, you should prepare some questions for vocabulary, comprehension and discussion. You lead the discussion of your article. ½ hour.

## ***Grammar***

Again, group members should take turns preparing grammar materials and exercises for the group. However, the group should decide which areas of grammar to focus on (look at your writing assignments and my comments; they'll guide you in your decision). You may use any resource such as the internet or The Write Guide.

You should give a brief explanation to your group on the grammar topic before you work through an exercise or two. ½ hour.

I will ALWAYS be available to assist you and your group if there are questions or problems; however, I want you to take charge of some of your own learning!