

IMPROVING WRITING THROUGH THE MARKETING CURRICULUM: A LONGITUDINAL STUDY

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ABSTRACT

Writing skills are essential for marketing students (Kelly and Gaedeke 1990; McDaniel and White 1993), yet at this research site, as with probably many other colleges, writing skill had shown no improvement through four years of business education (Bacon and Anderson 2004). One reason why writing skills are not sufficiently emphasized in marketing education is that they are difficult and time consuming to teach.

A new approach to teaching writing skills, based on an automatically-scored instrument, has recently shown potential for improving writing skills while not demanding too much of the teacher's time (Bacon and Anderson 2004). The method asks students to identify grammatical errors in a short passage of text (approximately 1.5 pages double-spaced). Substantial improvements in editing skill were achieved across a single pretest and posttest using this test (ES = 0.7 standard deviations). Importantly, the only intervention by the teacher was to distribute a study sheet to prepare for the editing test.

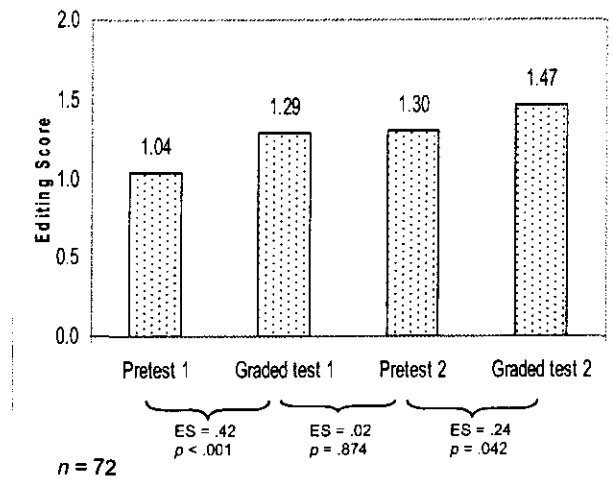
The present research extends Bacon and Anderson's (2004) findings by addressing two research questions:

RQ1: What pattern of improvement and forgetting is apparent after repeated cycles of pre-testing and testing on the editing task?

RQ2: How strongly is performance on the editing task related to writing performance?

To address these questions, data were collected over several quarters and across several courses. Multiple forms were used, and all forms were equated using the Rasch model (Rasch 1980). A total of 566 observations (pretests or posttests) were collected. The pretests were unannounced and did not count toward the student's grade, while the posttest was announced and did count toward the grade. Of all the observations, 72 students were found to have completed the pretest and posttest at least twice and so were included in the longitudinal study. To measure actual writing skills, writing samples were collected from 68 students and scored by two independent raters ($\alpha = .79$).

FIGURE 1
IMPROVEMENTS IN WRITING OVER TIME



As shown in Figure 1, editing scores did improve with each administration of the editing test. Surprisingly, little or no decay in learning was observed between the first graded test and the second pretest (average retention interval = 18 weeks). The stability of this learning may be related to the frequent use of this skill, as opposed to the one-time learning characterized by the knowledge studied in Bacon and Stewart (2006).

The correlation between actual writing skill and editing skill was found to be .43 ($p < .001$). This relationship, while significant, was not as strong as it might otherwise have been due to the fact that students may have received outside help on writing their papers, they may have used a grammar checker, and they may have avoided grammatical forms that they were uncomfortable with.

In summary, evidence was found that editing skills can be improved with repeated administrations of an automatically-scored editing test, and that the improvement in skill is fairly stable over time. Further, the skill demonstrated on the editing task is associated with actual writing skill. Thus, this research demonstrates the effectiveness of repeated automated testing in improving student writing skills.

References Available on Request