



ESL Podcast 685 – Getting Feedback on Writing

GLOSSARY

marked up – edited; revised; corrected, usually by drawing lines and comments in red ink

* The professor marked up Jim's essay because he used the passive voice instead of the active voice.

draft – an initial version of a written document that needs to be reviewed and edited one or more times before it is finished

* How many drafts did you go through before you had the final version?

revision – edit; a suggested change to improve a written document

* Most of these revisions focus on sentence structure and word choice.

comment – a written opinion about something or additional information about something, usually written for the consideration of the original author

* Most of the comments were positive, but some people really disliked the third paragraph.

margin – the white space at the top, bottom, and right- and left-hand sides of a page; the white space around printed text

* The teacher asked us to use one-inch margins for our homework assignment.

to underline – to draw a thin line underneath text, usually for emphasis

* This style guide says we should underline the titles of books and put the titles of songs in italics.

introduction – the first paragraph(s) of an essay, used to present the subject of the entire essay and let readers know how the rest of the essay is structured

* The introduction should be interesting enough to catch the readers' attention and get them interested in what is coming next.

run-on sentence – a sentence that is very long, usually because it uses "and," "or," and "but" too many times, and would be better if separated into two or more smaller sentences

* Run-on sentences can be very difficult to understand. Try expressing the same ideas in two to three shorter sentences instead.

body – the main part of an essay, usually the paragraphs between the introduction and conclusion

* You should use the body of your essay to provide detail and include supporting statistics.



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transition – a word or short phrase used between sentences or between paragraphs to make the writing smoother and help readers follow the flow of ideas

* “Additionally,” “in addition,” “moreover,” and “furthermore” are all transitions that have the same meaning.

well supported – with a lot of proof or evidence; with a convincing or persuasive reason to believe something

* Janey’s essay about the need to eat more fruits and vegetables was well supported by statistics from the American Medical Association.

to cite – to refer to what is written in another document or what has been said by an expert in order to support one’s own argument or idea

* If you cite an encyclopedia in your essay, be sure to include the page number.

source – the book, article, or interview where a particular piece of information comes from, especially when referring to that information in one’s writing

* Most students know that a peer-reviewed scientific journal article is a much better source than a webpage found on Wikipedia.

conclusion – the final paragraph(s) in an essay, used to restate one’s main argument or idea, briefly referring to the main ideas that were included in the body of the essay

* Make sure your conclusion refers back to the main ideas you discussed throughout your essay.

to summarize – to state the main points or main ideas of a larger document, usually in just a few sentences

* Our homework assignment is to summarize the novel in just one paragraph.

constructive criticism – advice that is meant to help someone improve something by showing him or her what is wrong with it

* At first, I was hurt by Quinton’s constructive criticism, but then I realized he was just trying to help me.

demoralizing – frustrating and depressing; making one feel like one shouldn’t try to do something because one is very bad at it or because it won’t be successful

* The company’s president has been announcing budget cuts every week for the past three months, and it is very demoralizing for the employees.



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battle wound – something that happened to one in the past and was difficult or painful, and that one remembers clearly, but is no longer difficult or painful and has actually made someone stronger in some way

* They've been happily married for more than 30 years, and they often laugh when talking about their battle wounds from the first few difficult years of marriage.

COMPREHENSION QUESTIONS

1. What did Professor Rodriguez do to Xica's paper?
 - a) He edited it.
 - b) He graded it.
 - c) He folded it.
2. What did Professor Rodriguez do to the introduction?
 - a) He drew a circle around it.
 - b) He drew lines under all the text.
 - c) He drew arrows pointing to it.

WHAT ELSE DOES IT MEAN?

comment

The word "comment," in this podcast, means a written opinion about something or additional information about something, usually written for the consideration of the original author: "Please send me your comments by Friday, and we'll have a new version for your review by next Wednesday." The phrase "for comment" means for review: "Send this report to the managers for comment." A "comment" can also be one's opinion or critique about something: "This novel is an interesting comment on race relations in the 1960s." Finally, the phrase "no comment" is used when one is being asked many questions by reporters and does not want to respond or be quoted: "Is it true you stole \$3 million from the company?" "No comment."

margin

In this podcast, the word "margin" means the white space at the top, bottom, and right- and left-hand sides of a page, or the white space around printed text: "Young tried to make his essay seem longer by using a large font and very big margins." A "margin" is also the amount by which something wins or loses, or exceeds a certain minimum amount: "The team is expected to win by a 15-point margin." Or, "What kind of profit margins do you anticipate for the company next



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year?” When talking about statistics, the “margin of error” reflects how likely it is that the actual number will be different than the calculated number: “Does this poll have a large margin of error?”

CULTURE NOTE

Extra Help for College/University Students

When university students don’t understand a “concept” (idea) or are not doing well in a particular course, they can get “extra” (additional) help in many ways. University professors are required to have “office hours,” or periods of time each week when students can “drop by” (go somewhere without an appointment) the professor’s office to ask questions and receive assistance. If the office hours are not “convenient” (held at a time when one is available) for the student, most professors will schedule an appointment with the student.

When students need additional help, they can “turn to” (ask for help from) each other by forming “study groups” (small groups of people who study together). Most universities also have “tutoring centers,” or places where “tutors” (people with strong knowledge in a particular subject) help students understand difficult concepts. Universities often offer free tutoring centers for math and writing. Tutoring services in other subjects are often free for “student athletes” (students who play on the university’s sports teams), but other students many need to pay for private tutoring.

In classes with many students, some universities have “note-taking” (the act of writing down information as one hears it in a lecture) services for “core classes” (classes that almost everyone takes). Students can pay to receive a copy of the notes for a particular day. This is especially helpful when students weren’t able to attend a particular lecture, or if they realized that their own notes aren’t very good.

Sometimes professors put their old exams “on reserve” (on hold) at the library. Students can “check them out” (take from the library) for a few hours, grading their own performance on old exams as they prepare for their own exams.

Comprehension Questions Correct Answers: 1 – a; 2 – b



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COMPLETE TRANSCRIPT

Welcome to English as a Second Language Podcast number 685: Getting Feedback on Writing.

This is English as a Second Language Podcast episode 685. I'm your host, Dr. Jeff McQuillan, coming to you from the Center for Educational Development in beautiful Los Angeles, California.

Our website is eslpod.com. Go there to download a Learning Guide for this episode. The Learning Guide helps you improve your English and helps us keep this podcast audio free for everyone.

This episode is called "Getting Feedback on Writing," getting someone's reaction to, comments on, and corrections on your writing. Let's get started.

[start of dialogue]

Xica: I just got my paper back from Professor Rodriguez and it's all marked up.

Lucas: Let me see. It doesn't look too bad. This is a draft, right? His note at the top says to make revisions before handing in a final version. He's trying to help you get a better grade.

Xica: Maybe, but there's nothing he likes about the essay. Look at all of those comments in the margins. He underlined the entire introduction and wrote "run-on sentence" next to it.

Lucas: That's easy to fix, and it is a run-on sentence, you know.

Xica: And in the body, he wrote that I had no transitions and that my arguments weren't well supported.

Lucas: Well, transitions are easy to put in and you just need to cite a few more sources – that's all.

Xica: Yeah, but that's not all. Next to the conclusion, he wrote that I didn't properly summarize my main points. See what I mean? There's nothing he likes about this essay.

Lucas: I think you should take the constructive criticism as it's meant – to help you.



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Xica: It's easy for you to say. You're done with college. It's kind of demoralizing to get your paper back all marked up.

Lucas: True, but you forget that I have my own battle wounds – lots of them!

[end of dialogue]

Our dialogue begins with Xica saying to Lucas, "I just got my paper back from Professor Rodriguez and it's all marked up." A "paper," in this case, is something you would give to a teacher or professor in school, some writing that you had to do, maybe an essay. Xica has received her paper back from Professor Rodriguez. She gave it to Professor Rodriguez and Rodriguez gave it back to her all marked up. "To be marked up" means that it has been corrected, edited, perhaps changed. Usually the teacher or professor will use a red pen, and they will circle things and write things there, and indicate how it needs be corrected or changed.

Lucas says, "Let me see. It doesn't look too bad. This is a draft, right?" A "draft" is the first attempt or one of your first attempts to write a certain paper or document. Usually, the draft has be changed, corrected, and reviewed. So, when someone says, "This paper is just a draft," they mean it still isn't perfect yet. Lucas says that his, meaning Professor Rodriguez, note at the top of the paper says to make revisions before handing in a final version. "Revisions" are changes to what you have written, changes to the paper or document to make it better. "To hand in" means to give to, in this case, the professor. "Hand in" is the phrasal verb we often use in school to talk about things that you are giving to the professor or the teacher as a student, but it also could be used in other circumstances.

Lucas says, "He (the professor) is trying to help you get a better grade (a better mark on your paper)." Xica says, "Maybe, but there's nothing he likes about the essay. Look at all of those comments in the margins." "Comments" are, in this case, someone's opinion about something or additional information that they want you to think about and perhaps use in making your revisions. There are other meanings of the word "comment," and those can be found in our Learning Guide. A "margin" (margin), when talking about a piece of paper, is the space at the top, bottom, right or left sides of the page; they are often white, but not always. The margin is where you could write comments on someone's writing. It's space that is not usually written in. "Margin" has a couple of different meanings in English and those, once again, can be found in our wonderful Learning Guide. Xica says that the professor underlined the entire introduction



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and wrote (quote) “run-on sentence” (unquote) next to it. “To underline” is to draw a thin, small line below the text, underneath the writing, often to emphasize or point out something. The “introduction” is the first part of the paper; in this case it was an essay. The introduction usually tells you what the essay is going to be about. Xica says that the professor underlined the entire introduction and wrote “run-on sentence.” A “run-on sentence” is a sentence that is very long, often one the uses the word “and,” “or,” or another conjunction too many times so the sentence keeps going and going and going. Usually, a run-on sentence is one where you can put a period in; you can break the sentence up and it will make more sense or read more easily. A run-on sentence, in other words, is not something you want to have, and that’s what the professor is telling poor Xica.

Lucas says, “That’s easy to fix (that’s easy to correct), and it is a run-on sentence, you know.” He’s agreeing with the professor that Xica’s first sentence or the introduction is a run-on sentence. Xica then says, “And in the body, he wrote that I had no transitions and that my arguments weren’t well supported.” The “body,” when we’re talking about an essay, a document like this, is the main part of the essay; it’s the main part of the document. You have an introduction, a body, and a conclusion. So it’s the longest, typically, part of the essay, where you present the main points you are making and any evidence to support those points. Xica says that in the body of her essay the professor wrote that she had no transitions. A “transition” in writing is a word or short phrase that we use between sentences or between paragraphs that make the writing smoother; they help you go from one point to the next point. So, phrases like “in addition” and “nevertheless” and “however,” these could all be transitional words or phrases. Xica says that the professor told her she had no transitions and that her arguments weren’t well supported. “Well supported” means that you have a lot of evidence or proof for what you are saying. You are able to give facts that show that your conclusion is true.

Lucas says, “Well, transitions are easy to put in.” It’s not difficult to put in the words and phrases so that the essay flows more smoothly; you have phrases that take you from one part to the next. He says, “you just need to cite a few more sources.” In order for the essay to be well supported is what he means. “To cite” (cite) means to refer to typically another written document, maybe something in a book or a magazine that was said in order to support your own arguments. It could be something that another expert said; it could be information that supports what you are trying to argue for. So, Lucas says that in order to have a well supported argument, Xica just needs to put in – just needs to write in, to cite a few more sources. “Source,” here, is the book, the article, the interview where that particular piece of information comes from.



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Xica says, “Yeah, but that’s not all. Next to the conclusion, he wrote that I didn’t properly summarize my main points.” The “conclusion” is the last, final part of an essay. Remember, we have the introduction, the body, and now the conclusion. The conclusion of an essay usually summarizes your main points. “To summarize” means to state the main ideas in a short form, very quickly using just a couple of sentences. Xica says, “See what I mean? There’s nothing he likes about this essay.” So, the professor didn’t like the introduction, he didn’t like the body, and he didn’t like the conclusion.

Lucas says, “I think you should take the constructive criticism as it’s meant – to help you.” “Constructive criticism” is advice that is meant to help someone improve something by showing them what is wrong with what they’re doing now. It’s “constructive” because you give it to the person in order to help them be better. Of course, when you are “criticizing” someone, when you are telling them what they are doing wrong, they don’t always consider that advice to be constructive, to be given to you in order to help you. But, Lucas says that’s what Xica needs to do, that’s what the criticism is meant to do, that’s the purpose of it.

So, Xica says, “It’s easy for you to say.” That expression means that it’s easy for another person to tell you what to do because they don’t have to do it themselves. Xica says, “You’re done with college (meaning you’re finished with college, you are no longer in college – at the university). It’s kind of demoralizing to get your paper back all marked up.” “Demoralizing” is something that is depressing, something that is frustrating, something that makes you feel like you’re not very good and will never be very good at this action – this activity, in Xica’s case writing an essay. She found the professor’s comments demoralizing.

Lucas says, “True (it can be demoralizing), but you forget that I have my own battle wounds – lots of them!” A “battle” is when two groups of people are fighting each other, perhaps two different countries. A “wound” (wound) is when you are hurt; perhaps you have been shot or you have been cut. A “battle wound,” then, is some injury that you have received in a battle. Lucas is using the expression here to mean that he has also received a lot of criticism. He received difficult comments from professors when he was in school so that he also knows what it is like to get these kinds of comments, and that Xica’s experience is not unique. She’s not the only one, he also has gone through this experience.

Now let’s listen to the dialogue, this time at a normal speed.

[start of dialogue]



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[end of dialogue]

Everything our scriptwriter says is well supported; that's because it's written by Dr. Lucy Tse.

From Los Angeles, California, I'm Jeff McQuillan. Thank you for listening. Come back and listen to us again sometime here on ESL Podcast.

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