

From the 'Folder' Approach to the Model Approach: Students Managing Their Writing Errors

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Abstract:

This paper examines the process related to student management of writing errors. In this context, a teacher/professor and peers provide a student with written corrections to amend a paper or information to revise a paper. The paper is divided into four distinct parts: Part one, the introduction, explains the background of a problem that is being addressed, as well as the current assessment and outcomes that are anticipated pertaining to the research that will be conducted. Part two is The Current Method Approach. This method focuses on the current method being utilized and also includes a SWOT assessment of that model. Part three is the Future State Approach which previews a revised model approach and details how the transition to this approach could be made possible. There is also a brief review of other educational sector approaches included in this section for comparative analysis purposes. The Conclusion, part four, gives a summary of the key points and describes any knowledge that has been gained from the revised model approach. This approach can be used for all composition classes, secondary, ESL/EFL, as well as university.

Keywords: Writing/Composition, Learning and Teaching Methodology, New Learning and Teaching Models.

Introduction:

Composition teachers and professors provide comments for their students' academic papers through reviews, editing, and revisions. During this process, it has been observed that many students enrolled in composition classes make repetitive errors and often create additional work for the teacher/professor, as well as themselves. The problem is largely based on the fact that students do not retain the essays that have been corrected in order to learn from their mistakes and gain important lessons from the corrective process. The current model used in essay correction involves process improvement and transformation. Most students now have access to relatively sophisticated computer technology and are quite capable of learning the details of various hardware and software applications in order to make a quicker transition through the correction process. An improvement on the current model would alleviate the burden of multiple corrections, while also assisting the student with ways to improve the process that would provide beneficial to every person involved in the correction process. This paper attempts to examine the current model and determine ways that this model may be improved upon for future state consideration. The improved model would relieve the burden of repeated corrections, while also educating the student on process improvements that would be of benefit to all involved in the correction cycle.

Literature Review:

There is a large literature base to explore this subject matter. Tice (2001) published a reflective paper with the goal of exploring the process of the classroom and focusing on the interaction between the student and teacher. It concentrates on the work environment from a teacher's perspective, the teacher-student relationship while in this work environment and a diary of events that is actually recorded by a teacher. Because this paper is written from the front-end perspective of the teacher, it gives meaningful insight into the hardship most teachers face on a daily basis when attempting to undertake the manual revision process with students because of the detail involved. There was also a paper written describing the feedback process from Teacher to Student in the context of teaching English as a Foreign Language. It provided a more in depth view about how students record and interpret the information obtained from instructor feedback (Williams, 2003). This paper could be considered a great tool in gathering information about students who struggle with writing in the beginning stages because the language is new to them; therefore, they will have many challenges and face several adaptations, all of which will be part of the revision process.

A strategy paper was published that focused more on the analysis component of the problem statement. The consideration is made towards the root cause analysis of writing issues, identification of the issues, and how students may begin making the appropriate corrections. The approach of this paper is from a strategic perspective (Intervention Central, 2011). An early assessment indicates that there are critical gaps in the current literature review. There are few texts or papers that deal directly with method or systems solutions for students to work specifically with recording and processing teacher comments. There are software solutions such as the use of OneNote by Microsoft Office Suite, but little has been done to address other issues relative to this problem (Intervention Central, 2011).

The Current Method Approach:

This approach is based upon the student maintaining a simple folder which is continuously updated with every instance of feedback that is given by either a teacher or peer.

The process works basically by having the teacher revise the paper in question or providing the student with feedback via comments about how to best proceed with corrections. The student then records this feedback directly on the folder. The folder is composed of drafts and revisions listed/written on the outside front and a list of ideas and subjects to write about on the inside of the front cover. It also contains a list of problematic areas for students concerning their papers on the inside of the back cover and a list of their various writing strengths on the outside of the back cover.

The student retains the folder at all times so it will provide an up-to-date record of events when needed. Once the paper in question is complete, the student can archive it for future reference but continue to use the folder in his/her composition class throughout the semester, as well as in future composition classes. A new folder is/can then be created for the use of subsequent papers. This manual method has proved to be sufficient for the students' needs; however, with the innovations in technology there could be a much more streamlined process that would save time and increase the knowledge acquired by each student through the process of editing and revisions.

SWOT on Current Model Approach:

There are several strengths in the SWOT diagram. It is simple in its design and the concept is quite feasible to implement. There is a way to prevent loss of the papers because of the hard folder content. The current model approach has the capability to capture all of the data from teacher and peer-reviews; it also has the capability to archive the final product and makes it easier to create a new folder.

Weaknesses to the current model approach are present alongside the strengths, albeit in a downsized form. There is a reliance of manual processes and, thus an increased risk of error. Also, paper analyses must be performed manually. This does not facilitate the learning process. It follows more of a cyclical approach rather than an interactive approach and there is the potential for the loss of a folder with no back-up system.

The SWOT offers opportunities such as the introduction of improved technology and the creation of multiple record capabilities. Both of these opportunities would be significant to a student in regards to the potential for capturing information and having the ability to archive that information for months or years until the student has a need to access it at a later date. Also, the creation of additional writing capabilities and the ability to provide a set of aids for offering new writing styles on the desktop would provide the student with enhanced methods to add flair to his or her writing style and increase the vocabulary usage in the various writings. This would further help with the acquisition of student vocabulary. There is also a more interactive model with the current model system and a reduction in the reliance on manual operations. On the opposite spectrum, there are threats to the system such as extra costs involved in the implementation of a new system. Also, ensuring student access to laptops and computer workspaces can be threatening when considering the current model approach. Lastly, in order for this to be effective, there must be maintenance in the integrity of the system and this would be the student's responsibility.

Building Business Process Improvement

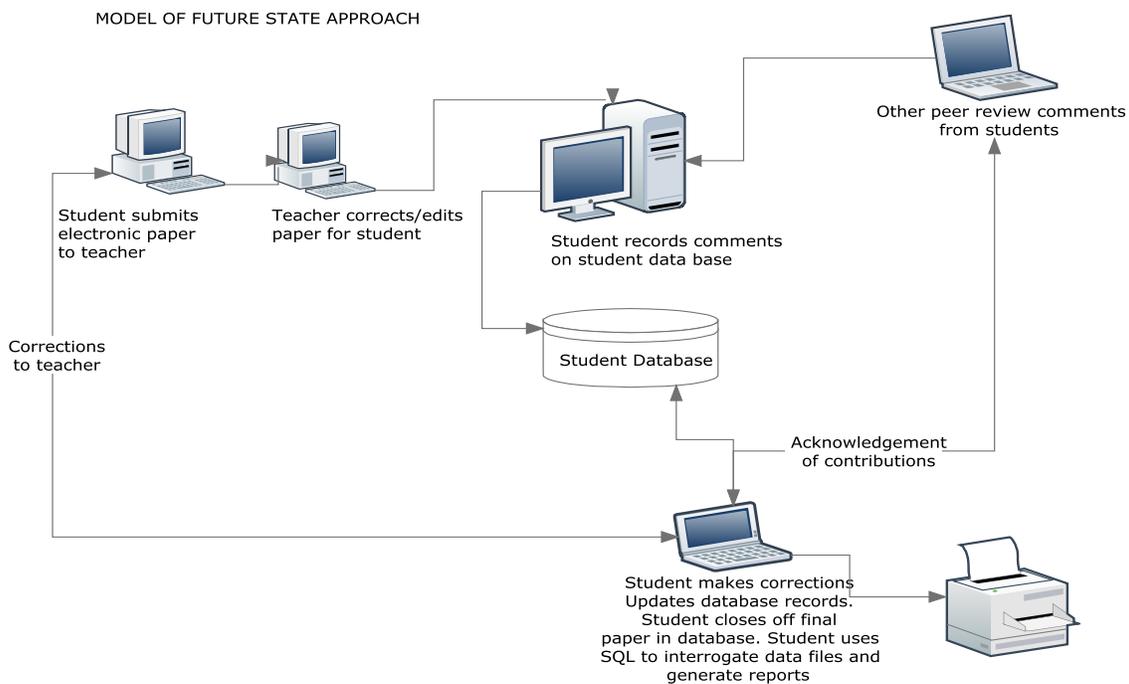


In order to achieve the required system, there should be a three stage approach. Stage 1 examines the current model in place. Stage 2 builds the concept for the future state requirement of the model required. This leaves a gap analysis between that of the current to the future state (Stage 3) and is often referred to as the transition steps.

The Future State (Model) Approach:

The future state model is based upon automation of the current model and streamlining the processes in order to create a more efficient workflow. The concept is based on three different entry points, as based upon Microsoft Office software, in accordance with cost and level of complexity required. The process model, as illustrated below, eliminates much of the paper flow in favor of a more dynamic and interactive model concept.

In this model, the student would submit the paper to his/her teacher as an electronic document and the teacher would review the paper. The editing process would be performed by utilising the revision application located within Microsoft Word. This is operated from a Windows 7 environment and is supported by Microsoft Office software. The student would receive the corrected version of his document for capture and information storage.



The three types of database solutions that are feasible in this situation are offered below. They are listed with relative cost and need.

a. **Simplest Low Entry model:** This is essentially the use of the One Note application in the Microsoft Office Suite. The One Note application is capable of storing files and information such as text files (which would be an alternative to the Microsoft Office word processing files), graphics, and simple notes. The information is quite easily arranged by categorizing based on the type of information and may be personalized based on the student's individualized preference.

b. **Medium Entry model:** This model would require the use of an access database, which comes as a standard feature with a professional version of Microsoft Office. The tables in this access database are cable of being structured to capture the information provided by the teacher such as comments, documents, and revisions. It may be filed and updated accordingly.

c. **Advanced User model:** This involves the use of a Microsoft add on called SharePoint and is more expensive than the basic Office version. A feature of this application is the ability to have a true relational database concept in real time environment where there is the ability to also interact with others as well. In this particular model, a student could theoretically perform any kind of manipulation with the information as long as he has access to the data. While this is a high-end system and not likely feasible for this particular project, it is important to note the versatility that today's modern technology grants an individual as long as he or she understands how to utilize it.

In this model, the student is the administrator of the database and has the sole decision as to who is granted access to his documents. S/he is responsible for the maintenance of the database and keeping records updated in a timely fashion. The student is also responsible for the integrity of the database and ensuring that appropriate back-ups of the data are maintained at frequent intervals. There will be a certain amount of training required to ensure the student is capable of using this system, as applicable to the medium and advanced levels. The student will also have the ability to print his/her own reports that can either be hard copies or electronic copies of the data set required by the teacher. The system also supports a desktop environment, email and diary via Outlook, a database application for storage and retention of data, print facility, access and system control features, flexibility in the design and recording of information, archiving, and retrieval and storage of electronic data sets.

Advantages to this model are that it is an electronic solution and thus eliminates the need for paperwork unless so desired by the teacher. Also, the system is more secure with an increase in the amount of checks and balances to ensure the prevention of data loss. There is an interactive solution to ensure a faster turnaround time and a more streamlined approach to the editing process. It also optimises the time that a teacher or student requires to edit, review, or correct the information and complete the entire procedure. The various weaknesses in this model are that initial investment is required to buy the hardware and software, training is required to adequately train everyone on the operation, there could be a need for technical support in the initial setup process, and it requires a large commitment by the student for database maintenance.

The Relational Database Concept:

A relational model has three components: They consist of a collection of objects or relations, as well as the operators that have the ability to act on those objects or relations. The

third component consists of the data integrity methods and is important to the overall model's implementation. A relational database management system (RDMS) may be defined as:

all data is stored in Relations which (to the user) are tables with rows and columns. Each table is composed of records (called Tuples) and each record is identified by a field (attribute) containing a unique value. Every table shares, at least, one field with another table in 'one to one,' 'one to many,' or 'many to many' relationships (Business Dictionary, 2010).

A network database is one where data elements are connected to one another through a series of links and this particular concept is best illustrated through an Entity Relationship (E-R) diagram. It describes the various relationships between the data. One is able to visualise, through the model, a complete representation of the networked data. Yet, another adaptation is the hierarchical concept. This is essentially a construct based upon a Parent-Child relationship model. This particular concept could be analogous to a department store as far as capabilities are concerned. For example, in a retail store setting, there may be a Furnishings Department. This may be split into three subordinate areas such as Home Furnishings, Office Furnishings, and Domestic Appliances. These, in turn, may have additional lines of responsibility; hence, one has a hierarchy of data being performed.

Managing the Transition:

The transition phase is nothing more than a conversion from a basic manual system to an updated electronic version of that same system with new features. The implementation steps may be followed in what is known as a 'waterfall approach' in the systems development lifecycle. The steps are explained below:

1. All system specification must be completed and agreed upon by the vested parties and stakeholders.
2. All training must be performed per standard requirements to ensure capable operators.
3. The development of a prototype must be successful to begin the testing phase of the project:
 - a. All hardware and software needed for the transition process must be acquired through lease or purchase.
 - b. All technical configuration steps must be completed to ensure the most seamless transition.
 - c. Workflow routines must be established to ensure increased productivity.
 - d. New or modified roles and responsibilities must be established and agreed upon before further implementation is undertaken.
 - e. Testing of the entire system must be completed before a live run may be performed.
 - f. A live run of the system must be performed to determine if there are errors or glitches in the system.
 - g. Any errors detected must be handled before the transition to this system is completed and the system is completely put into place.
 - h. The system is finally ready to 'go live'.
4. Once the system is in an operational environment, the following three components must be periodically assessed to ensure continued success of the system.
 1. Technical support through Microsoft (for software components)
 2. Hardware Support (through hardware vendors)

3. Database Maintenance (this is the responsibility of the student)

Examination of other Concepts in the Education Sector:

Research indicates that most teachers are still hesitant about the incorporation of such a modern system because they are comfortable with the current process of editing and have little control over the students in terms of how they use, assimilate, or retain the feedback provided from the teacher and other peer reviewers. There seems to be some reluctance to facilitate change despite the fact that many students own and operate laptop computers. In this regard, there is a missed opportunity to further educate the students on the applied use of their computers and increase their technological awareness.

Some teachers are experimenting with student self-assessment programs and helping reduce the administrative burden in the review correction and editing process. This has certain advantages in terms of increasing the self-awareness of students and making them become more responsible for the overall quality of their work. Making this transition, however, can prove very difficult for the teachers as the rules have to be clearly set out and the parameters must be well defined. This changing role for the teacher can also become a problem in itself. There is the danger of being diverted to other educational tasks and becoming removed from an important part of the student's educational process (Rolheiser, 2011).

Certain schools are increasing their collaboration with students in order to get the students more fully integrated into process of record keeping and general administration. This allows the student an opportunity to have a great amount of personal integration with the school computer network. In this role, the school takes over the administrative function of the database and the student is responsible for populating the information required. This is essentially a *spin* on the student centric model. The key is that the burden of responsibility for student record maintenance is placed upon the school administration system. While students would be expected to comply with the instructions provided, the control would be exercised by school system administrators. This may place an additional cost burden on schools that they cannot afford (Vecchioli, 1999).

When speaking about the subject of an Access database, one must consider several advantages to a team approach versus an individual approach. These advantages would be the ability to delegate one's duties as they deem fit and to divide the various tasks into smaller areas to offer a more detailed approach. Another advantage is the ability to have expertise on the subject. This would be extremely beneficial for a large scale project in order to decrease the amount of time needed and increase the productivity to complete the project before the predetermined due date (Goedert, 2011).

When speaking in terms of database construction, the size of a team will have differences dependent on the size and complexity of the project that is currently being undertaken. If there is a large scale system being constructed, the team will consist of various functional specialists that will have the responsibility of covering the landscape and overlooking the supervision of the design and database development. Conversely, a small scale system will only require a small team of a few people. It has been found that the optimal team size for database and software development is between 3 and 5 people in order to provide the most accurate and timely results (Putnam, 2011).

Conclusion:

There is certainly a need to examine the process of marking student papers to assist busy teachers with the reviews and edits that must be made. Equally, this needs to be captured in a more efficient manner for the student to both assimilate the knowledge and make process improvement steps from the learning experience. In many regards, this is based upon improving the student – teacher interaction and relationship. The need for manually editing academic writings is equally an out-of-date concept, and teachers should be educating the students on gaining productivity from their laptop computers as opposed to that of social networking, word processing, and e-mailing. Hence, there exists an opportunity to not only streamline the work process, but also to educate the student on more advanced aspects of computer technology. This creates an equal opportunity for teachers to become more versed in computer hardware and software applications and make the productivity gains that benefit both the teacher and the school.

The system presented in this paper takes the concepts of a manual model and streamlines the business processes in order to make a more efficient computer interactive model using the concepts of relational data base technology. With the use of standard office applications such as Microsoft Office, it has been made easier for both the student and teacher in terms of automating what might otherwise be a complicated work process. Any system, however, requires both the discipline and commitment of those who choose to utilise its capabilities. In the student centric model, the student assumes the responsibility of maintaining and updating the database while retaining the referential data integrity. The key to any successful model is to properly train students and teachers in the same manner so that they will have the ability to understand every process and utilise the applications for the specific needs of the class. This will help improve overall writing skills, streamline the amount of productivity, and decrease the workload for teachers.

About the Author:

Dr. Ronnie Goodwin is an Assistant Professor in the English Language and Linguistics Department and is interim Assistant Dean of the College of Arts and Science at Gulf University for Science & Technology (GUST). Dr. Goodwin specializes in teaching Business Writing, English Composition, and English to Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) to college-level, high school, and adult learners. He is experienced in teaching intensive English for Academic Purposes (EAP) and English for Specific Purposes (ESP) courses. Dr. Goodwin's research interests are in Writing/Composition, Linguistics, Discourse Analysis, ESL/EFL skill areas and Cross-cultural studies.

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