



**UNIVERSIDAD AUTONOMA DEL ESTADO DE HIDALGO
INSTITUTO DE CIENCIAS SOCIALES Y HUMANIDADES**

**TESTING STUDENTS' WRITING: AN EXPLORATORY STUDY
OF CURRENT TEACHERS' PRACTICE**

**TESIS
QUE PARA OBTENER EL GRADO DE
LICENCIADO EN
ENSEÑANZA DE LA LENGUA INGLESA**

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ABSTRACT

This is a qualitative study whose aim is to know the way teachers at Instituto de Ciencias Sociales y Humanidades (ICSHu) at Universidad Autónoma del Estado de Hidalgo (UAEH) test students' writing. We interviewed teachers from the different B.A. programs offered in the institute. The results reveal that teachers use mainly guided activities and they avoid free writing. Teachers choose these activities based on students' proficiency level. This study contributes to our field of study because English teachers at ICSHu can become aware of the aspects to be taken into account when designing a writing test and the different techniques they can use when testing this skill.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	iii
ABSTRACT	iv
CHAPTER I. INTRODUCTION	1
CHAPTER II. WRITING AND TESTING	4
2.1 Conceptualizing Writing	4
2.2. Testing Writing	6
2.3 Principles for testing	10
2.3.1 Validity	10
2.3.1.1 Content Validity	10
2.3.1.2 Criterion-related validity	11
2.3.1.3 Construct Validity	12
2.3.2 Reliability	12
2.3.3 Practicality	14
2.3.4 Backwash effect	14
2.4 Testing Techniques	15
2.4.1 Multiple-choice	15
2.4.2 Error-recognition items	16
2.4.4 Changing Words	17
2.4.5 Blank-filling	18
2.4.6 Controlled writing	19
2.4.7 Broken sentences	20
2.4.8 Sentence and paragraph completion	20
2.4.9 Form filling	21
2.4.10 Free writing	21
2.5 Rubrics	23
2.6 Scales	26
2.6.1 <i>Holistic scoring</i>	26
2.6.2 <i>Analytic scoring</i>	27
CHAPTER III. METHODOLOGY	30
3.1 Subjects	30
3.2. Instruments	31
3.3 Procedure	32
CHAPTER IV. RESULTS AND FINDINGS	33
4.1 Conceptualizing Testing Writing	33
4.1.1 Teachers' conception of testing writing	33
4.2 Test Design	34
4.3 Testing techniques	36
4.4 Testing Frequency	37
4.5 Marking criteria	38
4.6 Rubrics	40
4.6.1 How do students become aware of the rubrics?	42
4.7 Test results	43
4.8 Scales	44
4.9 Feedback	46
4.10 Summary	48

Chapter V. CONCLUSIONS	49
5.1 Conclusions	49
5.2 Limitations of the study	51
5.3 Further research	52
REFERENCES	53
APPENDIX 1. Interview guide	55
APPENDIX 2. Interview Sample	56

LIST OF TABLES

Table1. Rubrics used to test an essay.....	15
Table 2: Example of using a rubric for marking students' writing.....	16
Table 3: Acceptable writing level for university	18
Table 4: Analytic Scale	20
Table 5: Teachers' details.....	32

CHAPTER I. INTRODUCTION

In teaching and learning contexts, language testing is used for many purposes: to measure students' knowledge, to identify their weaknesses and strengths, to place them according to their level of proficiency, or to be accepted in schools. It also provides new gateways to study abroad or to get a better job, among other things.

However, testing is one of the most difficult tasks for teachers because they have to be taken into account some aspects. For example, teachers have to choose the appropriate type of test or items for the skill and syllabus proposed, the purpose, the structure, the techniques to be used, scoring procedures, the time the teacher has to spend to prepare, apply, interpret and score. However, sometimes tests fail to measure accurately what they are intended to achieve or the tests do not reflect student's true abilities because teachers do not test according to what and how they teach in the classroom.

When testing English, in general, the four skills might be taken into account: speaking, writing, listening and reading, and two types of testing can be distinguished, objective and subjective. The first one requires no judgment on the part of the scorer; this means that the answer of the items has a specific and only answer or a limited number of possible correct answers. On the other hand, subjective tests need the scorer's judgment. That is to say, the score depends on the teacher's point of view. Testing speaking and writing might be subjective because the teacher has to use his or her own criteria. As we have mentioned

above, language testing is difficult but when talking about subjective testing, it turns into a more complicated subject.

Testing can be conceived as a procedure to prove people's capabilities, to see how a person performs any activity in particular or to realize about the improvement during a course, lesson or topic. On the other hand, writing can be considered as the use of graphic symbols, which are related to the sounds we make when we speak, but writing is not just creating symbols, but ordering them to make sense and produce communication. So, when we refer to testing writing we mean to apply the mentioned procedure to the writing skill.

This investigation pretends to find out the way English teachers at the Instituto de Ciencias Sociales y Humanidades (ICSHu) at the Universidad Autónoma del Estado de Hidalgo (UAEH) in the B.A programs offered, test students' writing, the procedures, rates and criteria taken into account to carry out this practice.

The research question addressed in this study is the following:

1. How do ICSHu teachers test writing?

The objectives set are the following:

- To know the techniques ICSHu teachers use to test writing
- To find out if ICSHu teachers establish a marking criteria when testing writing

This research is organized into five chapters. In chapter one an introduction to the topic and the explanation of the research context are presented. It also presents the purpose of the study; the research question it sets out to answer, finally, the importance of the research is stated. In Chapter two, an overview of the most important concepts of the theoretical framework of the research around testing writing is given. The chapter three presents the methodology followed to carry out this investigation, that is, a description of the subjects, the instruments and the procedures used to collect, analyze, and interpret the data. Chapter four presents, illustrates and discusses the research results, which are further interpreted in Chapter five. This last Chapter addresses the discussion of the findings, the implications for teaching practice, the limitation of the study and some suggestions for further research.

CHAPTER II. WRITING AND TESTING

2.1 Conceptualizing Writing

Writing may be one of the most challenging skills in language learning. Even writing in L1 is really difficult, so for second or foreign language learners the challenges are enormous. A reason that makes this skill so difficult could be because as Kitao and Kitao (1996) mention the ability to write involves six component skills:

1. Grammatical ability. This is the ability to write English in grammatically correct sentences.
2. Lexical ability. The ability to choose words that are correct and used appropriately.
3. Mechanical ability. The ability to correctly use punctuation, spelling, capitalization, etc.
4. Stylistic skills. The ability to use sentences and paragraphs appropriately.
5. Organizational skills. The ability to organize written work according to the conventions of English, including the order and selection of material.
6. Judgements of appropriacy. The ability to make judgments about what appropriate depending on the task, the purpose of the writing and the audience (p.2).

Writers must be aware of these aspects because when we write we do not use only one sentence or various unrelated sentences, but we produce a sequence of sentences arranged in a proper order and linked in certain way, so this can make our ideas have sense and communicate what we want, in the form of a text. We also have to create a context of what we are writing about, we cannot make reference to something or someone if we cannot point it personally. As well, it may be that the reader is unknown to us or he or she should not be present and has no interaction with the writer, so we have to anticipate the reader's reaction to what we are trying to communicate and include the possible answers to these reactions or doubts. The reader has a big benefit from the text, because he or she can reread as many times as possible to understand it, taking into account some of the devices like punctuation, underlining or capitals among others that are really helpful to get the correct meaning or idea.

Another important aspect when writing is incorrect spelling, which can negatively affect the readers' understanding and show a lack of education or care when developing the text. Harmer (2005) mentions that "one of the reasons that spelling is difficult for students of English is that the correspondence between the sound of a word and the way it is spelt is not always obvious" (p.256). For this reason spelling can be difficult for students.

Regarding punctuation problems, many writers feel confused about when to use commas, capitalization and the use of dots, full stops, semicolon, and colon. The use of excessive commas, the use of them instead of full stops, or the

correct moment to use quotation marks can become a matter of personal writing style, which may be criticized or accepted depending on the reader.

2.2. Testing Writing

Writers have to be aware of all of the aspects mentioned because they may be considered when teachers test writing. As Hughes (1989) mentions, there are three issues that have to be taken into account when testing writing:

- 1 We have to set writing tasks that are properly representative of the population of tasks that we should expect students to be able to perform.
- 2 The tasks should elicit valid samples of writing (i.e which truly represent the students' ability).
- 3 It is essential that the samples of writing can and will be scored validly and reliably (p. 85).

Addressing the first issue we can say that when testing writing, the teacher should select the appropriate activities for each part of the test, according to what he or she wants to measure. For example, if the teacher wants to test describing activities, they should be focused only on that topic, and not deviate into some other aspect.

As people have different abilities in different levels, the teacher should take a sample of each type of task, some learners may be better at filling a certain layout and some others in developing topics freely. By having a

representative sample, we mean using various types of tasks because as Kitao and Kitao (1996) claim it is a new trend to test students on different types of tasks they have produced during a long period of time, rather than over one piece of writing on a particular occasion.

Regarding the second issue, the teacher should select specific aspects or topics from the content that will test only the ability of writing and nothing else. Also the teacher should select a new task for each time he or she is going to test a specific topic. This will provide a variety to students and will achieve greater reliability and therefore greater validity. Beside this, there should be a balance between what is desirable and what is practical; this means the teacher should apply tasks that provide reliable results, but at the same time they should be interesting and creative.

Hughes (1989) mentions that “in language testing we are not normally interested in knowing whether students are creative, imaginative, or even intelligent, have wide general knowledge, or have a good reason for the opinion they happen to hold” (p.90). By this he means that the teacher should not focus on these abilities because some students could have imagination and others could be creative, but a single person does not possess all the abilities mentioned before. For instance, when the teacher asks the students to write a conversation with a friend about the vacations they are planning to have together, this task would favor candidates who have imagination and creativity, but other students would not be confident at doing the same task, that is why the success of each task will depend on the learners’ abilities. Another important

ability that interferes with the accurate measurement of writing ability is that of reading, because writing tasks should be well explained in order to avoid confusions and time wasting.

Similarly, it is important to point out here the elaboration of a test. When we are going to elaborate a test, it is important to determine the most relevant elements or topics of a course that will help the students to use the language in their lives, because as Hughes (1989) stated “one of the most important aspects is the content of the test because this should reflect what the students have been doing in a class or during a course and also the items in the test should be relevant in terms of real world language use” (p.21). The content of the test will depend on the kind of syllabus the teacher is following. Also, the teacher will decide the level of importance of each element she or he selects and the way she or he is going to test it (Harris, 2001).

As teachers we have the obligation to write, administer and mark tests in order to see how our students are learning. When we have selected the aspect to be tested, we should start from the instructions so that the students can realize what they are asked to do during the test. On the other hand, as Heaton (1990) mentions if the language of the instructions is unclear, the students may not know what is expected from them. It is important that all the instructions are clear and understandable for all the students, so it is important that the teacher writes them carefully when constructing them, because instructions should tell the students exactly what to do and how to do it.

Finally, another important aspect is to give a correct comment to the writer in which we address the important issues of content and language, being clear and specific, instead of giving a vague comment like 'well done but the second paragraph needs more details', this does not provide any guide for the student to realize about mistakes or know how to correct them, this has to do with marking criteria. For example, Zamel (1985) carried out a study to examine the responses to students writing from some ESL teachers. The results of the study reveal that the teachers make similar types of comments and are even more concerned with language specific errors and problems. The marks given are, most of the times, confusing, arbitrary and inaccessible. With such comments students may feel unable to interpret their errors and may feel they did not reach the objective of the task, so teachers need to develop comments which provide understandable reasons of their mistakes and feedback for them. Zamel (ibid) suggests that teachers should not test writing as a finished product but as work in progress, that is, to test during the whole writing course rather than as a final task.

As we have mentioned before teachers have to write, administer and mark tests in order to see how our students are learning. For this reason, it is important for teachers to select the marking criteria, which is one of the most time-consuming aspects of testing. When the teacher is going to mark student's writings he or she should take care only in marking what the program requires or what he or she needs to know from students.

2.3 Principles for testing

When developing a test we must pay special attention to some of the most important aspects of a test in order to make it useful and make it achieve its purpose, which is to know how students have improved their writing. The aspects that we refer to are validity, reliability, practicality and backwash effect.

2.3.1 Validity

According to Hughes (1989) “a test is said to be valid if it measures accurately what it is intended to measure” (p.26) In addition Bachman (1990) points out that in examining validity, we look beyond the reliability of the test scores themselves, and consider the relationship between test performance and other types of performance in other contexts.

Some authors (Heaton, 1990; Hughes, 1993) distinguish three types of validity, content, criterion and construct validity.

2.3.1.1 Content Validity

Anastasi quoted in Weir, (1990) defines content validity as ‘essentially the systematic examination of the test content to determine whether it covers a representative sample of the behaviour domain to be measured’. She provides a set of useful guidelines for establishing content validity:

1. The behaviour domain to be tested must be systematically analysed to make certain that all major aspects are covered by the test items.
2. The domain under consideration should be fully described in advance, rather than being defined after the test has been prepared.

3. Content validity depends on the relevance of the individual's test responses to the behaviour area under consideration, rather than on the apparent relevance of item content.

The first aspect that provides validity to the test is the content; this important issue has to do with what has been taught, this means that we have to choose the most important topics learned during the period to be tested, taking into account that the sample of content must include the most relevant aspects for learning writing.

The more content validity a test has the more and better knowledge measurement we can get from it. But if we are not careful when choosing the content and fall into selecting only what it is easy to test, the level of validity can decline. For this reason, content validity should be considered during the development of the test, rather than checking it after being applied.

2.3.1.2 Criterion-related validity

Weir (1990) claims that criterion-related validity is concerned with 'the extent to which test scores correlate with a suitable external criterion of performance'. Criterion-related validity is essentially of two kinds: concurrent validity and predictive validity. Concurrent validity is when the test scores are correlated with another measure of performance, usually an older established test taken at the same time. Predictive validity is when test scores are correlated with some future criterion of performance.

2.3.1.3 Construct Validity

According to Bachman and Palmer (1996) construct validity is used to refer to the extent to which we can interpret a given test score as an indicator of the ability or construct what we want to measure. Bachman (1990) points out that constructs can be viewed as definitions of abilities that permit us to state specific hypotheses about how these abilities are or are not related to other abilities, and about the relationship between these abilities and observed behaviour.

To sum up, it can be said that validity not only implies designing, but also scoring, this aspect is important because of the way it is done, for example if we are grading with a task in which students have to write an application and its parts, and the teacher scores spelling aspects, validity will fail because the teacher is not grading according to the main purpose of the test which is realizing about the knowledge of the content.

2.3.2 Reliability

Reliability is often defined as consistency of measurement (Bachman and Palmer: 1996). A major threat to test reliability is errors of measurement. It is well known that test performance is affected by factors other than the abilities we want to measure. For example, test-takers' lack of motivation, the time provided to answer the test, anxiety.

Ratings given by different raters can also vary as a function of inconsistencies in the criteria used to rate and in the way in which these criteria are applied. Bachman (1990) points out that in order to increase test-reliability, test designers must be able to identify sources of error and estimate the magnitude of their

effects on test scores. In order to identify sources of error, we need to distinguish the effects of the language abilities we want to measure from the effects of other factors; in fact this is quite a complex problem. Bachman (*idem*) points out that when we increase the reliability of our measures, we are also satisfying a necessary condition for validity; in order for a test score to be valid it must be reliable as well.

A test can only have validity if it has reliability, this can be done by knowing the results of the test. For a test to be reliable it needs to include enough exercises or evidence about student's ability, this can increase confidence about the students' results. Another key for a test to be reliable is when developing it, the teacher hopes that the students might get a similar result if the test is applied at any other moment (Bachman and Palmer, 1996).

A test cannot be reliable if what the teacher wants to test is not clear, that is why the instructions and the exercises must be as direct as possible. An administration as well is another important issue for reliability. The teacher must provide students with clear instructions, adequate facilities, proper material, and make the students know in advance the procedure when unexpected situations occur, such as cheating or talking, for example. Also, teachers must provide the students with rubrics so they have a clear idea about what the teachers expect them to do.

2.3.3 Practicality

Weir (1993) conceives practicality as the cost effectiveness of a test. For giving a test practicality, the teachers must focus on three principal resources, time, human and material resources. These resources have to do with how it will be implemented, developed and used. Time means how long will it take the teachers to develop the test, which implies the time when the test is designed until the scores are delivered to authorities, and the time teachers spend when designing, scoring, and implementing the tasks. The second is the human resource; this implies the people who are involved in all the processes of testing. Finally, the material resources are the ones that involve every piece classroom equipment and space, as well as the essential equipment for the students to solve the test.

2.3.4 Backwash effect

Messick (1996) examines the concept of backwash as an instance of the consequential aspect of construct validity, linking positive backwash to so-called authentic and direct assessment: “One should not rely on backwash to establish test validity, rather one can instead turn to the test properties likely to produce backwash—namely authenticity and directness—and ask what they might mean in validity terms” (p. 242).

Backwash effect is the major impact of testing on the classroom setting. According to Prodromou (1995) the backwash effect can either be overt or covert. In its overt form, tests invade essential teaching space, when they are not

the final stage of a process of learning but become the beginning, middle and end of the whole process. This means doing a lot of papers in class as preparation for an examination. In covert testing, less able learners are penalized as they do not provide the correct answer in the shortest time; whereas good students fill in the pauses created by slow students.

The backwash effect is the “feedback” we can get from this practice of test design. That is, through this effect we can identify the weaknesses and strengths of the test.

2.4 Testing Techniques

2.4.1 Multiple-choice

There are different techniques teachers can use to test the writing skill (Weir, 1993; Hughes, 1990; Kitao and Kitao, 1996). For example, teachers use multiple choice items when they want to test the ability to recognize sentences that are grammatically correct and it is useful for finding out the difficulties that the students have with certain areas of grammar. Here we have an example:

1. The car was full of _____.

- a) petrol b) a petrol c) the petrol d) some petrol

Something that is characteristic of multiple choice items is that they must have only one correct answer, thus the teacher has to pay special attention to the answer she or he writes because sometimes the teacher writes an item with two possible answers, but all the options that the teacher selects should be at the

same level of difficulty. Harmer (2005) mentions that multiple choice exercises are easy to mark and require little time from teachers to mark them. On the other hand, there are some areas of grammar in which it is not appropriate to use multiple choice format, for example articles and concord the agreement between subject and verb, etc.

This technique is one of the most common used because it is easy to mark and there is only one correct answer. However, this type of activity does not represent a writing task as a whole.

2.4.2 Error-recognition items

In error recognition items, the teacher can use the errors that his/her students normally make in their writing. From the writings the teacher can select some sentences, then the teacher selects four words or phrases and underlines them and from those sentences the students have to choose the correct one, this one can be considered as a kind of multiple choice item. There is another way of writing this item, Heaton (1990) describes it as follows “the students are told there is a mistake in grammar in each sentence and instructed to write the letter of the part of the sentence in which it occurs, this type of item is more useful for testing errors caused by omission of articles” (p.92). Another way of testing this kind of item is by giving the students incorrect sentences and asking them to write out the correct version, but the teacher should tell the students that there is only one mistake so students do not waste time in changing all the sentences. The following item provides an example:

_____ 1. By the 1920's, many radio transmitters had been build.

A B C D

2.4.3 Re-arrangement

For the re-arrangement technique, the teacher provides the students unscrambled sentences and ask the students to write each sentence in the correct order, with this type of item the teacher can test the order of adjectives, the position of adverbs, inversion, connectors, pronouns and other areas of grammar.

1. We live in a _____.

Old / big / wood made / house / black / scary

2.4.4 Changing Words

About changing words, this type of item is different from the others mentioned before, because the teacher only asks the students to write verbs in the correct tense or in the correct voice, but it is important to provide an interesting context.

1. Where do your parents live? (1) _____

They (1) live in Chicago most of the time, (2) _____

But they (2) stay in Florida this winter. (3) _____

They (3) have a house there.

We can question if this technique really tests writing because students are just asked to order words of a sentence. This type of technique maybe an example of the opposite of what Weir (1993) suggests for test to be authentic. With this exercise students are asked to provide the verb tense which is far from testing writing because this exercise tests grammar.

2.4.5 Blank-filling

As well as multiple choice, blank filling is used to test grammar and vocabulary, not writing itself. When the teacher wants to test grammar using this type of testing, s/he has to pay special attention to choose the words to be omitted, because all of those words have to be grammatical words for example to, in, the, is. An important aspect of blank filling is that the paragraphs selected should be interesting and they should provide a relevant context. There is another way of using blank filling, for example the teacher asks students to find out not only which words have been omitted but where they have been omitted. (Weir, 1993)

In the following item the students have to solve an exercise like the following:

1. A: What you like to order? 1_____
- B: I have the fried chicken. 2_____
- C: You like rice or potatoes? 3_____
- D: Potatoes please. 4_____

E: What kind of potatoes would you? 5_____

F: Mashed, baked or French fries? 6_____

G: I like French fries. 7_____

Weir (idem) mentions that these types of exercises are more communicative and are based on real life situations such as joining to a club or giving information for a survey.

2.4.6 Controlled writing

Regarding controlled writing, this refers to having control over what students write over the grammatical aspects and forms of the language used. With this the teacher can ensure that certain grammatical patterns and language functions are tested. Some of the forms that controlled writing can take is transformation, this type of item requires that the students re-write sentences according to certain pattern. A similar way of using transformation is by giving the students a word in brackets instead of the beginning of the new sentence. A negative aspect of using this type of item is the lack of context it provides as shown in the example below.

1. In Australia, 87% of married couples have children (most)

_____.

This exercise does not really show whether students can write or not because they are just asked to write a sentence using the word provided.

2.4.7 Broken sentences

The teacher can test the ability of writing sentences from a series of words and phrases by using broken sentences and the students have to make as many changes as possible in order to form good sentences by adding articles, prepositions, punctuation marks, and verbs in the correct tense. An important aspect to take into account when using this type of item, is that the teacher should put the broken sentences in the form of a paragraph, a dialogue or a letter. For example;

1. My / in the United States / is Santa Fe. / favorite city

_____.

2. New Mexico. / It's in

_____.

This type of techniques test students' ability to write isolated sentences without any given context. This exercise does not really test students' ability to write complete paragraphs.

2.4.8 Sentence and paragraph completion

A realistic task of controlled writing is sentence and paragraph completion because writing is integrated with reading comprehension, so by reading, students can complete a sentence or a dialogue.

Most of my students in my class were rather lazy and did not enjoy the course. Some even stay away from school quiet often. Pauline, however, _____

_____ etc.

This technique is more challenging and it is a mixture of both reading and writing skills (Kitao and Kitao, 1996).

2.4.9 Form filling

Form filling is an important task for students because in real life they are asked to fill forms, for example, if they want to get a job they have to give details information about themselves or to ask for a driver's license, some forms need to be filled. When using notes and diaries the teacher can ensure that the students are working on a similar written task and what they have written can be compared fairly with one another.

2.4.10 Free writing

Regarding free writing, there are some basic principles that the teacher has to take into account when she or he is planning to make a test using free writing. The first one is, choosing subjects, it is important that the teacher selects subjects that are familiar to the students and she or he should avoid general and abstract topics. On the other hand, if the teacher provides the students with precise titles they will focus their attention and thoughts on that topic and also it

is helpful for the students to give a brief description of the situations that are familiar for the students.

The second one is to create realistic tasks, this means that when developing these free writing tasks, the teacher has to apply contexts that are applied in real life and not too formal ones like writing compositions. In normal life we do not use compositions for every aspect of communication; we use messages, notes or letters, for example. Applying a task in which the teacher asks for a report of a school visit could be used for an intermediate or advanced levels, because they may find situations in which they are required to write reports of this type.

The third one is to writing for a purpose task. Here it is important that the teacher provides the students with a purpose for writing, because this will help them to organized and well develop written works and also they will know why they have to write and what they have to write and what is the purpose of their writing tasks.

Audience is also important when writing. It is relevant that the students know for whom they are going to write. Knowing this, the students will decide what kind of language and writing they are going to use. For example if the writer is going to write an article about sports the audience will be an sport people, for this reason is outstanding that the teacher tell the students about the person or people to whom they have to write.

As we can see there are different techniques that teachers can make use of when testing writing. However, teachers have to take into account what their students have practiced in the classroom so that they test what they teach.

Free writing and controlled writing are the most common used techniques. The first one requires very little from the teachers in terms of test design. They only have to take into account these aspects. However the prompt has to be clear and state what students have to write about. Controlled writing is similar in terms of the design, however, here the teacher control what they want students to write on.

2.5 Rubrics

In order to understand this term we can point out that a rubric is a scoring tool that contains the aspects taken into account for a piece of work. These usually inform certain level of knowledge or progress expected from several levels of quality.

We can now say that we can use rubrics to grade the different students' performances. For example, like how they perform in certain activities in which reading, listening, collaborative work and behavior are marked, so teachers can get a final grade. Another use is when grading a specific task, for example writing an essay; here the teacher can use rubrics to take into account punctuation, content, organization and spelling. Table 1 is an example of a rubric used to test an essay:

Table 1. Rubrics used to test an essay

Fluency	<p>5 Following style- very easy to understand –both complex and simple sentences – very effective</p> <p>4 Quiet flowing style –mostly easy to understand –a few complex sentences –effective</p> <p>3 Style reasonably smooth –not too hard to understand –mostly (but not all) simple sentences – fairly effective</p> <p>2 Jerky style –and effort needed to understand and enjoy –complex sentences confusing – mostly simple sentences on compound sentences</p> <p>1 Very jerky –hard to understand –cannot enjoy reading –almost all simple sentences –complex sentences confusing –excessive use of ‘and’</p>
Grammar	<p>5 mastery of grammar taught on course –only 1 or 2 minor mistakes</p> <p>4 A few minor mistakes only (prepositions, articles, etc.)</p> <p>3 Only 1 or 2 major mistakes but a few minor ones</p> <p>2 Major mistakes which lead to difficult in understanding –lack of mastery of sentences construction</p> <p>1 Numerous serious mistakes –no mastery of sentences construction –almost unintelligent</p>
Vocabulary	<p>5 Use of wide range of vocabulary taught previously</p> <p>4 Good use the new words acquired –use of appropriate synonyms, circumlocution, etc.</p> <p>3 Attempts to use words acquired –fairly appropriate vocabulary on the whole but sometimes restricted –has to resort to use of synonyms, circumlocution, etc. on a few occasions</p> <p>2 Restricted vocabulary .use of synonyms (but not always appropriate) –effects meaning</p> <p>1 Very restricted vocabulary –inappropriate use of synonyms seriously hinders communication.</p>
Spelling	<p>5 No errors</p> <p>4 1 or 2 minor errors only (e.g. ie or ei)</p> <p>3 Several errors –do not interfere significantly with communication .not too hard to understand</p> <p>2 Several errors –some interfere with communication –some words very hard to recognize</p> <p>1 numerous errors –hard to recognize several words –communication made very difficult</p>

Source: Heaton, 1990, p98.

As we can see, the first aspect we have to know are the features that we want to mark like fluency, grammar, vocabulary and spelling. Each feature has a

grade from 1 to 5, for each one of them you may state notes that can help you to remember what you have to take or you took into account when grading.

Table 2 shows an example of how a teacher marked a student's essay using the rubrics above:

Table 2: Example of using a rubric for marking students' writing

	5	4	3	2	1
Fluency			X		
Grammar		X			
Vocabulary				X	
Content	X				
Spelling			X		

Heaton, 1990, p. 97

Rubrics are not only for teacher's use, but also for students, as a self-evaluation for example in developing a research, in which the student has to follow certain steps so he or she can check his/her own progress.

An interesting variable when creating rubrics is to develop them along with the students, in this way students may feel that the aspects to be graded are chosen fairly by them and by the teacher, they also realize about the components and how an appropriate writing task has to be made before starting it.

A reason why teachers use rubrics is that the students can realize what the teacher wants them to do, also help the students to be aware of their work and grade; finally rubrics can provide feedback because the students can realize the mistakes they have made before and try to avoid having a relapse. The use

of rubrics may reduce students' anxiety and nervousness because they will know in advance what aspects of their writing are being tested.

2.6 Scales

When teachers are going to mark students' writings they should take care to mark only what the students have written, for this reason it is important that the teacher can find the best way to mark students' performance. There are two approaches to scoring: holistic and analytic.

2.6.1 Holistic scoring

According to McNamara (2000) rating or scoring requires raters "to provide separate assessment for each of a number of aspects of performance rather than to record a single impression of the impact of the performance as a whole" (p. 43). This means that the teacher only counts the number of errors that a student has made and gives him or her a mark. An advantage of this scoring system is that it is very fast to score and that the teachers can check a piece of writing of a single student more than once. In order to make the mark reliable the teacher can give the same piece of writing to different teachers; this way, the reliability degree may be higher. On the other hand, a disadvantage for using this scoring system is that sometimes the errors that the students make have different levels of importance. For this reason, it is important to select the appropriate scoring system for each level and for the purpose of the test. For example, the following scoring scale is an example of a scale that was used to

determine whether a student's writing ability was adequate for studying English at university level.

Table 3: Acceptable writing level for university

NS	Native speaker standard
NS-	Close to native speaker standard
MA	Clearly more than adequate
MA-	Possibly more than adequate
A	ADEQUATE FOR STUDY IN THIS UNIVERSITY
D	Doubtful
NA	Clearly not adequate
FBA	Far below adequate

Source: Hughes, 1989, p. 104

2.6.2 Analytic scoring

According to McNamara (2000) Analytic scoring “requires the development of a number of separate ratings scales for each aspect assessed.” (p. 44). This means that the teacher should identify the areas that she or he wants to mark, for example content, vocabulary, fluency, etc., and give to each area an appropriate mark. Some advantages of using this type of scoring system is that the teachers can focus only on the skill they want to mark, they only concentrate in some aspects of students' performance and the fact that the teacher has to give different scores makes the total mark more reliable. On the other hand, the main disadvantage of the analytic method is the time that it takes to mark. A second disadvantage is that sometimes the attention can be diverted from the whole effect of the piece of writing because of the concentration on the

different aspects. The following analytic scale was used at college in North America to test writing.

Table 4: Analytic Scale

ESL COMPOSITION PROFILE			
STUDENTS	DATE	TOPIC	
SCORE	LEVEL	CRITERIA	COMMENTS
C O N T E N T	30-27	EXCELENT TO VERY GOOD: knowledgeable – substantive – thorough –development of thesis – relevant to assigned topic	
	26-22	GOOD TO AVERAGE: some knowledge of subjects – adequate range – limited development of thesis – mostly relevant to topic, but lacks details	
	21-17	FAIR TO POOR: limited knowledge of subject – little substantive – inadequate development of subject	
	16-13	VERY POOR: does not show knowledge of subject – non-substantive – not pertinent – OR not enough to evaluate	
O R G A N I Z A T I O N	20-18	EXCELENT TO VERY GOOD: fluent expression – ideas clearly stated/ supported – succinct – well organized – logical sequencing – cohesive	
	17-14	GOOD TO AVERAGE: somewhat choppy – loosely organized but main ideas stand out – limited support – logical but incomplete sequencing	
	13-10	FAIR TO POOR: non fluent – ideas confused or disconnected – lacks logical sequencing and development	
	16-13	VERY POOR: doses not communicate – no organization – OR not enough to evaluate	
V O C A B U L A R Y	20-18	EXCELENT TO VERY GOOD: sophisticated range – effective word/ idiom choice and usage – form word mastery – appropriate register	
	17-14	GOOD TO AVERAGE: adequate range – occasional errors of word/idiom form, choice, usage <i>but meaning not obscured</i>	
	13-10	FAIR TO POOR: limited range, frequent errors of word/idiom form, choice, usage – <i>meaning confused or obscured</i>	
	9-7	VERY POOR: essentially translation – little knowledge of English vocabulary, idioms word form – OR not enough to evaluate	
L A N G U A G E U S E	25-22	EXCELENT TO VERY GOOD: effective complex construction – few errors of agreements, tense, number, word order/function, article, pronouns, preposition	
	21-18	GOOD TO AVERAGE: effective but simple construction – minor problems in complex construction – several errors of agreement, tense, number, word order/function, article, pronouns, prepositions <i>but meaning seldom obscured</i>	
	17-11	FAIR TO POOR: major problems in simple/complex construction – frequent errors of negation, agreement, tense, number, word order/ function, articles, pronouns, prepositions and/or fragments, run-ons, deletions – <i>meaning confused or obscured</i>	
	10-5	VERY POOR: virtually no mastery of sentence construction rules – dominated by, errors – does not communicate – OR not enough to evaluate	
M E C H A N I C S	5	EXCELENT TO VERY GOOD: demonstrates mastery of conventions – few errors of spelling, punctuation, capitalization, paragraphing	
	4	GOOD TO AVERAGE: occasional errors of spelling, punctuation, capitalization, paragraphing <i>but meaning not obscured</i>	
	3	FAIR TO POOR: frequent errors of spelling, punctuation, capitalization, paragraphing – poor handwriting – <i>meaning confused or obscured</i>	
	2	VERY POOR: no mastery of conventions – dominated by errors of spelling, punctuation, capitalization, paragraphing – handwriting illegible – OR not enough to evaluate	
TOTAL SCORE	READER	COMMENTS	

Jacobs et al.'s 1981 in Hughes, 1989, p. 104

We can conclude this section by saying that as Hughes (1989) states “Any scale which is used, holistic or analytic, should reflect the particular purpose of

the test and the form that the reported scores on it will take” (p. 105), this means that the scoring scales should cover the purpose of the test and should be close to the teacher needs in order to make the students’ mark valid, also the scale should be adapted for the situation in which they are going to be used.

This study is important because it will benefit both teachers and students, because we will identify the procedures teachers use when test writing and students will know the criteria teachers use when testing their writings, so they can have a basis to know the reason of their grades.

Once the teacher has selected the content of the test, she or he should decide the format of the test, because there are different ways in which the teacher can test a specific ability. For example, in the case of writing if the teacher wants to test grammar and structure items he or she can choose between: multiple choice, error-recognition, re-arrangement, changing words, blank filling. For controlled writing, the teacher can use: transformation, broken sentences, sentences and paragraphs completion, form filling, notes and diaries and for free writing the teacher should take into account some aspects which are, choosing subjects, realistic writing tasks, writing for a purpose, writing for an audience, specific instructions and using pictures for writing. For these reasons the teacher should select the ones that suit the best for each part of the test.

CHAPTER III. METHODOLOGY

This investigation is a qualitative exploratory study because an exploratory investigation has the essence of analyzing a case and getting as much information as possible in order to help in the development of a theoretical framework. We choose this method because the aim is to find out the way teachers test students' writing, It is based on the results of interviews that teachers answered. Due to time limitation, an analysis of the exams was not done so the information here mentioned was obtained from interviewing a sample from the teachers in ICSHu. It is qualitative because according to Bell (1993) "qualitative perspective is more concerned to understand individuals' perceptions of the world. They seek insight, rather than statistical analysis" (p. 6). For the purposes of this research a semi-structured interview was used, which some specific questions were included in an interview guide and some other questions were added as they rose during the interview. According to Rubin and Rubin (1995), "qualitative interviewing is a way of finding out what others feel and think of their worlds." Through qualitative interviews you can understand experiences and reconstruct events in which you did not participate" (p.5)

3.1 Subjects

"Data resources are places or phenomena from or through which you believe data can be generated" (Mason, 2002:51). The resources can be people, texts, documents, etc. In this study the data sources just include subjects

The teachers we selected for this investigation were chosen randomly, from the different B.A programs offered at ICSHu. We tried to include the largest sample from all of the English teachers in the institute. They were finally selected because of their personal and time availability; some for their good reputation on the subject and some because of the need to include as many B.A. programs as we could.

The following table shows some details of the teachers we interviewed, their names, their gender, time working at ICSHu, and the B.A. they are working at. The teachers' names used are pseudonyms.

Table 5: Teachers' details

NAME	GENDER	Time working at ICHSu	B.A.
Patricia	Female	5 years	Communication and LELI
Maricela	Female	1.5 years	Education, Communication and Law.
Monica	Female	3 years	Communication
Georgina	Female	1.5 years	LELI
Pablo	Male	3 years	LELI
Edna	Female	5 years	Law and Sociology

3.2. Instruments

For this research, a semi-structured interview was designed. It consisted of 20 questions, with the possibility of adding further questions. The three first

questions were concerned with personal and professional information. Questions four and five were designed to find out the personal thinking about testing. Questions six and seven are related to knowing procedures and ways of testing writing. The following five questions were formulated to find out rubrics and marking criteria knowledge and use. Questions thirteen through fifteen are related to testing techniques, testing frequency and feedback. The following four questions were designed with the purpose of finding out the individual use of rubrics and scales and the interpretation of test results. Finally, question twenty was intended to have the teachers enrich the interview. The interview can be seen in appendix 1.

3.3 Procedure

As a first step, the interview was designed, and piloted for checking validity and reliability. Afterwards, it was administered to all six subjects and recorded. Then, a transcript was made from each interview, after that, they were checked and given to the participants to check for clearness and they were asked to provide more information when required. Once the interviews were enriched or corrected by the teachers, some categories were developed, information was organized and analyzed. That is, the coding process started as Rubin and Rubin (1995), suggest: "is the process of grouping the interviewees' responses into categories that bring together the similar ideas, concepts, or themes you have to discover or steps or stages in a process" (p.238). Finally, some conclusions were drawn about the way teachers test writing, in order to answer the research question which is: How do ICSHu teachers test writing?

CHAPTER IV. RESULTS AND FINDINGS

Overview

The main purpose of this section is to answer the research question: How do ICHSU teachers at the Universidad Autónoma del Estado de Hidalgo test students' writing? The issue of this section is to summarize the aspects taken into account by teachers when testing writing and to find out if teachers set marking criteria when testing writing.

4.1 Conceptualizing Testing Writing

4.1.1 Teachers' conception of testing writing

When we asked teachers what they think about testing, we found out that two out of the six teachers agree on disliking testing. As teacher Georgina mentioned *"I don't like testing very much, I like evaluating."* As we know evaluating is a process that involves looking at the different aspects that intervene during the teaching and learning process. This may imply that this teacher does not only test students but she evaluates them. Teacher Edna thinks that testing has some lack of reliability and objectivity, based on the fact that students feel anxious and nervous during the test, proposing that in class activities students feel more confident.

On the other hand, two teachers, Patricia and Maricela, provided their personal definition of testing as presented respectively:

“A process to know how much the students have advanced and what we have to reinforce in order to help them.”

“It is the best way to know how the students learn.”

Teacher Monica stated that testing is a useful way to check if your students are learning what you are teaching. It also provides teachers a way of reflecting on their own teaching practice. Finally teacher Pablo defends the idea of testing as a tool with which teachers can confirm that students can use or apply in different situation the knowledge they have learnt.

According to these opinions we can assume that participants agree on saying that testing is an appropriate tool for measuring students' knowledge. These results are similar to what Hughes, 1993; McNamara, 2000 suggest that testing is a useful tool to test students because it reveals what students are able to do and what needs to be reinforced.

4.2 Test Design

Test design is about how teachers develop their tests, to whom the tests are going to be applied, the purpose, what topics are going to be included, the methods to be used, the length and how long will the test take to be solved.

All six interviewees said that they design their own tests, and teacher Monica argued that she gets additional exercises from other sources.

“Taking exercises from internet or books is very useful.”

She mentioned that these sources can be helpful for getting ideas from the exercises or even using them in the exam. However this may not be too reliable

because the format and the language used may be different from the one that is being used in the course, though the formats can be of great help so the students do not get bored of the same type of exercises all the time.

Teacher Patricia mentioned the importance of some aspects as she addressed:

“I develop the format including instructions, directions and an outline.”

As well as teacher Patricia the rest of the interviewees mention the importance of instructions. As we know instructions are important issues when testing, if instructions are not clear or are too vague, students might get confused or misunderstand what they have to do.

On the other hand teacher Maricela said:

“I design my test based on what we checked during the course, I take this as the base of my exam.”

Teacher Maricela develops her test by using a vast sample of the exercises already known by the students, this provides validity to the exam, as the students are familiarized to the exercises, so they can feel more confident when answering, and have the clear idea of what the teacher wants them to do.

So we can say that the most important aspects to be taken into account when designing a test are the instructions and the techniques, developing them in a correct and comprehensible way may result in a valid and reliable test, of course these elements should be created according to each different class and level.

4.3 Testing techniques

As students have different ways of learning, it is important for teachers to use different types of testing techniques. Regarding testing techniques that teachers use, the six teachers use different techniques to test students' writing. At the beginning students are tested with simple and short exercises, moving on into more complex ones as they get a better level. Being guided progressively until, they perform something by themselves. As teacher Patricia said:

“We start by building up some sentences at the beginning and then we move to paragraphs and essays, place the basis, guide them, work together and little by little I let them write.”

Unlike teacher Pablo who prefers guided writing, rather than the free one. By guided writing he means that students write according to a guideline, for example an application for a job, letters or descriptions. Free writing, on the other hand, lets the students express their ideas using a context provided by the teacher in which no formal structure or layout is required, so they can write the way they choose.

Level was addressed by teachers Patricia and Edna who mentioned that for basic levels, students write brief paragraphs provided by model or writing specific information. In more advanced levels, teacher Patricia gave essays, letters, and e-mails as examples of techniques.

As we can notice the exercises become more complex as students improve their writing.

According to teachers Patricia and Edna the kind of exercises the students are going to develop depends on the students' language level. For example, as teacher Edna said *“for basic levels write brief paragraphs, close writing or model writing. Identify parts of the letters of messages, collaborative writing.”*

From these views we can see that teachers test writing by using different techniques and it seems that the decision on which one to use depend on the students' proficiency level. Another important aspect is that these techniques vary in their complexity again based on the student's level of English. This idea is shared by Kitao and Kitao (1996) who claim that students must be tested according to their proficiency level. They suggest, for example, that for beginners it is often necessary to test writing indirectly by filling in the blanks which do not require students to write connected prose. However at intermediate and advanced levels, students should be tested in direct ways in which they demonstrate the ability to write connected discourse.

4.4 Testing Frequency

An important aspect when testing is how often teachers test students because this information can help us know the kind of evaluation that is promoted, either summative or formative.

Teachers Maricela, Georgina, Pablo and Edna agree that they test students' writing once a month, by this they mean they administer two partial exams and the ordinary exam in a semester. Teacher Georgina said;

“I test only during each partial; we do a lot of activities in the class, that of course are graded, but not as the final test.”

On the contrary, this is what Monica said:

“I test my students at every moment after I explain or we listen to something. I think twice a week.”

We have a third opinion from teacher Patricia.

“I am always checking how much the students know, through eliciting, I am always evaluating very often, I mean every class, I bring exercises so every class they have to write down, to produce something or to write on the board.”

It seems that these teachers assess students and they do not only administer tests because they are interested in the process students go through rather than the product itself. However, for some teachers it is difficult to promote continuous assessment because as teacher Edna mentioned *“it can be difficult to test students once a week or three times a month, but grading students during the whole course might be more reliable because the students may not feel nervous and be more confident.”*

We can infer that teachers administer tests at different times during a semester based on their own experience and when they are needed to check students' progress.

4.5 Marking criteria

An important aspect for teachers when testing students' writing is marking criteria. We identify two moments when teachers allow students to know the

marking criteria used for testing writing before and after the administration of the exam. The first one is that all of the six teachers that we interviewed use specific marking criteria. For example teacher Patricia said:

“We work in academia, a group of teachers establish the marking criteria, and we agree on that in order to avoid confusions.”

In addition, when the teacher tests students' writing, students are provided with the aspects to be marked. For example, teachers Patricia, Georgina and Monica agree that:

“Students have to know what is going to be evaluated in the task, students are aware of the marking criteria.”

On the other hand, teachers Edna and Pablo, agree that students know the marking criteria previous to the exam. They said that the students realize about this important aspect of testing during the teaching process, so when students are graded, they already know exactly what is going to be marked and the use of instructions is important to make them remember those aspects.

As we mentioned before, if students know in advance what they are expected to do while being tested, and if the teacher provides the students with specific instructions and the appropriate rules, the students will be familiarized with the type of test they are going to present and focus just on what they have to achieve and not waste time trying to realize what they have to do.

4.6 Rubrics

As we stated in section 2.5 a rubric is a scoring tool that contains the aspects taken into account for a piece of work. It was interesting to find out that teachers do not engage students in the process of rubric design. As teachers state below:

Patricia:

“I haven’t designed rubrics with my students, sometimes they suggest things for the teacher to consider, but it would be interesting to design them with my students.”

Maricela:

“Rubrics are designed up by the teacher; you design it according to the paper. In basic level they are only designed by myself, sometimes the students check out the important details of an application for example, but most of the time it is my decision.”

Monica:

“Sometimes all of us design rubrics, not very often, but most of the time I design them by myself.”

Teachers also refer to the fact that the university does not ask the teachers for rubrics when testing, none of the teachers said that they were asked to do this task. As teacher Georgina and Edna respectively agree.

“Rubrics are not asked by the university. I create my own. I always design them by myself.”

“Not university, it depends on the writing and the groups. It is something that not everybody does, because it is a bit complex, maybe they do not know how to do it, maybe it was not established right. I consider students’ opinion to design rubrics, sometimes not always.”

To sum up, all of the teachers we interviewed stated that rubrics were developed by themselves; the only one who used a cooperative method to design rubrics was teacher Monica.

Similarly, all of the teachers mentioned that rubrics are only designed by teachers, not by students. Three out of six teachers (Marciela, Patricia and Edna) agreed on taking into account the students’ opinions, but not designing the rubrics together yet, we assume that the participants might be enthusiastic about developing rubrics along with their students, promoting in them the feeling of fairness. As we mentioned in section 4.6, an interesting variable when creating rubrics is to develop them with students, in this way students may feel that the aspects to be graded are chosen fairly by them and by the teacher. They also realize about the components and how an appropriate writing task has to be made before stating it.

We know that the marking of writing tests will always be at least somewhat subjective, but the use of rubrics can help make the marking consistent (Kitao and Kitao, 1996). If teachers create rubrics for testing, they will know exactly the

aspects to be marked and the specific part of the skill they are testing and students will be aware of the aspects they are tested on.

4.6.1 How do students become aware of the rubrics?

As mentioned in section 2.5 a reason why teachers use rubrics is that the students can realize what the teacher wants them to do; also they help students to be aware of their work and grade. That is why it is important to inform students in advance all the aspects the teacher is going to include when giving them a writing task, and as a result of this anxiety and nervousness in students will be reduced.

The results reveal that all of the teachers establish and share the aspects they will take into account before assigning the task to students. That is, they establish the marking criteria to be used to mark that specific task. As teacher Georgina mentioned:

“Yes, they have to know in advance at the beginning of the semester or before the exam, before the exam, I give them the rubric no! So they will know what I’m going to test.”

Similarly teacher Edna stated that:

“When I am grading something is because it has been already taught, and then I tell them exactly what am I going to, to grade.”

All of the teachers mentioned that the aspects they include in a writing exam or in a writing task have been previously taught, so students are already familiar with them.

According to this, we can say that in order for the students to develop an appropriate writing task it is important that teachers establish the marking criteria before assigning a task and share it with students. In this way students may feel more comfortable developing the task and at the same time they can check their own progress by checking if they have included all the aspects they are required.

4.7 Test results

Some of the teachers believe that results/ grades can tell about students' achievement during the course. So according to teacher Patricia, "results can be subjective". By this she means that not in every situation results can be reliable, and some important factors can really influence students' grades. Some of these factors might be mood, nervousness, or even how well they slept the night before. Teacher Edna mentions an example of this topic:

"If they are writing as a pleasure, they can have better performance and during a test they might be nervous."

From this opinion, we learn the importance of making students to be confident and used to writing. When students feel comfortable when writing and not under pressure they can develop better writing tasks, so if students are asked to write constantly they can get used to the way the teacher wants them to write and as a result they will perform better during the test.

Teacher Maricela mentions the importance of promoting writing in the classroom, as she said:

“Most of the students do not like to write, so it is important to make them feel in the mood for writing.”

As we all know not everybody likes writing, so for many students it becomes even more difficult when it is performed in a foreign language. Some teachers suggest making students write about topics they are interested in according to their ages, working on cooperative writing and even making them choose their own topic and write just under some specifications told by the teacher. According to these ideas provided by our interviewees, students should get a great interest or at least getting used to writing. However if we think of this process as evaluation, we know that tests are just one way of learning about the students progress.

Based on these comments, teachers actually believe that the results of the test reflect what students have learnt, though the issues mentioned above can be an obstacle for students to write at the level they actually have, so working through the course to reduce those issues may be profitable when getting the results.

4.8 Scales

Most of the teachers have certain ways to mark students' writing, but when marking they must be very careful on marking only what the students have written or what the teacher has asked them to write. For this reason the teacher has to find the best way to mark students writing. According to Hughes (1990), there are two ways of scoring students writing, Holistic and Analytic.

In some way all the six interviewees use both Holistic and Analytic methods of scoring. For example teachers Pablo and Maricela said respectively, *“My tests have a combination of both [Analytic and Holistic], you can not only do the tests where you have to choose certain answers, so you need to check more what the students think and the purpose of the question.”*

“I have to grade both, holistic, because obviously you have to take the most important part in the syllabus to grade their knowledge, and analytic, because you are checking that they have done it well in a correct form.”

According to this view, we can assume that teachers do not count the number of errors that a student has made and gives him or her a mark , but the teacher identifies the areas that she or he wants to mark, for example content, vocabulary, fluency, etc., and gives to each area an appropriate grade. As mentioned in session 2.6.2, McNamara (2000) analytic scoring requires the development of a number of separate rating scales for each aspect assessed.

On the other hand, two of the teachers (Marcela and Edna) agreed that analytic method is for higher levels, they said that:

Maricela:

“Analytic method, I think this is more for advanced students, but it depends on them. Sometimes it is difficult because of the time, the content of the course, the length of the class and the extra-class activities.”

Edna:

“Analytic, it has to be for higher levels, I mean you have to apply them but not in dept of so many details in basic levels.”

Regarding what these two participants argued, the level of the class is a part in which the teachers have to pay special attention, mainly in stating the purpose of the test, in order to make it appropriate for students, so the test can be reliable and valid.

Also we can say that an important issue they mentioned is the time that it takes to mark students' writing because the teacher has to identify the areas to be marked, he or she spends too much time giving a different score to the different aspects of the piece of writing. Another important issue is that sometimes the attention can be turned aside to another aspect that it is not relevant or important for the purpose of the students writing. That is why it is important to establish the aspects to be marked and try to stick to them when marking the tests.

As one of the teachers said, the analytic method is an important aspect of education, because it allows the students move from being reflective students to be more critical students when writing.

4.9 Feedback

We know that feedback is a very important aspect of testing. This is because feedback makes students realize about what they did right and what they did wrong by checking the test and getting it corrected. Feedback is

considered as a “response to students’ writing” (Reid, 1993, p. 205) and it is defined as “any input from reader to writer that provides information for revision” (Keh, 1990, cited in Reid, 1993, p. 218). We can say that as sources of feedback on language teaching and learning “tests can thus provide useful input into the process of language teaching” (Bachman, 1990, p.3). However, the participants referred to feedback in the sense that making students aware of their own mistakes can be a way of helping them to improve them. For example, Teacher Pablo said:

“Feedback and peer correction is the way to check their [students] mistakes and clarify some doubts.”

Teacher Patricia agrees with this view as she says,

“It is always important to let them [students] know what the strong and weak points were.”

On the other hand, two of the teachers commented they provide feedback by correcting mistakes with the whole group, peer correction and going from general aspects to specific ones solving personal doubts.

Finally teacher Edna said:

“After the feedback, they [students] have as homework, to rewrite the work or to write a different one taking into account the details mentioned during the feedback.”

Leki (1992, cited in Scott 1996, p. 107) points out that corrections and feedback are worthless if students never have the opportunity to rewrite a

piece and perform better. According to this opinion, redoing the task means that students will reinforce what they have learned and the correct way to do the things where they got mistakes.

4.10 Summary

We can say that testing is one of the most difficult activities teachers have to do; however, we can see that teachers are aware of this by establishing the criteria when testing writing. This process can be very subjective but we can say that the nature of testing is becoming more humanistic in the sense that these teachers are interested in knowing what their students can do instead of what they do not know.

Chapter V. CONCLUSIONS

5.1 Conclusions

The purpose of the present study was to find out how English teachers test students' writing. For this reason, six teachers in ICSHu at the Universidad Autónoma Del Estado de Hidalgo were interviewed. The first aspect we noticed during this study was that most of the participants do not like to test students. They mentioned that testing was difficult, takes a lot of time, and depending on the situation the test is administrated, it can have lack of reliability, even though it was necessary for them to administer tests to get a grade for the students, the positive things they mentioned about testing were that the best tool for measuring students knowledge is by being tested, and by testing teachers can know about the progress of the students during the course.

In testing techniques teachers agreed on using appropriate exercises for each student's proficiency, specially mentioning the rejection of the use of free writing and a preference of using guided activities in which students have to follow specifications, such as letters or applications.

The participants in this study test students during every partial exam set by the university giving them the chance to have a better sample of the students' knowledge, but they also emphasized the importance of evaluating the students' writing as much as possible during all the course through daily exercises even if it is hard to check all of the students every day, they can get used to write the way the teacher wants.

All the teachers agree that feedback is one of the most important issues for testing. They argued that it is very important to make students know why they got their grades and the things they missed in the test, this last part is of great importance because the mistakes are clarified and worked on to be corrected.

Remarkably, none of the teachers has specific rubrics to follow, and this could be because the university does not ask them for rubrics when developing tests; however they create their own rubrics according to the topics they are checking or the level of the students. In addition some teachers take into account the students opinions to design some rubrics. As well as they can help in the development of rubrics, they know in advance what is going to be tested, so they can realize why they are right or wrong.

In terms of the relevance of this study, we can say that first of all, we learned about what and how teachers test writing. One important thing we noticed is that teachers do not use the same rubric among them nor among levels; this means that rubrics are designed according to students' English level, and according to how they do during a course. We also found that students' level is an important issue when designing tests, so depending on the level exercises are different beginning from specific to general. All of the teachers we interviewed mentioned that this is a very important issue to take into account when designing writing tests, in order to make them valid and reliable.

An aspect we noticed that needs to be improved, is that in some cases teachers get confused and grade something else instead of writing, for example the use of grammar when the main purpose is to grade content and cohesion, so

it could be really useful to check the tests before delivering it to the students and getting them to know in advance the marking criteria, so they can be really sure of what is going to be graded, and based on that answer the exam.

Another important aspect to mention is that we think that it would not be useful for teachers to have the same marking criteria or scale, because as we know all the students have different ways of learning, teachers have to find out the best way to test students' writing, and this would be according to the students' level or according to the topics they are checking. Also because we know that, what works for someone, does not mean that it has to work for all.

5.2 Limitations of the study

The purpose of this investigation was to know how teachers at ICSHu test their students' writing, though we had some limitations during the process. As teachers are really busy, working on students and at home, it took too much time for them to analyze the interviews and write their comments on it, this leads us to a new limitation which was our sample; we would like to have more teachers for being interviewed in order to get more opinions. Though the information we obtained was really useful for the research.

Generalizations cannot be drawn from this study because of the sample that participated on it. However, it provides a general overview of the way teachers at ICSHu test students' writing.

5.3 Further research

Our proposal to enrich this study would be to administer interviews to students which could also be of great importance when extending this research because students' opinions could make us realize their feelings about marking criteria, rubrics, grading, feedback, and test design. Besides, analyzing writing tests could be relevant because the issues we have taken into account may be crossed out with the information provided by teachers and find out if all the criteria is being apply when developing tests.

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APPENDIX 1. Interview guide

1. What is your full name?
2. How long have you been working at ICSHu?
3. What do you think about testing?
4. How do you test your students?
5. How do you test Writing?
6. Do you have certain procedure for testing writing?
7. Do you have a marking criteria?
8. Are your students aware of the aspects to be marked?
9. Here at the university, are you asked to use specific rubrics?
10. What kind of testing technique for testing writing do you prefer?
11. How often do you test writing?
12. When the students receive their grade, do you provide feedback?
13. How do you design your writing test?
14. Do you think that the results that your students get actually reflect what they have learnt?
15. Have you ever designed rubrics with your students?
16. Do you know the holistic and analytic ways of testing?
17. Which one do you prefer?
18. Would you like to add something?

APPENDIX 2. Interview Sample

A: Good afternoon can you please tell me your full name?	
N: N.	
A: How long have you been working at ICSHU?	
N: At ICSHU about five years	
A: Do you teach at another B.A.?	
N: yes, sociology and law	
A: but besides here	
N: ha no no no just here	
A: he, what do you think about testing?	
N: testing... testing, I hate testing jajaja, ok testing, I think testing is not very objective, when you are, when you are trying to test a student, sometimes the test can have some ahh, it cannot be very reliable, there are many aspects or factors they, they can eh, how do you say? That can affect the result, some time the tests can say that they don't know anything or they can't show exactly the knowledge, right, and you know the students can forget a lot of things, no? There are a lot of things and sometimes they somehow, you know how, how good you are at English.	
A: How do you test your students?	
N: Well I have to because is one of the polices in here how to do an exam, a test, a written exam, and you can establish he consist in the four skills, listening, writing, listening and speaking and this is, we have some percentages like a fifty percent no sixty percent for the partial exam the first 2 and final one, they also have a portfolio and some of the activities they include are going to be graded and some others are just for reinforcing.	
A: How do you test writing?	
N: Writing good question, writing is very difficult and when we are teaching and in here at ICSHU because our groups are large groups, right, many of our teachers they don't test or they don't teach a lot on writing. What I do in my class I normally do close writing or model writing it depends on the level, right, and normally I don't do writing the day of the exam I do it during the semester, but they can they can see their progress and I I try to mark all what they have done so they can check and write it again and so they have one piece of writing there yes.	
A: do you have a marking criteria?	

<p>N: yes it depends what I'm doing yes I always have a marking criteria, and it is quite difficult for me, cause I do a rubric I design a rubric that some times when you are thinking in something , but when you are marking you realize a lot of things that sometimes I have to modify on the way.</p>	
<p>A: And are your students aware of the aspects to be marked?</p>	
<p>N: Of course, yeah absolutely yes I always when I set for example if it's a message I write the instructions you have to write a message, and to write words, I mean something that you have to teach at the beginning right in advance, so when Im grading something is because it has been already taught and then I tell them exactly what am I going to, to grade.</p>	
<p>A: How do you notify them?</p>	
<p>N: In the instruction, I mean it has to be with practice, first I have to teach them , I preteach vocabulary maybe, and then I give them the model, haa maybe haa identify the parts of the writing if it a letter or a message or whatever, give the organization, when I give the feedback, normally when I start doing this I always use the collaborative writing, when I start giving the feedback I say this and this is ok you have to correct this one and I give all the details and then they have a homework doing this one or rewriting again following all the feedback and then we do another one and I tell them remember you have to have this and this and this because that is going to be graded, and it is sometimes in the instructions, I teach them to analyze and read the instructions of the writing, right and I told them all the time it is something to be graded, if I say twenty five words is because is has to be twenty five words, if you write forty is going to be wrong you know.</p>	
<p>A: Here at the university are you asked to use specific rubrics?</p>	
<p>N: again sorry!</p>	
<p>A: Here at the university are you asked to use specific rubrics?</p>	
<p>N: Is not the university it depends on the writing and the different groups. What we are trying now, we are training all the teachers in rubrics because as I have said before it is something that not everybody does because it is a bit complex maybe they don't know how to do it, maybe it was not established right, what we are doing at the moment we are going to have a training course is the next</p>	

summer course and they are going to have rubrics for different levels, basic level, intermediate level and advance level, preintermediate and intermediate right cause you have the project of tests and we have noticed some lack of a practice on the students so we are reinforcing the basic levels.	
A: What kind of testing techniques do you prefer?	
N: holistic and analytic? Both, it depends I think the analytic it has to be for the higher levels I mean you have to apply them but not in dept of so many details in the basic levels right we have, we don't have, culturally we are not writers right, is very difficult start teaching English and then you have to teach English and the conventional items always can affect. So both and it depends on what you are writing.	
A: Can you tell me an example of he any type of I mean exercise or something he you use to test writing?	
N: how do I test writing	
A: yeah and example of, for example an exercise	
N: ok an exercise, well one can be for example I can set to some of my students write a brief for basic levels no write a brief paragraphs talking about your last holidays for example no, I can say, say where did you go?, how many days?, where did you stay? And what day? For example no, for me that is going to be the marking criteria they have to include everything, the organization, coherence, introduction.	
A: How often do you test your students?	
N: I always try to as I said before they have two partials I always tray at least at least for them to write collaborative writing that is graded at least minimum three per partial that is if I have time sometimes I don't have enough time and I just check the answers and grade it, the other one can be for practice and the feedback in general good.	
A: Can you tell me an example of how you design hee your writing test?	
N: how do I design... the instruction you mean	
A: Aja all of the procedures	
N: One of the activities I taught, that it was I gave them a sheet about seven questions or ten questions that they were scrambled, what they had to do, they had to put the words in order in the correct order to make questions, to make questions about their lives, about their birthday, about personal information, when they did that they had to, they, they played to find someone who ,and they were and act this questions to the classmates, sometimes they	

<p>had all the answers but they, I ask them to do was, to organize, to group the information or the questions, the answers by topics because some of them questions they were about work, other questions they were about personal information and some other they were about last birthday or something like that, so what they have to do, they have to write a paragraph about the information they found from their classmates I provide them with a prompts from the introduction like a today I interview my classmate for this is what the information I get from my friend, fulanito, etcetera, and I ask them that they have to had a title, paragraphs the introduction, and they have to put in order as I say coherence and logical the information and they finally the conclusion, what they think about their classmates, right, so what is the right thing.</p> <p>I did this activity and we stopped it in the class because it is because it was only a hour they did it as a homework and then I grad it, I gave a lot of feedback and I took notes about all the things that works I took notes and then I gave a general feedback with the things I could see as the most important ok they were very specific as they were some repetitive so I did it in general, I grade them and I provide the students with a code, they have a code like for example if it is a test I write a T, if it's spelling S, if it's grammar I write a GR, so we did he one in the class and then they check their own piece of work and they have to do it again for the following task.</p>	
<p>A: So, do you think that the result that students get reflect what they have learnt?</p>	
<p>N: the results reflect, sometime because, it deepens because when they are doing as a pleasure they can have a better performance when they, when they are in a test, in a test they might be nervous, right and or maybe sometimes in the test they can write something that they have I mean experienced and that could be a kind of strange, that why the results in the test they are not very reliable, not from my point of view, that's why I tray it to do it during the semester so I could see if they have learn, if they, because they are more confident.</p>	
<p>A: Have you ever design rubrics with your students?</p>	
<p>N: Haaa, it would not exactly design, ok what we are going to do this, and then they decide not decide they say hey teacher teacher can we change like that, can I put this and they, they give ideas sometimes, sometimes they are interesting and, ok let's include and yes not exactly like a</p>	

activity at itself but yes, I consider their opinions sometimes not always.	
A: Would you like to add something else?	
N: No. not really just like a, to say that writing is a very, very difficult just to teach because as I said before we don't still have the culture of writing and it's very, very difficult and as I see the subject as a compulsory subject and not because they wants, they need or the like or as teachers is very difficult to teach and to teach in writing and speaking this is a particular skill.	
A: Ok thank you very much	

A: Interviewer

G: Participant's initial