

## Graphic Organizers to Improve Students' Writing on Recount Paragraphs

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### Abstract

Writing is said to be difficult for the undergraduate students of second semester students of English department of UNISSULA. They found many difficulties in some aspects such as topic sentence, supporting sentence and concluding sentence. There were 10 of 23 students who got 75 on their writing score. Hence, the writer wanted to help them in improving their writing quality especially on those main structure of a paragraph by applying graphic organizers. Graphic organizers were used in the teaching learning process by conducting action research as the research method. The action research used two cycles. The results were that the students' writing is better. The way they wrote topic sentence, supporting sentence, and concluding sentence were better than the previous one in the preliminary cycle. It was proved by the percentage of the students who got the score under the standard score of writing, namely, 75.

**Keywords:** graphic organizers, writing, recount paragraphs

### Introduction

Writing is the one of the basic skills of the English learning. It is generally considered as one of the most difficult than other skills for foreign language students. Even native speakers feel difficulty in showing a good command of writing (Johnstone, Ashbaugh, & Warfield, 2002). Writing skill is an essential element for students' academic success because writing helps to i) reinforce the grammatical structure, ii) enhance the students' vocabulary, iii) and assist other language skills such as reading, listening and speaking (Kellogg, 2008). The ability to write something in a productive way is an indicator of success during the learning process (Geiser & Studly, 2001).

Based on the writer's preliminary observation of the second year undergraduate students of the writing class, the writer found that they got low score under the performance standard of achievement that was 75. There were only 10 students of 23 students got 75. It proved that they had problems in writing recount paragraph.

Most of the students had problems in providing good paragraph structures. Oshima & Hogue (2006) mentioned that the elements of a good paragraph are



topic sentence, supporting sentences and concluding sentence. Moreover, the writer found that the students' paragraphs did not show the unity and coherence as the important element of a good paragraph. Unity means that a paragraph discusses one and only one main idea from beginning to end. From the students' writing, the writer found that they discussed more than one idea in each paragraph which meant that the supporting sentences did not directly prove the main idea. On the other hand, coherence in writing means that the movement of one sentence to other sentences must be logical and smooth (Oshima & Hogue, 2006). The writer did not find that the students provided smooth sentences. There were many sudden jumps of their sentences. Those were because the students did not have many ideas to write. Hence, most of the students were not able to write well.

From the preliminary observation results, the writer decided that the way of teaching needs to be improved. Hebert et.al (2010) stated that writing is a skill which can be learned by using many kinds of techniques. The appropriate technique or strategy can solve the students' difficulties in writing. To solve the students' problem in writing, the writer decided to implement graphic organizers. At the end of the implementation, the writer expected that the students were able to write recount paragraphs.

Graphic organizers can be used in order to assess the degree of students' understanding and enhance recall, retention, and summarization of main ideas, which can often functions as a plan leading to writing tasks (Manoli & Papadopoulou, 2012). Students who work in writing tasks have to connect their ideas. Hence, graphic organizers help them to structure the ideas to relate with other ideas (Zaini et.al, 2010). In graphic organizers, their ideas are structured in a hierarchical top-down fashion which can be the guidance to improve their writing (Clark, 2007). By implementing graphic organizers, the writer wanted to investigate whether graphic organizers improved the students' writing on recount paragraph.

Sam (2013) clarified that a graphic organizer is a diagram which represents a relationship directed by sequence of event which can aid learning process. The use of graphic organizers will be the appropriate teaching tool to help increase learning, make learning meaningful, and maximizing the amount of time students remain engage in the process. Crawford and Canine (2000) reiterated, "graphic organizers help students sort, simplify, show relationships, make meaning, and manage data quickly and easily" (as cited in Gallavan & Kottler, 2007, p.117). As the result, students' level of motivation increases, they recall information at a faster pace, and there will be greater long term achievement if the strategy is implemented effectively (Gallavan and Kottler, 2007).

The presentations of the events process the textual information. The picture presentations facilitate understanding of knowlegde in a given limited time (Ciascai, 2009). Graphic organizers provide new language that facilitates classroom communication, as well as deepen understanding of the content that teachers work to transmit. By using the effective implementation of graphic organizers, lessons will become genuine as students will begin to engage, and make connections between the ideas and concepts being taught.



## Method

This study was designed as classroom action research based on two reasons. The first, the problem investigated in this study is the problem that the writer found in the classroom and had the purpose of contributing changes or improvements in the writer's classroom. The problem was implementing graphic organizers towards the students' writing on recount paragraphs. Writing recount paragraphs was one of the materials that the students learn in paragraph writing class. Paragraph writing class is the very basic writing class before they continue to the next writing class. Hence, at the end of this study the majority of the students were able to write recount paragraphs. The second, action research needs reflective practices to figure out what teaching strategies suit the writer's students' needs. Action research has several characteristics as follows: (a) action research involves self-reflective practice to identify problems (Burns, 2010; Kemmis & McTaggart, 1988; Stake, 2010), (b) researchers employ critical and systematic research approach to examine their own practices (Burns, 2010; Frerrance, 2000), and (c) action research is conducted to make changes or improvement in practices (Burns, 2010; Hatch, 2002; Kemmis & McTaggart, 1988; Stake, 2010). Thus designing this study as an action research design was aligned with the purpose of the study.

This study follows four stages in conducting action research according to Kemmis & McTaggart (1988). The four stages were planning, action, observation, and reflection as presented in figure 3.1.

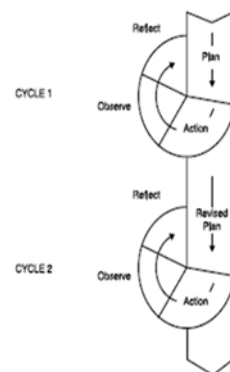


Figure 1: The action Research Cycles (Kemmis & McTaggart, 1988: 11)

There were two cycles in this study to investigate how graphic organizers help students in writing recount paragraph.

### Preliminary Observation

In this stage, the writer identified the problem in the classroom and defined a plan of actions in order to make improvements in specific focus by doing observation. The problem investigated was the majority of the students did not write recount paragraph well in paragraph writing class. There were only 10 students of 23 students got 75. It proved that they had problems in recount paragraph writing. Thus, it was important to classify the factors causing their lack of writing and the way to improve their writing because students' writing plays important role in developing their skills. This study applied graphic organizers to



improve the students' writing. In doing this study, there were indicators used to determine the level of good writing. Oshima & Hogue (2006) suggest that a good paragraph writing pays attention to some indicators such as showing good format, providing appropriate mechanics, having good content, having good organization, and providing good grammar and sentence structure. The following is the table containing the indicators of good writing paragraph.

NO	INDICATORS	REQUIREMENTS
1.	Format	There is a title The title is centered The first line is indented There are margins on both sides The paragraph is double-spaced
2.	Mechanics	There is a period, a question mark, or an exclamation mark after every sentence. Capital letters are used correctly The spelling is correct
3.	Content	The paragraph fits the assignment The paragraph is interesting to read The paragraph shows thought and care
4.	Organization	The paragraph begins with a topic sentence that has both a topic and controlling idea The paragraph contains several specific and factual supporting sentences that explain or prove the topic sentence, including at least one example The paragraph ends with an appropriate concluding sentence
5.	Grammar and Sentence Structure	Estimate a grammar and sentence structure

### Planning

In the planning stage, the writer designed the lesson plan and materials of graphic organizers used in the paragraph writing class during the study.

### Action

In this stage, the writer applied graphic organizers as the intervention of this study. The students' recount paragraphs were based on the information they wrote in their graphic organizers. The students had to provide information about their topic sentence in their graphic organizers then they developed their topic sentences into supporting sentences and finally at the end of their writing they had to provide the concluding sentence.

### Observation

In the observation stage, the writer observed the progress of the students' writing of recount paragraph. The writer used an observation sheet to observe the students' writing. The writer completed the observation sheet.



## Reflection

In the last stage, the writer reflected on the results of the intervention by examining the data gathered from the observation sheet and students' writing. Then the writer analyzed the data and tried to conclude whether the implementation of graphic organizers enhance the quality of writing. The results of the first cycle was used to design the cycle 2 in terms of the lesson plan, and the way the writer facilitated the students' writing was by giving them more opportunities to write.

This study examined factors influencing the lack of students' writing in writing class and the implementation of graphic organizers to improve students' writing on recount paragraphs. In order to reach those purposes, the data of this study were collected by using quantitative and qualitative data. Quantitative data were collected by computing students' writing score. In collecting the quantitative data, the writer conducted written tests. The students were asked to write recount paragraphs through graphic organizers. The purpose of conducting the written tests was to see the students' writing skill. Action research more focused on the process than the products resulted in the study. Thus, the writing tests which were used in this study were to support the data. On the other hand, in collecting qualitative data, the writer used observation sheet, and interview guideline. Observation sheet was used to identify all condition that happened during the teaching and learning process. While the interview was used to know the students' feeling, problem and other condition.

In assessing the students' writing, the writer used scoring rubric as proposed by Oshima and Hogue (2007) which focuses on five aspects of writing. They are format, mechanics, content, organization, and the last are grammar and sentence structure. Nevertheless, in analyzing the students' writing, the writer calculated the mean of the students' score in each cycle, the following formulas was applied:

$$x = \frac{\sum X}{N}$$

where,  $x$  = The mean of students' score  
 $\sum X$  = The total score  
 $N$  = The number of the students

Next, to categorize the number of students who were competent in writing recount paragraphs, the following formula was applied:

$$P = \frac{R}{T}$$

where,  $P$  = The percentage of those who get the points up to 75  
 $R$  = The number of students who get the points up to 75  
 $T$  = The total number of students

The participant of this study was 23 English department students in Sultan Agung Islamic University, Semarang, Indonesia. The students were second year of undergraduate students majoring education.



## Findings and discussion

This study was designed as action research. This study implemented graphic organizers to improve students' writing on recount paragraphs in two cycles. The action research was formed in several steps. They are pre cycle, cycle 1 and cycle 2.

### Pre cycle

In pre-cycle, I investigated the problem faced by the students by doing observation. I used observation sheets and students' writing test to see the students' writing ability before the intervention of graphic organizers were applied. The observation resulted that the majority of the students did not provide good writing in teaching and learning process. Most of students were not capable of conveying their ideas into good recount paragraphs related to the topic given in the class. Based on the observation sheet, I categorized the students' difficulties into some criterias. The criterias were that they were not capable of providing good format, mechanics, content, organization and the last criteria were grammar and sentence structure. There were 10 students out of 23 students who could provide good writing and got 75.

After understanding that the influencing factors towards the students' writing were format, mechanics, content, organization and grammar and sentence structure, the writer constructed the explanation based on those findings. Thus, during the intervention in cycle 1, the writer formulated correct and complete sentences, topic sentence, supporting sentences, concluding sentence, unity and coherence to them before the writer implemented graphic organizers to the their writing. In short, the findings in pre-cycle became the basis of the intervention in cycle 1 in making planning and materials for conducting graphic organizers.

### Cycle 1

Planning was very important in conducting a teaching and learning process. Thus, the writer made a lesson plan and teaching materials for cycle 1 based on the findings of pre-cycle. The lesson plan was for 100 minutes every meeting which the writer allocated for various learning activities. The time allocation for every session was 15 minutes to introduce the concept and the rules of graphic organizers. The writer gave them the overview of what they were going to do in the sessions to give them an understanding of the concept of graphic organizers. The writer distributed the graphic organizers to the students so they could catch the bases information before they went on to the implementation of graphic organizers in their recount paragraphs. Further, the writer explained them how to put their information or ideas in graphic organizers such as they did not need to write all their story or complete paragraphs in the graphic organizers rather than put their topic sentences and brief or the main supporting sentences of each paragraph in each part of graphic organizers. Then, the writer handled 10 minutes for building knowledge of the related topic. The writer gave 10 minutes for asking questions of their difficult words about their ideas which had to be written in the graphic organizers. Then, the writer had 30 minutes for group work, and 15 minutes for the class activity and 20 minutes for drafting their writing into graphic



organizers provided by the writer which was assessed in the next meeting for the writing score.

Finally, the students and the writer reviewed the writing and made suggestions on how to improve future writing. In cycle 1, there were two points becoming bases for the cycle 2. The first, overviewing the students' writing was important to make sure that the students understood their writing. However, directly giving the English terms of the students' difficult vocabularies was not appropriate to build their memory about their lack of vocabularies. Hence, I decided not to provide the English terms of their difficult vocabularies rather than permitted them to open their dictionary. The second, choosing interesting topic was important to help students creating their ideas into paragraphs. The students mentioned that by choosing an interesting topic they would be able to develop their ideas into paragraphs easily. Thus, I asked them about the interesting topic to be the topic in cycle 2.

## Cycle 2

After reflecting to the findings of cycle 1, the writer made a lesson plan for cycle 2. The lesson plan was allocated for 100 minutes as in cycle 1. However, the learning activities and the time allocation for each learning activities was different. The writer used 15 minutes for explaining the rules of the graphic organizers intervention and building the students' background knowledge related to the topic. In cycle 2, the writer did not give them explanation about graphic organizers because they had got the information and the concept in cycle 1. Thus the writer skipped it. Then the writer built their background knowledge related to the topic to their experience. The students showed their interest in the issue. It might be because it was their decision. Most of the students suggested the topic to be implemented in their writing.

Next, the students were asked to complete the graphic organizers individually. They were asked whether they found any difficult vocabularies to be written in the graphic organizers. Some students mentioned they did not know the English term or the vocabularies. Later, they were permitted to start to open their dictionary. Allowing the students to open their dictionary was helpful for them because during the process of teaching and learning it made them improve their vocabularies mastery since they were the second year undergraduate students.

Then, the students were asked to check their writing by asking their friends whether their sentences were correct or incorrect. The quality of their writing were better than their writing in the first cycle. Moreover, the students provided less incomplete sentences than in the previous cycle which indicated that at this topic they had enough ideas to put them into paragraphs. The students found that graphic organizers made them easier in writing recount paragraph in cycle 2. In brief, based on cycle 2, the writer could say that the implementation of graphic organizers made the students had better writing especially in recount paragraphs writing.

In assessing the students' writing in each test, the writer followed the writing assessment rubric as suggested by Oshima & Hogue (2006) which consisted of format (5 points), mechanics (5 points), content (20 points), organization (35 points) and grammar and sentence structure (35 points). The grand total of the



score was 100. The students' score increased from the first writing test to the last writing test. It can be seen in the table below:

Table 1: Students' Writing Scores in Test I, Test II, and Test III

No	Students' Initial Name	Test I	Test II	Test III
1.	X1	66	70	78
2.	X2	71	76	81
3.	X3	65	76	81
4.	X4	65	77	80
5.	X5	66	70	84
6.	X6	70	80	88
7.	X7	69	74	78
8.	X8	76	81	84
9.	X9	82	80	84
10.	X10	84	88	97
11.	X11	76	88	84
12.	X12	68	76	84
13.	X13	82	84	92
14.	X14	82	87	90
15.	X15	72	78	80
16.	X16	74	78	80
17.	X17	70	77	86
18.	X18	80	80	90
19.	X19	78	82	90
20.	X20	78	82	82
21.	X21	84	90	97
22.	X22	70	77	92
23.	X23	71	80	94
	Total Score	1706	1831	1976
	Mean	74.17	79.60	85.91

Based on the result above, there were 10 students got up to 75 in the first writing test. In the second writing test, there were 20 students who got up to 75. However, in the third writing test there were 23 students who got up to 75. They proved that the students had the ability to write well during the implementation of graphic organizers.

After the writer got the result of each test, then the writer made the range of the students' score improvement as follows:

Table 2: Range of Students' Score Improvement

No	Range of Improvement Score	Students' Initial Name	Total	Percentage
1.	21-30	X22, X23	2	8.6%
2.	11-20	X1, X3, X4, X5, X10, X12, X19, X21	8	34.7%
3.	1-10	X2, X6, X7, X8, X9, X11,	13	56.5%





X13, X14, X15, X16, X17,  
X18, X20

Total 23 100%

To know the number of students who got writing score up to 75, then the writer calculated the percentage of each test.

Table 3: The Percentage of Students who Got Score up to 75

Test	Students who got score up to 75	Percentage
Test 1	10	43.4%
Test 2	20	86.9%
Test 3	23	100%

Based on the result above, there were 13 students who got writing score below 75. In the second writing test, it was found that there were 3 students got writing score below 75. However, in the third writing test it was found that no students got writing score below 75.

After conducting the study by using graphic organizers in teaching writing of recount paragraph, it was found that the implementation of graphic organizers improve the students' paragraphs writing. It was supported by Tayib (2015) who investigated the effect of using graphic organizers on writing. He found that graphic organizers model had significantly improved the students' writing ability and had positively impacted their attitudes towards writing.

The use of graphic organizers showed improvement in students' writing. It could be seen from the students' writing score and the result of the observation sheet and interview. However, in order to get the maximum benefit of the graphic organizers implementation, the teacher should be creative in creating them. Moreover, in deciding the topics of the writing tests, the teacher should be wisely discuss them with the students. The second semester students are the students who need serious attention since they learn the language which is not their first language.

Based on the interview, the writer found that the students were interested in using graphic organizers in writing of recount paragraphs. Graphic organizers helped them create good paragraphs which followed the aspects of good paragraph writing as suggested by Oshima & Hogue (2006). They understood how to make good topic sentence, supporting sentences and concluding sentence. They could provide the unity and cohesion of their writing easily. In addition, they enjoyed their writing.

## Conclusion

From the result of this study, it can be concluded that graphic organizers implementation improve the second year of undergraduate students in writing recount paragraphs. The problems they face previously, such as the problems in showing good format, providing appropriate mechanics, having good content, having good organization, and providing good grammar and sentence structure, are solved after they got the intervention by using graphic organizers.



Moreover, the students' writing difficulties also solved. They stated that after having graphic organizers, they did not get bored but they had fun during their writing activities. It was because they enjoyed their writing. By using graphic organizers in writing recount paragraphs, they felt that writing was not difficult anymore. They did not get frustrated as they faced in the previous activities when they had not got the intervention of graphic organizers.

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