




THE SIGNIFICANCE OF ERROR ANALYSIS IN WRITTEN PRODUCTION: A CASE STUDY OF AJLOUN NATIONAL UNIVERSITY STUDENTS



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ABSTRACT

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This paper aimed at identifying the significance of error analysis in written production of Ajloun National University students in English Writing 2 (Essay Writing) course in the final examination. The participants were eighteen second- year English language major students. The students were asked to choose a topic out of six different topics to write an essay in the final examination. The results showed that there were ten different types of errors categories identified in students' essays in the final examination such as word choice, spelling, punctuation, prepositions, etc. Moreover, the results revealed that the most common errors categories were wrong word choice (N=104, 18.02%) (Rank 1), followed by poor spelling (N=84, 14.55%) (Rank 2) whereas the least common types of errors categories were poor possessives usage (N=24, 4.15 %) (Rank 10) and wrong pluralism (N=29, 5.02.33%) (Rank9). Finally, identifying errors committed by ANU students were significant because they shed light on the problems that face them as well as helped the instructors in providing feedback to the students to make their writing more successful.

Contribution/ Originality: This study contributes in the existing literature to identify the types and frequency of errors committed by Ajloun National University students in written production. The results also provide the EFL teachers with new teaching methodologies and techniques by analyzing the students' errors in writing skill.

1. INTRODUCTION

Writing is a communicative and productive language skill that needs mental effort to produce sentences and paragraphs. However, writing is taught to assist learners practice and use the writing skills at school, higher education and in their work in the future. It is also an essential method to express students' needs, feeling and thoughts. Basically, writing is one of the four language skills that involves four steps in teaching it : prewriting, writing, revision, and editing (Calkins, 1983). In fact, writing should be taught as a means of self-expression and an act of creation through conventional and comprehensible clear marks as well as it is a transformational process of learners' thoughts into language. Thus, it is a successful way for increasing the learner's way of thinking to discover the self and the world (Adeslstein and Pival, 1984). One of the major tasks teachers have is to correct students' texts. They look for errors and correct them in order to assist their students' progress in English language

development. In brief, Writing 2 (Essay writing) is a compulsory course for English Language Department students at Ajloun National University. By the end of this course, students are expected to write a well-organized essay free of grammar, spelling and punctuation errors. In addition, students are asked to write different kinds of essays like descriptive, cause and effect, analytic, comparative, contrastive and argumentative using advanced linguistic structures.

Still, writing is a requirement that indicates academic success depending on a sufficient level of writing fluency. Mainly, this skill can be classified into: Firstly, higher-level writing skills, which consist of planning, organizing, and revising. Secondly, lower-level writing skills, which include handwriting, grammar, punctuation, capitalization, and spelling. All of these skills may reduce students' ability to respond effectively to the demands of the curriculum (Harris *et al.*, 2006).

Al-Zoubi (2005) emphasized that learners of a foreign language suffer from a obvious weakness in composing regardless of the continual efforts of Jordanian pedagogues to overcome this weakness. Actually, most students of the secondary stage in Jordanian public schools are suffering from various difficulties in the writing skills. Such difficulties may hinder the learning process of EFL in Jordan because these difficulties negatively can affect the enthusiasm of learning this language. In general, students' weakness in writing is due to many factors such as: the methods of teaching, lack of motivation, the teacher, practice and interest and in the curriculum design (Krashen, 1984). However, writing is a skill that needs to be fostered and developed in the classroom through appropriate techniques. These techniques could help students become better able to develop their own writing ability and to express themselves in the target language easily (Scot and Rodgers, 1993).

Error Analysis is one of the most major fields of second language acquisition since it investigates errors made by L2 learners and describes a set of procedures to identify, describe and explain learners' errors ; consequently, it can be defined as the study and analysis of the errors made by second language learners (Ellis and Barkhuizen, 2005). Error analysis is a kind of linguistic analysis that concentrates on the errors learners make. Moreover, it is considered an important technique for obtaining information about learners' language. Therefore, error analysis presumes that errors signify learning difficulties and that the frequency of a particular error is an indication of the difficulty learners have in learning that structure. For students and for teachers it is inevitable to cope up with errors to develop their language skills. Because teachers are responsible for the development of students' English language development, it is crucial to tell them about the types of errors, dealing with them and providing corrective feedback. One way to do so, is the application of the approach of error analysis

Corder (1967) pointed that errors is a proof of the learners' level that illustrates how first and second language learners improvement as an independent system of language. As a result, the study of learners' errors has become a crucial field of applied linguistics to examine language grammatical knowledge by analyzing learners' writing that is necessary for teachers to assist learners in developing their writing in English. Additionally, the analysis of language learners' grammatical knowledge enables the language teachers to expect and overcome problems of errors happened in the process of language learning.

To sum up, writing is a difficult process even in the first language; though it is more difficult to write in a second or foreign language. Since error analysis is very a useful method to collect information about learners' language, many researchers have tried to classify the common errors EFL/ESL students make in L2 writing. However this is a brief overview of error categories in students' final examination essays include: verb tense, subject verb agreement, articles, prepositions, punctuation, word choice, gerunds, spelling, pluralism and possessives. Obviously, a comprehensible understanding of the errors and the source of these errors can help teachers recognize students' difficulties in learning that language in the process of EFL writing. Furthermore, it can support in implementation of suitable teaching strategies to help students learn better. Consequently, this study aims to identify the types and frequency of errors committed by Ajloun National University students in English Writing 2

(Essay Writing) course in the final examination and supply useful solutions to cope with these errors in context where exposure to the L2 could be restricted.

1.1. Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to identify the types and frequency of errors committed by Ajloun National University students in English Writing 2 (Essay Writing) course in the final examination and to recognize the reasons and causes of these errors as well as provide the language EFL teachers with new teaching methodologies and techniques by analyzing the students' errors and to make the students aware of their errors in writing so as to overcome them.

1.2. Research Questions

Based on the main purpose of this study, the researcher would try to answer to the following research questions.

1. What are the types and frequency of common errors committed by Ajloun National University students in their final examination written essays?
2. What are the most and least common types of errors committed by Ajloun National University students in their final examination written essays?
3. What are the reasons and causes of common errors in Ajloun National University students' final examination written essays?

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Recently, there have been an increasing concern in error analysis as a major field in applied linguistic. A good number of research, theoretical and practical, have been performed on error analysis of learners' written production. However, the researcher thought that a comprehensive consideration is to be given to error analysis of learners' writings, so that they can move forward to having acceptable writing skills in English. Accordingly, making errors can be as an evidence of developing language competence and as a assisting factor in second/ foreign language learning. For example, Corder (1981) explained that learners' errors are significant in three different ways: Firstly, for teacher since they demonstrated how learners learn the second language and the strategies they employed in order to learn. Secondly, these errors are essential for teachers as a sign of learning process. Finally, they are significant for learners themselves to overcome these errors in their writing. As a result, several researchers have analyzed students' written production errors in different educational context (Huang, 2001; Kim, 2001; Bataineh, 2005; Ahmadvand, 2008; Darus and Subramaniam, 2009; Al-Buainain, 2010; Tahaineh, 2010; Katiya *et al.*, 2015).

In this respect, Kim (2001) carried out a study to identify students' errors in college writing samples to examine L1 interference occurrence. He mentioned that, "*it is widely believed that Korean learners of English often show incorrect use of English expressions due to their L1 interference. Despite such a prevalent belief, the sources of learners' errors and L1 interference were not clearly identified.*". So as to identify the nature and the sources of students' errors, he gathered 30 writing samples from students in TOEIC class. The results revealed the most learners' errors were in: Using verbs, conjunctions, plural/singular, agreement, adjectives, articles and prepositions. Afterward, these errors were divided into two types interlingual and intralingual. Lastly, the results presented that most of learners' errors were intralingual and only a few cases can be attributed to L1 interference.

In her study, Bataineh (2005) identify the types of errors Jordanian EFL university students made in the use of the indefinite article (a). The results revealed that there were nine types of errors in the use of the indefinite article as follows: deletion of the indefinite article, substitution of a for an, substitution of the definite for the indefinite article, writing a as part of the noun/adjective following it, use of the indefinite article with unmarked plurals, substitution of the indefinite for the definite article, use of the indefinite article with marked plurals, use of the

indefinite article with uncountable nouns and use of the indefinite article with adjectives. In conclusion, the results demonstrated that all errors were independent of the learner's L1 except one category of error that could be referred to the impact of Arabic was the deletion of the indefinite article.

Ahmadvand (2008) analyzed errors in Iranian EFL learners' written productions. He collected the data from 40 learners' written productions. The results showed that the most recurrent kinds of errors were: omissions, additions, and regularizations. Besides, it was presented that negative transfer responsible for only 30% of all errors and misinformation is responsible for the most of the errors in learners' written productions. Accordingly, it was shown that negative transfer from Persian to English in learners' written productions is neither the only source of errors, nor the major one. Definitely, the results of this study reduced the responsibility of first language in the acquisition of English as the second language.

Huang (2001) examined the distribution and nature kinds of grammatical errors that made by 46 English majors students. The errors were classified into 13 error types. The main six common errors were: Noun, Verb, Spelling, Article, Preposition and Word choice. Likewise, Darus and Subramaniam (2009) identified errors in 72 essays written by 72 Malay students. The results revealed that students' errors were six types: singular/plural form, verb tense, subject-verb agreement, word choice, preposition and word order. In these two studies, the main causes of EFL learners' errors were due to overgeneralization, simplification, ignorance of rule restrictions, incomplete application of rules and L1 transfer.

In his study, Al-Buainain (2010) concentrated on the problems that students at department of English at Qatar University frequently encountered in their writing course. This study examined 40 exams scripts collected from students during their first writing course. Thus, the results showed that students' errors were systematic and categorized into errors in: verbs, noun modifiers, relative clauses, fragments, countable and uncountable nouns, articles and prepositions. Another study conducted by Tahaineh (2010) to investigate the types of errors in the use of prepositions that Jordanians EFL students committed. The samples of this study were collected from compositions written by 162 students. The findings of this study showed that Jordanian students tends to select the improper prepositions if equivalents are not used in their mother tongue, use proper preposition if equivalent was found in their mother tongue and omit prepositions if equivalents are not required in their mother tongue.

Abushihab *et al.* (2011) performed a study to analyze the corpus of written discourse of 62 Jordanian EFL students at the department of English Literature and Translation at Alzaytoonah Private University in Jordan. The main purpose of this study was to examine and classify the grammatical errors that those students committed in their writing production. The results revealed that students' most frequent errors were in: prepositions, active and passive, morphological, verbs, articles, and tenses. Thus, the results presented that the highest category of errors was the errors of prepositions that comprised 26% of the total errors.

Taher (2011) examined the most frequent errors committed by Swedish junior high school students. The results revealed that the most common errors included verb inflection, verb tense and subject-verb agreement. The causes of these errors due to incorrect transfer from Swedish into English and lack of grammatical knowledge. Another research conducted by Katiya *et al.* (2015) that identified and analyzed a corpus of Chemistry first year students' essays. The results revealed that punctuation errors, misapplication of essay construction rules, spelling errors, syntactic errors and morphological errors compromised the quality, meaning and rhetorical aspect of the contents. Therefore these errors were due to mother tongue interference.

3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1. Participants

This study is a case study, it was consisted of a specific learner group who are second -year students at ANU studying a course entitled Writing 2 (Essay writing) in the second semester of the academic year 2017/2018. This course lasted approximately for four months. The participants in the study were eighteen second -year English

language major students who took English Writing 2 (Essay Writing) course .They were seven males and eleven females .All of them have learned English language as a foreign language at schools from grade one to grade twelve since English is compulsory course in addition to one year in the university so they learn English for at least thirteen years.

3.2. Instrument

This study is qualitative using error analysis approach to investigate the common errors committed by Ajloun National University students in their written essays in the final Writing 2 (Essay writing) course examination . However, error analysis is a commonly used research method in social sciences. The participants were asked to choose a topic out of six topics to write an essay (Appendix 1).The data was collected in the form of answer copies of Writing 2 (Essay writing) final examination of Ajloun National University students. The purpose behind teaching this course is to improve students' abilities in English language writing skill .To obtain the information concerning common errors made by ANU students, eighteen pieces of final Writing 2 (Essay writing) examination papers were collected and marked by class lecturer.

3.3. Data Analysis

The students' written essays were checked and marked by the class lecturer using a specific rubric for assessing students' written essays (Final Examination Writing 2 ,Essay Writing) and identifying the common errors committed by ANU students (Appendix 2) . All of the collected errors were analyzed and labeled according to their types, frequency, percentage and rank. Additionally, examples of common errors committed by ANU students were provided. Ellis (1994) applied the procedural analysis of error analysis and so this study applied it. This procedure consists of the following steps: First. Collection of errors: Writing 2 (Essay writing) course final examination. Second, the identification of errors. Then, the description of errors. Finally the evaluation of errors.

Following the four steps as mentioned above the answer copies of all participants were collected and the errors committed by ANU students in their written production were identified, described, explained and evaluated. Basically, eighteen students' answer essays are checked, analyzed for the identification and description of the errors. The errors are classified into: verb tense, subject verb agreement, spelling, articles, prepositions, punctuation, word choice, gerunds, pluralism and possessives. In Writing 2 (Essay writing) course, the students learned to write different kinds of essays such as cause and effect, descriptive, analytic, comparative, contrastive and argumentative using advanced linguistic structures. In Writing 2 (Essay writing) final examination, the students were asked to choose a topic out of six topics to write an essay in a given time (Appendix 1). Each essay examined word by word and each error was recorded according to its type, frequency and rank in an individual error record form. The students' errors were identified and classified accordingly in the final examination. Moreover, the final step in this study of error analysis is to evaluate and draw a conclusions on the collected results, so that the different errors could be weighed to differentiate which error got more consideration to be taught in class.

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

4.1. Results Related to the First Question of the Study

- What are the types and frequency of common errors committed by Ajloun National University students in their final examination written essays?

Table-1. Type of Errors, Frequency, Percentage and Examples of Errors Identified in the Students' Written Essays.

Type of Errors	Frequency	Percentage	Examples of Students' Errors Identified
Wrong Word Choice	104	18.02	* to fasten belt seat, *cause dead, *water voice *problem traffic,*live a life happy,* places wonderful, *jam traffic
Poor Spelling	84	14.55	*Beatiful , *tuorsm ,*relagius ,*finlly , * travilling, *desingers , *government
Poor Punctuation Marks Usage	81	14.03	*jordan , *And , *aqaba, *. everyone should, *Therefore we must, *In my opinion we can
Poor Prepositions Usage	77	13.34	*to the weather, *from out of the country,* in the other hand, * in night, *suffer of
Poor Subject Verb Agreement Usage	52	9.01	*Everyone have , *it reflect , *it keep, *both the driver and pedestrian is
Wrong Verb Tense Usage	47	8.14	*Last year we visit,*I wish I stay, *must be understand, *My family going,* I feeling
Improper Articles Usage	42	7.27	*is very attractive place ,*most interesting place *in the Jordan,*an university,* in the summer
Wrong Gerunds Usage	37	6.41	*enjoy to visit , * to overcoming , * I 'm interesting *we feel relaxing , * loving
Wrong Pluralism Usage	29	5.02	*this phenomena , *many place, *a good doctors,
Poor Possessives Usage	24	4.15	*peoples' attention, *it's border with , *car's belts ,
Totals	577	100%	

Table 1 presented the type of errors, frequency , percentage and examples of errors identified in ANU students' written essays . The results indicate that there were ten different kinds of errors categories found in the written essays of the second year English major students at ANU. A clear analysis of the errors presented in Table 1 showed that the errors committed by ANU students can be classified into two categories. That is, mechanical category and grammatical category errors. The mechanical category of errors include errors related to poor spelling, poor punctuation marks usage, and improper articles usage. Whereas ,the grammatical category of errors include errors wrong word choice, poor prepositions usage, poor subject verb agreement usage, poor possessives usage and wrong gerunds usage. these errors categories included :Wrong word choice (18.02) followed by poor spelling (14.55) , poor punctuation marks usage (14.03), poor prepositions usage (13.34) , poor usage of subject verb agreement (9.01) , wrong verb tense usage (8.14) , improper articles usage (7.27), wrong gerunds usage (6.41) , wrong pluralism (5.02) and poor possessives usage (4.15) . As a result, the total number of common errors that Ajloun National University students commit in their written essays was (577).

4.2. Results Related to the Second Question of the Study

- What are the most and least common types of errors committed by Ajloun National University students in their final examination written essays?

Table-2. Type of Errors Frequency, Percentage and Rank Distribution of Errors in the Students' Written Essays.

Type of Errors	Frequency	Percentage	Rank
Wrong Word Choice	104	18.02	1
Poor Spelling	84	14.55	2
Poor Punctuation Marks Usage	81	14.03	3
Poor prepositions Usage	77	13.34	4
Poor Subject Verb Agreement Usage	52	9.01	5
Wrong Verb Tense Usage	47	8.14	6
Improper Articles Usage	42	7.27	7
Wrong Gerunds Usage	37	6.41	8
Wrong Pluralism Usage	29	5.02	9
Poor Possessives Usage	24	4.15	10
Totals	577	100%	

Table 2 showed the type of errors, frequency, percentage and rank distribution of errors categories in the students' written essays. It can be inferred from Table 2 that the most five common errors categories in the written essays of the second year English major students at Ajloun National University were : In the first rank was wrong word choice (N=104, 18.02%) ,followed by poor spelling (Rank 2) (N=84, 14.55%) , poor punctuation marks usage (Rank 3), (N=81, 14.03%) , poor prepositions usage (Rank 4) (N=77, 13.34%), poor subject verb agreement usage (Rank 5) (N=52, 9.01%) . On the other hand , the least common types of errors categories committed by second year English major students at Ajloun National University in the written texts were : poor possessives usage (Rank 10) (N=24, 4.15 %), wrong pluralism usage (Rank 9) (N=29, 5.02.33%) , wrong gerunds usage (Rank 8) (N=37, 6.41%) , improper articles usage (Rank 7) (N=42, 7.27 %) and wrong verb tense Usage (Rank 6) (N=47, 8.18%) . Therefore, the most common error category committed was wrong word choice in rank one and the percentage was (N=104, 18.02%) .Whereas the least common error category was poor possessives usage in rank ten and the percentage was (N=24, 4.15 %).

4.3. Results Related to the Third Question of the Study

- What are the reasons and causes of common errors in Ajloun National University students' final examination written essays?

Subsequently, the researcher started investigating the source of these common errors committed by Ajloun National University in their written essays with examples of these errors. These errors can be classified into four different categories :

- First, ordering refers to the wrong order of the words in the sentence. E.g. * *to fasten belt seat*. Here the order of the sentence is incorrect and is becoming the reason of error.
- Second, selection refers to the problem of wrong selection of the certain forms. E.g. * *I wish I stay*. Here, the present simple is used instead of the past simple tense .
- Third, addition referred to the addition of any unnecessary grammatical item. E.g. * *from out of the country*. Here is the addition of the preposition *from* that is not needed. The true structure is: *out of the country*
- Fourth, omission takes place when the linguistic item that is needed in the sentence is omitted. E.g. * *it reflect*. Here the morpheme “s” is omitted that was needed for the correct structure of the sentence.

Furthermore, there are many reasons behind the common errors committed by Ajloun National University students in their written essays. One reason can be the lack of teachers' competence in language teaching or the unsatisfactory material for language teaching. Dulay *et al.* (1982) explained that the sources of errors in second language learning were either from interlingual or intralingual source. On one hand , the interlingual sources of errors are those caused by negative transfer or interference from the learners' first language. One the other hand, the intralingual sources of errors , which are also called developmental errors, are those caused by interference within the learners' second language itself.

Some researchers like (Ellis, 1995; Ziahosseiny, 1999; Darus and Subramaniam, 2009; Kazemian and Hashemi, 2014) identified some factors of errors in the language learning that are:

- Firstly, language transfer that refers to the interference of the mother tongue in learning a second language in which one language is learned in the existence of another language. There are two types of language transfer positive and negative. When there are similarities in two languages positive transfer can occur while negative transfer happened when there are differences in the two languages.
- Secondly, lack of the understanding of the rules. Occasionally, students do not have satisfactory comprehension of the rules of the language, and this leads to mistakes and errors in language as well as hinder English language learning.

- Thirdly, overgeneralization refers to the use of previously available strategies in new situations in which one form or rule of the language is overgeneralized over the other forms. The expanding use of certain forms refers to the overgeneralization and becomes the cause of errors in language learning.
- Fourthly, simplification refers to the situation when learners avoid the use of the complex structure and prefer to use the very simple forms.
- Finally, fossilization can be defined as a process which sometimes arises in learning a language in which incorrect linguistic features become a permanent part of the way a person speaks or writes a language.

This study considered all these causes and reasons of these errors by analyzing the errors made by Ajloun National University students' written essays in the final examination. This study also attempted to concentrate on the role of error analysis in learning and teaching foreign and second language.

5. CONCLUSIONS

In conclusion, the results indicated that there were ten different kinds of errors categories recognized in the final examination written essays of the second - year English major students at Ajloun National University. These error categories included: verb tense, subject verb agreement, articles, prepositions, punctuation, word choice, gerunds, spelling, pluralism and possessives. Thus, the total number of common errors made by Ajloun National University students in the final examination written essays was five hundred and seventy seven errors. A close analysis of these errors showed that they can be classified into two categories. That is, mechanical category and grammatical category errors. It is clear that after analyzing the common errors committed by Ajloun National University students' written essays, the most common errors categories were Wrong Word Choice in the first rank (18.02 %) followed by Poor Spelling in the second rank (14.55%). While the least common errors categories were Poor Possessives Usage in the tenth rank (4.15%) and Wrong Pluralism in the ninth rank (5.02%). It should be emphasized that ANU students couldn't use the rules of the English language effectively. This could be due to the lack of teachers' competence in language teaching or the unsatisfactory material for language teaching, lack of the knowledge of the rules, language transfer, simplification, overgeneralization and, fossilization.

To sum up, out of the eighteen written essays that were analyzed, five hundred and seventy seven errors were detected. However, identifying these errors was significant during studying Writing 2 (Essay Writing) course because they shed light on the problems that face ANU students and also helped the instructors in giving wash back effects to the students to make their writing more effective. Besides, this situation needed instant awareness to help the students in this university to be proficient with writing skills.

6. RECOMMENDATIONS

With reference to the results of this study, the researcher recommended the followings:

- First, the credit hours for teaching Writing 2 (Essay writing) course should be increased from three hours to six hours as well as extended to the third- year students so that they need to spend more credit hours in improving their writing skills in essay writing.
- Second, the instructors who taught writing skills at the university should raise students' awareness towards helping them understand and appreciate the importance of writing skills in learning English language.
- Third, instructors need to be aware of writing strategies that might assist students during the writing process and employ them effectively in writing their essays.
- Finally, learners' writing skills could be tested in examinations or their writing assignments could be included in grading. In this way, students can see what they do is useful also they can be more encouraged to improve their writing skill. Consequently, this study was conducted to help other researchers in this field to be familiar with the errors that ANU students made throughout their writing production.

Furthermore, this study aimed to recognize the causes of these errors and their effects on learning English language.

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APPENDIX (1)

Final Examination.	Writing 2 (Essay Writing)	Time : Two Hours
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Part Two: Free WritingWrite an essay on **ONE** of the following topics :

(40 points)

- 1 – What are the causes for students to cheat on tests?
- 2 – Two different celebrations.
- 3 – A difficult decision you had to take .
- 4 – The best solution to overcome traffic problems in Jordan .
- 5 – A formative experience from your past .
- 6 – A particular or favorite place .

APPENDIX (2)

Rubric for Assessing Students' Written Essays (Final Examination Writing 2 ,Essay Writing)

Areas of Assessment	Excellent	Good	Acceptable	Poor (Fail)
	(34-40 Marks)	(25-33 Marks)	(20 -26 Marks)	(Less than 20)
Ideas	Presents ideas in an original manner	Presents ideas in an consistent manner	Ideas are too general	Ideas are vague or unclear
Organization	Strong and organized beg/mid/end	Organized beg/mid/end	Some organization; attempt at a beg/mid/end	No organization; lack beg/mid/end
Understanding	Writing shows strong understanding	Writing shows clear understanding	Writing shows adequate understanding	Writing shows little understanding
Word Choice	Sophisticated use of nouns and verbs make essay very informative	Nouns and verbs make essay informative	Needs more nouns and verbs	Little or no use of nouns and verbs
Sentence Structure	Sentence structure enhances meaning; flows throughout piece	Sentence structure is evident; sentences mostly flow	Sentence structure is limited; sentences need to flow	No sense of sentence structure or flow
Language Use	Few (if any) errors	Few errors	Several errors	Numerous errors

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