

## ENHANCING COLLEGE STUDENTS' ENGLISH WRITING SKILLS USING POWER-S & F APPROACH

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### ABSTRACT

This study investigates the impact of the POWER-S & F journal template intervention on the writing performance of English majors through a pre-test and post-test assessment. The intervention aimed to enhance students' writing skills in content, organization, grammar, vocabulary, and mechanics. The study used a collaborative action research design involving 15 sophomore students as respondents. Quantitative analysis, including paired samples t-test and Wilcoxon W test, revealed a statistically significant improvement ( $p = 0.0290^*$ ) in post-test scores compared to pre-test scores. The shift from "Proficient" to "Exemplary" descriptors in various writing aspects supported the intervention's effectiveness. Focused Group Discussions (FGDs) provided insights into participants' experiences and challenges with journaling, highlighting the dual nature of the process. Recommendations include providing more time and flexibility in the intervention to optimize its benefits. The findings suggest that the POWER-S & F approach positively influenced students' writing abilities, emphasizing the need for tailored support and adjustments to enhance the journaling process further.

**Keywords:** *Writing Skills, English Majors, POWER-S & F Approach, Journal Template*

### INTRODUCTION

In higher education, it is important to develop strong writing skills necessary for students' ability to express themselves creatively or academically (Nenotek et al., 2022) and to communicate their thoughts and ideas clearly (Stevens & Cooper, 2023). The private institution in which this study takes place recognizes the significance of students' ability to write in English for success in both academic and professional aspects, especially since the respondents are from the School of Education and are composed of future educators. As such, these college students' critical and creative thinking abilities are strengthened by the department for them to comprehend language nuances that go hand in hand with the growth in their writing abilities, as they are expected to develop their future students' writing skills (Graham, 2019). After all, teachers are challenged to model the value of writing (Gallagher, 2023). However, it has been made apparent that university students have been experiencing difficulties and challenges in writing academic English essays, especially in content, organization, vocabulary, and mechanics, brought about by several factors, which include the lack of writing practice, a dislike for writing, writing anxiety and negative writing perception, as well as low writing motivation (Hang, 2021; Toba & Noor, 2019). In particular, the researchers note similar problems among the education major students who served as respondents for this study. Their writing exhibits errors in grammar and

mechanics, as seen in their various written outputs. It was also noticed that said students could not answer concisely or directly- as their responses tend to go off-topic. This lack of focus, organization, and mechanics has led the researchers to find means to enhance students' writing and learning.

The researchers suggest that journaling, particularly guided journaling, would be a helpful intervention. Journaling is a type of writing that seeks to record one's experiences and perceptions (Baresh, 2022), with Alt et al. (2022) mentioning how they are "pedagogical tools for nurturing students' lifelong learning skills". Moreover, journaling is also associated with the diary, where people can be personal and free in writing about their day-to-day life experiences. Journaling offers numerous advantages, including self-exploration, emotional recovery, personal development, and heightened self-knowledge. It provides a secure platform to record thoughts, experiences, and feelings, enabling people to sustain understanding, monitor development, and foster a stronger connection with themselves (Catania et al., 2023).

To improve the English writing abilities of School of Education (SOE) students, this research set out to investigate an innovative teaching technique that combines journaling with adapting the POWER-S structure approach. The POWER-S structure recognizes writing as a complex synthesis of language flexibility, vocabulary mastery, and creative expression; it taps the synergistic potential of journaling as a reflective and expressive writing practice (Bidari, 2021). The POWER-S structure consists of the following steps: Prewrite, Organize, Write/draft, Evaluate, Revise, and Share. In this study, however, the additional step "Feedback" is introduced. The teacher provides immediate feedback on the students' journaling output to give precise information on what to correct, to produce a positive reaction, and to provide points of improvement (Oubourmerrad, 2021; Salafia, 2021). Therefore, this study assumes that the addition of the "Feedback" component in the POWER-S & F approach would further enhance the student's English writing skills.

## **METHOD**

### ***Research Design***

This study employed a collaborative action research design, which provides a thorough and concrete analysis of the teaching areas that further improved the methods and strategies of the teaching pedagogies and practices (Rosmawati et al., 2024). Action research is often conducted in groups comprising practitioners and researchers. This design is appropriate as the study sought to determine the writing skill level or writing proficiency of students prior to and after the implementation of the intervention tool, any significant differences in their writing skills, and the challenges and experiences of the students while using the POWER S & F Journal template.

### ***Setting and Participants***

The participants for this study were purposely selected from a private university in Cagayan de Oro, Misamis Oriental, Philippines. The school holds full face-to-face classes as the administration shifted from hybrid to onsite during the current school year.

The research participants for this study were a specific group of students, namely 15 sophomore students enrolled in the Bachelor of Secondary Education major in English program at said university for the school year 2023-2024. The participants were in a crucial stage of their educational journey, where they were building a foundational understanding of teaching English to future secondary school students. The students are provided a wide range of opportunities to closely engage with those who were both learning about education and improving their English skills, making them an ideal target group for this research. It provided a unique platform to perform and use the Power-S & F Approach in the context of English education and offered a valuable and insightful perspective on the study's objectives.

### ***Instruments***

The researchers sought the expertise of several English teachers to validate the research-made POWER-S & F Journal template, which served as the intervention tool in enhancing students' writing skills. An adapted rubric was also carefully validated by the same teachers. A pilot testing of both instruments

was conducted among the third year Bachelor of Secondary Education Major in English students. The result shows adequate reliability, with a Cronbach alpha value of 0.85. Said rubric was used by the cooperating teacher to evaluate the pre-test and journal written entries of the students.

**Table 1.** *Rubric for POWER-S & F Journal Writing*

Rating	Content	Organization	Grammar	Vocabulary	Mechanics
Exemplary (5)	Exceptionally clear, focused, engaging with relevant, strong supporting details.	Effectively organized logically and creatively	No errors in agreement and number tense; no sentence errors; variety in length and type; sentence types relate to the style of writing.	Effective and engaging use of word choices.	Only one or no grammar errors in spelling punctuations, or capitalization.
Proficient (4)	Evident main idea with some support which may be general or limited	Organization is appropriate but conventional	One or two error agreement and number tenses; observed variety in length type of sentence errors; sentences are relatively related to the style of writing	Uses a variety of word choices to make writing interesting	No more than two grammar spelling, punctuation, or capitalization errors.
Developing (3)	The main idea may be unclear because supporting details is too general or even off-topic	Attempts at organization may be a list of events	Three to four errors in agreement and number tense; complete sentences; few run-on sentences	Shows some use of varied word choices	No more than four spelling punctuation, or capitalization errors

Emerging (2)	Purpose and main idea may be understood and cluttered by irrelevant details.	Lack of structure, disorganized and hard to follow	Five to six errors in agreement; number tense; complete sentence; no run-ons or fragments	Language is trite, vague, or flat.	No more than six spelling punctuation or capitalization errors
Beginning (1)	Lacks central Idea, development is minimal or non-existent	Lack of coherence, confusing	More than seven errors in agreement and number tense; many complete sentences; some fragments or run-ons	Inaccurate word choice, which obscures meaning	More than eight spelling, punctuation, or capitalization errors.

Lastly, the questions in the Focused Group Discussion (FGD) were also validated to ensure the validity and reliability of all the intervention tools in this study.

### ***Procedure***

The researcher's data gathering process took one and a half months and involved conducting a pre-test (free flow writing) that involved a specific theme, word count, and time duration. Students were given a certain topic and only constructed a text with a maximum of three hundred words (300) and were tasked to finish in fifteen (15) minutes. They were then asked to use the POWER-S & F Journal format for five (5) separate meetings. POWER-S & F stands for pre-write, organize, write, evaluate, revise, share, and feedback. This template was designed to be utilized by the research respondents as they articulate their ideas in the study's context. First, the respondents entered the prewriting phase by preparing their thoughts and ideas, considering the study's objectives, and establishing the foundation for their content. Subsequently, they proceeded to the organization phase, where they structure their ideas logically and coherently, creating an outline for their content to ensure it flows smoothly. Then, to the writing phase, following the template's guidance to craft their essays. After the initial draft, the respondents evaluated their work, assessing its alignment with the questions. It was then followed by the revision stage, where they made necessary refinements. Once their content was polished, the respondents were tasked to share their insights by submitting their work to their teacher.

Moreover, the researchers provided the cooperating teacher with a rubric that served as a tool to evaluate the student's written work in the POWER-S & F journal template. The essays were then graded by the cooperating teacher in terms of their content, organization, grammar, vocabulary and mechanics. The feedback step of the journaling template was emphasized, allowing the teacher to provide input on how students can enhance the quality and effectiveness of their work.

After five (5) sessions, the researchers gave the post-test utilizing the journal template, applying the same word count and the time frame that was previously stated. The pre-test and post-test served as the quantitative research method, for they utilized the rubrics adapted by the researcher. The Focus Group Discussion (FGD), which was carefully designed and structured to ensure the collected data was relevant to the research objectives, then followed the giving of the post-test. During these FGDs, one researcher acted as a moderator, guiding the conversation and encouraging participants to express their

views and insights. Additionally, one researcher was tasked to jot down notes and record the responses to open-ended questions.

### **Data Analysis**

The research used descriptive statistics that briefly interpret the given data of the participants to derive a mean which is designed to assess the quality of the journal entries completed by students before and after using the POWER S & F journal template. Rubrics (see Table 1) were used to rate the students' writing skills. The researcher also provided a distinct scoring guideline to ensure a comprehensive interpretation of the data. The means are interpreted as follows:

**Table 2.** *Verbal Description/Qualitative Interpretation of the Writing Skills Mean ratings*

<b>Score Range</b>	<b>Verbal Description / Qualitative Interpretation of the Writing Skills</b>
4.51-5.00	Exemplary – exceptionally clear, engaging, and well-supported with relevant details, showcasing logical and creative organization. Grammar is nearly flawless, with varied sentence structures that align with the writing style, while vocabulary usage is sophisticated and mechanics are virtually error-free, with only minor issues.
3.51-4.50	Proficient – presents a clear main idea supported by relevant details, demonstrating appropriate but conventional organization and generally accurate grammar. Vocabulary choices enhance interest, and mechanics are generally sound, with only minor errors.
2.51-3.50	Developing – unclear main idea with supporting details that are occasionally off-topic, featuring attempts at organization that may result in a list-like structure. Grammar shows some proficiency but includes a few errors, vocabulary usage demonstrates some variety, and mechanics exhibit some issues, although none are major.
1.51-2.50	Emerging – convey a discernible purpose and main idea but are cluttered with irrelevant details and lack clear organization, with several grammar errors present. Vocabulary usage may lack depth, and mechanics reveal several issues, although they are not pervasive.
1.00-1.51	Beginning – lacks a clear central idea and suffers from minimal development and coherence issues, with numerous grammar errors and problematic mechanics. Vocabulary choices often obscure meaning, making comprehension difficult for the reader.

The researcher also administered the Wilcoxon signed-rank test to check for significant differences in scores before and after the conduct of the intervention. The Wilcoxon signed-rank test was used as the normal distribution of the differences between paired individuals cannot be assumed because of the small number of participants in the study. In assessing the intervention, it is important to note that their effectiveness may not fully generalize beyond the study sample due to contextual differences in participant demographics and settings.

The results of the FGD were discussed thematically and served as support for the quantitative findings of the study.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### *Problem 1*

Table 3 presents the results of POWER-S & F Pre-Test and Post-Test and their difference in means.

**Table 3.** *Results of POWER-S & F Pre-Test and Post-Test*

	<b>Pre-test Average</b>	<b>Descriptor</b>	<b>Post-test Average</b>	<b>Descriptor</b>	<b>Difference</b>
Content	4.6	Exemplary	4.8	Exemplary	0.2
Organization	3.8	Proficient	4.8	Exemplary	1.0
Grammar	3.8	Proficient	4.8	Exemplary	1.0
Vocabulary	4.2	Proficient	4.8	Exemplary	0.6
Mechanics	3.6	Proficient	4.6	Exemplary	1.0
<b>Total Mean</b>	<b>20.0</b>	<b>Proficient</b>	<b>23.8</b>	<b>Exemplary</b>	<b>3.8</b>

As the table suggests, the pre-test showed that participants demonstrated exemplary content mastery, scoring an average of 4.6, implying a robust understanding of the subject matter before any intervention or training. However, there was room for improvement in organizational skills, as evidenced by an average score of 3.8, suggesting that participants could enhance the arrangement of words and sentences or the structure and coherence of their work. This further implies that students have varied styles in writing the desired task: a key quality of an effective paragraph in their overall writing output (Paul & Elder, 2019). Additionally, the structure of the sentences allows the students to express themselves freely and thus, continue creating with sense and connection between the texts (Jones-Mensah & Tabiri, 2020). Despite this, participants displayed proficiency in grammar and language usage, with average scores of 3.8 and 4.2 respectively, highlighting a strong command of language mechanics. Moreover, participants exhibited proficiency in mechanical accuracy, with an average score of 3.6, indicating adeptness in applying mechanical rules such as punctuation and spelling. This allows the students to deliver their ideas to the readers and focus on the content as well as the awareness contrasts the content's common mistakes in capitalization, spelling, and punctuation in texts (Yuliawati, 2021). Overall, while participants demonstrated strength in content mastery and language skills, areas for improvement were identified in the sub-categories "organization" and "mechanics."

The post-test shows a significant improvement in participants' proficiency levels across all skill areas. First, participants demonstrated exemplary mastery of content, organization, grammar vocabulary, and mechanics, as evidenced by high average scores of 4.8 in each category. This exceptional performance indicates a significant enhancement in participants' understanding and application of the subject matter to the procedural structured approach of POWER-S & F, surpassing the proficiency levels observed in the Pre-test. The consistency of exemplary ratings across all the assessed domains suggests a comprehensive and well-rounded development of skills following the intervention or training program. Additionally, they exhibited exemplary command of grammar, vocabulary, and language mechanics, showcasing their ability to communicate effectively and professionally. Bidari (2021) states that the POWERS structured approach allows one to focus on the structure, content and style, which includes writing as a developmental tool of a writer. Thus, the impact of the process of the implemented journaling in this study was significantly modeled as a writing guide and a technique for writing effectively (Azizjonovna & Ravshanzoda, 2023). Participants excelled in organizing their work and demonstrating clear and coherent presentation of ideas.



The notable exception in the post-test results is the mechanics category, where participants scored slightly lower, with an average of 4.6. While still exemplary, this suggests a slight improvement in applying mechanical rules such as Punctuation and Spelling. Hence, this mistake is commonly or may also be unconsciously produced by individuals who significantly prioritize the content or ideas to convey over the technicalities of the text (Yuliawati, 2021). Despite this, the overall post-test reflects a remarkable achievement, with participants demonstrating outstanding performance across all assessed skill areas shown by the increase of 3.8 points from the pre-test mean of 20.0 with a descriptor of "Proficient" to the post-test mean of 3.8 with a descriptor of "Exemplary."

### **Problem 2**

Table 4 presents the results of POWER-S & F Pre-Test and Post-Test and their difference in means.

**Table 4.** *Test of Significant Difference*

Paired Samples t-Test	Statistic	<i>p</i>
Wilcoxon W	15	0.0290*

*\*Significant at 0.05*

The "Test of Significant Difference" section, along with the accompanying statistical tests and p-value, is crucial for determining the statistical significance of the observed improvement. Here, the p-value of 0.0290\* indicates that the difference between pre-test and post-test scores is statistically significant at a confidence level 0.05. This suggests that the performance improvement is unlikely due to random chance and is likely attributed to the intervention. Furthermore, the change in descriptors from "Proficient" to "Exemplary" in every part supports the idea that the intervention resulted in a significant improvement. It shows that participants not only met the required level of competency but also outperformed expectations in several areas related to the skill or knowledge area that was evaluated. Overall, these results highlight how well the intervention improved participants' abilities or knowledge, as shown by the qualitative and quantitative studies.

The results signify a substantial in participants' competency scores, indicating a deepened understanding and enhanced application of the subject matter. In the matter of teaching and learning, there are present problems that the task of a writer may have unconscious errors or mistakes in their texts. Hence, mistakes and errors are shown within their writing abilities. "Error correction or corrective feedback" allows an individual to be aware, grasps the gaps of the mistakes, and helps to navigate and modify the works (Oubourmerrad, 2021) which is done by the feedback that allows the students to review their previous work prior writing for the new set of journaling. The exemplary rating across all domains underscores the effectiveness of the intervention, and the feedback in fostering the comprehensive skill development allows the student to further improve their English writing skills and output in the journal. Reinforcing mechanical accuracy alongside maintaining the exemplary standards achieved in content mastery, organization, grammar, vocabulary, and overall proficiency will further enhance participants' abilities and ensure continued success in their academic or professional endeavors.

While the interventions used have shown promising results within the specific study sample, a limitation in the generalizability of these findings to broader populations exists. Variability in participant demographics, settings, and other contextual factors may impact the effectiveness of these interventions when applied in different environments.

### **Problem 3**

Problem 3 discusses the experiences and challenges of SOE students before and after the implementation of journaling using the POWER-S & F approach based on the Focus Group Discussion (FGD).

### 1. Difficulties in the structured format

While some participants viewed journaling as a valuable tool for digesting class content and sparking creativity, others expressed difficulties with its structured format, finding it mentally taxing. Despite these challenges, participants recognized the benefits of journaling in enhancing coherence, refining writing skills, and heightening awareness of cognitive processes. However, the discussion underscored the nuanced nature of journaling, emphasizing the necessity for accommodations to address time constraints and adaptability issues specific to each individual's needs.

### 2. Uncertainty throughout the writing stages

Within the discussion, participants shared contrasting experiences across different stages of the journaling process. The prewriting stage emerged as a common hurdle, with participants grappling to organize their thoughts and seamlessly integrate them into coherent narratives. While some found solace in the act of writing itself, particularly in structuring paragraphs, others voiced uncertainties during the revision and critique phase, grappling with doubts regarding the correctness and relevance of their revisions. This complexity highlights the necessity for tailored support mechanisms to navigate the multifaceted journaling stages effectively.

### 3. Potential uses and benefits

Moreover, the discussion illuminated the pivotal role of journaling in cultivating study habits, enhancing memory retention, and deepening understanding of course material among college students. Participants underscored the significance of instructor feedback in pinpointing areas for improvement and fostering collaborative learning environments. While acknowledging the inherent challenges in journaling, such as time constraints and motivational hurdles, participants recognized its potential to stimulate self-expression and critical thinking skills. In sum, the FGD underscored the overarching benefits of journaling in promoting student engagement, augmenting learning outcomes, and nurturing growth as proficient communicators and critical thinkers.

## CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The primary goal of this research paper is to help SOE students enhance their English writing skills through the Power S & F journal template intervention. Based on the result, it can be concluded that the intervention has helped enhance the students' English writing skills in terms of their content, organization, grammar, vocabulary, and mechanics.

Analyzing the writing performance of the students before and after using the POWER-S & F approach in journaling demonstrates a significant improvement in all skill areas post-intervention. The intervention effectively enhanced students' content mastery, organization, grammar, vocabulary, and mechanics, leading to exemplary proficiency levels. Thus, the assumption that college students' English writing skills will be enhanced using the Power-S & F Approach is confirmed. This conclusion is supported by the studies of Bidari (2021), who mentioned the importance of reflective and expressive writing practice that one gets from journaling, and of Oubourmerrad (2021) and Salafia (2021), who reinforce the importance of feedbacking to provide specific points on what to correct, to aim for a constructive response, and to offer clear suggestions for improvement.

However, even though the participants excelled overall, a need to focus on reinforcing mechanical accuracy, particularly in punctuation and spelling, is recommended for further enhancement. In addition, given that the results revealed the time-consuming nature of the intervention, it is recommended to consider implementing this during remedial or make-up classes.

In summary, although students found the intervention challenging, they acknowledged its valuable role in helping them organize their thoughts effectively and pay closer attention to writing mechanics. Despite the difficulty, the intervention improved their writing clarity and coherence. By engaging with the structured process, students developed better writing skills and became more mindful of the technical aspects of writing. This highlights the intervention's effectiveness in enhancing students' writing abilities and fostering a deeper understanding of writing mechanics.



For future researchers interested in advancing upon this study, it's important to note that the Power S & F journal template intervention could be particularly effective for individuals seeking to enhance their writing skills. To maximize its impact, it's advisable to tailor the intervention to participants who may benefit most, potentially by assessing their writing proficiency levels beforehand.

One approach could involve implementing clear criteria for participation, ensuring that individuals with varying skill levels are appropriately matched with the intervention. Moreover, establishing specific guidelines for the length and complexity of journal entries could help streamline the process and make it more manageable for participants. In terms of time allocation, while shorter, more frequent journaling sessions can be beneficial, it's essential to allocate adequate time for meaningful engagement. Therefore, future researchers should consider dedicating at least 30 minutes to each session to allow participants to delve into the writing process effectively.

Furthermore, integrating the intervention into broader language skill development activities could enhance its effectiveness. This might involve extending the duration of journaling sessions or incorporating them into longer periods dedicated to language learning. By addressing these recommendations, future researchers can build upon the foundation established by this study and further optimize writing interventions for participants aiming to enhance their skills.

It is also recommended that future researchers explore covering a larger number of participants to synthesize the effectiveness of the interventions and to evaluate whether similar outcomes can be achieved across diverse groups.

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