

Biography Writing in English as a Foreign Language

By

Justin L. Otto

A Master's Paper

**Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of
The Requirements for the Degree of
Master of Arts in TESOL**

Major Advisor's Signature

Date

University of Wisconsin-River Falls

2014

Table of Contents:

1. Introduction	1
2. Narratives in EFL Writing Classrooms	3
2.1 The Benefits of Instruction on Narrative Writing	3
2.2 Difficulties Faced by EFL Writers of Narratives	4
3. The Genre Approach to Teaching Narrative Writing	7
3.1 Overview of the Genre Approach	7
3.2 Methods Used for Genre-based Instruction on Narrative Writing	13
3.3 Results from Genre-based Instruction on Narrative Writing	16
3.3.1 The Assessment of Genre-based Tasks	16
3.3.2 Changes in Grammatical Control	17
3.3.3 Changes in Rhetoric and Organization	19
3.3.4 Changes in Appropriacy	20
4. Biographies as Factual Narratives	21
5. Biographies and Contrastive Rhetoric	32
6. Lesson Plans	35
7. Conclusion	51
8. Appendices	52
9. Works Cited	61

1. Introduction

This paper examines narrative writing in English as a foreign language (EFL) classrooms, and then presents a series of lesson plans for teaching how to write biographies as factual narratives. These lesson plans would appear in a writing class for students attending a university in East Asia. While my interest in this subject stems from my background in social work, the specific requirements for similar writing tasks in healthcare and human services professions are not addressed here. Instead, I am providing a general approach to writing biographies, and this provides a foundation for other tasks such as providing written background information about elderly patients. In human services settings, it is uncommon to write about someone as illustrious as Audrey Hepburn, but she is the sample subject in my lesson plans. As an enduring cultural icon, Hepburn's image is already familiar to English students in many parts of the world. Hepburn is also chosen here to help students understand that the fame of an individual should not interfere with an accurate account of this individual's life. In the genre of biography any subject is held to the same rules: in the words of Leon Edel, "the biographer who worships his hero blinds himself to the meaning of his material" (12).

Using the interesting American figure Audrey Hepburn, an actress with international appeal, I have drafted a series of lesson plans to guide students into creative and accurate biography writing, thus arming them with a broad set of rules that may be applied to specific

settings, including human services occupations. Students in this course will learn how to present information objectively and with supporting evidence, with the understanding that the selection of facts is itself a creative process. Students will want to take this course because it will prepare them for other nonfiction narrative writing tasks in English, such as telling personal stories, recounting historical events, and writing life histories. These tasks apply to many fields, including social work and journalism. My lesson plans are meant to be part of an EFL writing course on creative nonfiction. In this lesson, students will first examine the elements of English language biographies and then use what they have learned to write about elderly subjects of their choosing. Students will work together as partners to see how individual reports of the same subject may vary.

International students from varying backgrounds should be taught the standards of appropriate biographical writing when they embark on writing about others in English. To do this, I advocate the genre approach to teaching biography as a type of narrative—essentially a story with a chronological design, in which an author must make creative decisions, including the highlighting of different events that the author considers most relevant to the representation of her subject. Prior to focusing on the subgenre of biography, this paper examines research on teaching the *pre-genre* (meaning basis for fiction and nonfiction genres, including autobiographies and fairy tales) of narrative (Swales 61). Extensive research has been done on this pre-genre, although specific studies on biography

writing remain to be undertaken (61). I will examine two classes that were taught narrative writing, the former a low-proficiency class and the latter a high-proficiency class, to illustrate the application and assessment of genre-based instruction. My paper will then examine the subgenre of biography and how it relates to other narratives. To further illustrate how biography writing differs between language groups, I will close my literature review with an overview of the concept of *contrastive rhetoric*. This term is used in the literature to help us understand the connection between language and thought. Finally, placing biography writing in the context of narrative genres and considering how narratives in East Asian cultures differ from narratives in English, I will present a series of lesson plans for teaching biography as a subgenre of narrative.

2. Narratives in EFL Writing Classrooms

2.1 The Benefits of Instruction on Narrative Writing

Narrative writing, including writing personal stories about one's self and others, is a common subject of language study (Kormos 148). This is because it is ubiquitous, as well as enjoyable to most students (Tannen 5, Wang and Wen 239). Narratives are found embedded in other genres such as autobiography and biography (Kormos 148). Furthermore, the *canonicity*—or importance—of events in common narratives highlights memorable scenes in life (Bruner 11). Classes where life stories are shared have become popular in

many institutions with EFL programs. Jun, an English student in China's Sun Yat-Sen University, had this to say about the experience of learning creative nonfiction writing: "I didn't know writing can be such fun in life; I didn't know writing can help me get close to people. Until I met creative writing course this semester!" (Dai 553).

According to Nugrahenny Zacharias, there are many advantages to teaching narrative writing in all of its forms. First, it builds a base for other types of writing. This is seen in how children begin forming discourse by storytelling—about themselves, real others, and imaginary others. Second, narratives with a personal nature allow students to connect the outside world with the academic world, thus strengthening the teacher's role: when students bring what they have learned in class to their daily lives, the learning process continues after class has ended. Students asked to write about others begin to see the complexity in human experience, and may apply what they have learned in other interactions. Third, narratives play a vital role in the construction of human experience, as storytelling humans seek order in an often chaotic world. This process plays a therapeutic role, as writers are encouraged to use depth and feeling to accurately represent their subjects; research has found that writing this way promotes mental clarity and even physical health (95-97). Thus narrative writing exercises are beneficial for students.

2.2 Difficulties faced by EFL Writers of Narratives

Throughout countries in East Asia, traditional teaching methods have not prepared students for narrative writing assignments. Writing about Japan, David Mauchlan observes, “One commonly sees students in a train studying lexical words as if memorizing a dictionary, and English words in advertisements are often completely out of their normal context” (94).

I have witnessed similar behavior in South Korea and in Taiwan. Students in this part of the world are typically expected to learn English, like other subjects, via the faculty of memory.

When students become better writers, however, such an approach does not allow them to understand English in broader contexts, such as narratives (79). This may be because a student’s first language affects her organizational process when writing.

In her comparison of the content of Korean and English narratives, J.Y. Kang discovered that cohesion and written discourse features varied in Korean students’ writings in Korean and in English. Korean students seemed aware of a difference, or target form, and this is evidenced by the fact that their essays revealed different patterns depending on the language that they used. “Unlike in their Korean narratives, the Korean EFL learners used pronouns for references most frequently in their English narratives, as the NES [Native English Speakers] did,” and “Koreans used causative conjunctions and additive conjunctions frequently in their English writing” (272). A MANOVA [Multivariate analysis of variance] on this data confirms that Korean writers favored causative, temporal, and simultaneous

temporal conjunctions, just as they were more likely than the NES group to use lexical repetitions and synonyms in their narratives (272). Written discourse features differed in that the Koreans used fewer of each feature in their writing samples, especially relative clauses and conjoined phrases. Furthermore, this study finds that the NES used more of the identified criteria in their samples (“participles, adverbial clauses that express manner, purposive adverbial clauses, and nominalizations”) when compared to Korean EFL narratives, and the usage of relative clauses in general varied greatly, but when the NES narratives were compared to the Korean students’ L1 narratives, no differences were found between the use of these features (272).

Wang and Wen’s findings on the use of Chinese as a first language in EFL writing further illustrate difficulties faced by East Asian EFL writers of narratives. Wang and Wen studied sixteen female Chinese English majors at Nanjing University in China. These students had eight years of EFL instruction averaging four hours per week and ranged from intermediate to advanced learners (229). Wang and Wen learned that code switching (alternating between languages) to Chinese was more frequent in the composition process for narratives, rather than argumentative essays, when students were thinking aloud. Code switching entered the think-aloud data 32% of the time in the former and 24% of the time for the latter. (234). Narratives may draw more upon the L1 of the writer. Considering that narratives are the first form of discourse learned by children, this makes sense. Students

know how to tell stories, and doing so requires reference to L1 skills. There is some evidence to support that code switching is to the writer's advantage (Raimis 418).

In helping us to understand the gap between first and second language writing in East Asia, Virginia Gonzalez chose to study the writing of one Mandarin speaking Taiwanese student under the pseudonym of 'Lucy Marie' (423). Findings for Lucy Marie's case and other research indicate certain difficulties with English in native Mandarin Chinese speakers. These include variants in word order and difficulty using inflection with pronouns (transferring between *he/she* and *him/her*) (432). Lucy Marie's writing, furthermore, reflected communicative problems apart from grammatical difficulties. A revealing example is her use of metaphors, at times translating directly with the inappropriate goal of carrying the same meaning ("you may just like the one who don't have feet to walk" and "we can take them as our mirror") (434). Lucy Marie's case is one of many that suggests common communicative difficulties for Chinese speakers writing in English.

In the above examples, it can be seen that students face difficulties with finding the appropriate language for narrative genres and using this language correctly. The genre approach to teaching narrative writing addresses these concerns.

3. The Genre Approach to Teaching Narrative Writing

3.1 Overview of the Genre Approach

In the world of English readers and writers, certain norms within writing styles are easily identifiable. These signature norms are represented by *genre*, meaning category of literary composition. Genres vary, from business letter writing to folklore. “*Genre* refers to abstract, socially recognized ways of using language,” and genres stem from what readers and writers in a language group expect to see in a given text (Hyland, *Genre Pedagogy* 149). Teaching writing requires instructors to provide adequate representations of a given genre “to discover facts about construction and specific language use which are common to that genre,” (Harmer 327). The genre approach is an answer to the *process* approach, an earlier technique that emphasizes guided revisions rather than contextual understanding (Gao 1). For the context of writing to be understood, relevant genre knowledge—including the features and norms of a specific genre—needs to be taught explicitly (Gao 1). Furthermore, while the process approach may guide students to a suitable end product, the emphasis on process leaves many of the features of written forms outside the range of writing instruction. Excluding these features is especially problematic for international students who have prior notions of what constitutes good writing for a given purpose (Reppen 32).

Over the course of the development of the discipline of TESOL, approaches to teaching writing have shifted from the focus-on-form approach of the 1960s and 1970s (which placed

an emphasis on “controlled composition tasks”) to approaches focusing on the content of discourse (Raims 408-411). A focus-on-form writing approach guides students through the dissection and analysis of writing samples, whereas a focus on the writer approach (or process approach) allows students to write about subjects of their choosing, including personal experiences. Another approach, focus-on-content, includes the teaching of genres and can include personal writing tasks (Reppen 414).

The genre approach to teaching writing gives students and teachers a chance to discuss the qualities of good writing for specific communicative purposes (Reppen 32). “The role of content writing instruction should emerge naturally from the material,” and so the examples used in teaching writing should be understood by the class to show them how to produce better written work (35). At every step, the audience for the assignment is considered. Sociolinguist Dell Hymes makes a distinction between styles of spoken discourse with the example of a sermon that “is typically identified with a certain place in a church service, but its properties may be invoked, for serious or humorous effect, in other situations” (61). Such rules may be applied to discourse communities, including those which use biographies (Swales 27). English language biographers as a group are artists bound by limited materials and “their success depends on how they select and sketch and portray within these limitations” (Edel 3). These biographers do not have the freedoms that

fiction writers have, such as the freedom of omniscience, and this makes them a community of writers with similar basic rules and standards (3).

Genres can be identified and categorized by readers and are found by these agreements. Based on these agreements, genres hold measurable traits (Hyland, *Genre: Language* 114). In naming a genre, the structure of a text is the starting point. This is because discourse structures are identifiable, and teachers should use this to their advantage. Furthermore, language texts are organized by structure type, and Kaplan and others have maintained that language groups structure texts in different ways, such as the linear chronological structure of discourse in the West (Johns 58). Typically, the teaching of genres is done from one of three standpoints. The New Rhetoric position, popular in North America, “principally concerns itself with investigating contexts [...] with the aim of uncovering something of the attitudes, values, and beliefs of the communities of text users that genres imply and construct” (Hyland, *Genre: Language* 114). From this approach, the authenticity of writing in the classroom is challenged, and students are encouraged to think about writing in a broader social context: simply performing classroom writing tasks, such as writing artificial emails, does not help the student unless real examples are first examined and emulated.

Another method of teaching genres was proposed by Michael Halliday in 1994 and is known as the Sydney school or Systematic Functional Linguistics (SFL). This approach teaches genres in stages with clear communicative goals and seeks to improve the rhetorical and

literary skills of migrants and other “historically disadvantaged groups,” beginning with people in Australia. Here the advantages of learning genres (ease of communication, clearer understanding of a new culture, ability to produce meaningful discourse in a new language) are presented via the study of smaller parts of language, including appropriate vocabulary and grammatical rules (Hyland 115).

Hyland goes on to explain the next standpoint, English for Specific Purposes (ESP), which borrows from both the rhetorical school and the Sydney school. Like SFL, ESP emphasizes the communicative role of genres, but it “does not make use of a stratified, extensive grammar” (115). From the ESP viewpoint, effective communication in a discourse community is the goal. Teachers in this approach must understand the communicative distinctions found in genres and place their focus on teaching the communicative features in a given genre. Room is made for creative decisions on the part of the writer. While this paper does not claim to work from any single theory of genre teaching, the concerns and goals of each have been adapted where appropriate (115).

To prepare the class for writing tasks, my lesson plans first present a sample of a biography for students to read. While the subject of this paper is not reading, but writing, the exercises in my lesson plans have reading elements. Reading and writing skills are related, and developing one can develop the other. In a long-term study of the effects of genre analysis in the classroom, Sunny Hyon interviewed eleven students from diverse

backgrounds (“four from East Asia, two from the Middle East, one from Africa, and one from Puerto Rico”) a year after instructing them on how to identify genres in reading (422). The students reported an overall increase in writing skills and were able to recall the structures found in the genres they studied (432).

Adult students in Japan and Taiwan benefited from genre-based instruction on narrative writing in the classes examined in the chart on the next page (Ishikawa 54, Cheng 178). These two classes include a range of L2 abilities. Little research has been done on teaching biography as a genre to EFL students, so the classes in this section have instead studied variations on the pre-genre of narrative. A higher proficiency and a lower proficiency class were chosen to illustrate applications of the genre approach to teaching writing. These groups had the following things in common. First, they were undergraduate EFL students. Second, they were studying writing narratives in English. Third, they were shown a specific method for doing so using the genre approach. Furthermore, students in these studies represent East Asian nationalities; Cheng’s class is similar to a class of undergraduates I once taught in Taiwan.

The subjects in Sandra Ishikawa’s study are from two classes of thirty freshmen in a Japanese women’s college. She names them “low-proficiency” EFL writers (54). The students in Cheng’s study were twenty-six Taiwanese first year undergraduates, all of whom were English majors.

These students in Cheng’s study were enrolled in their first undergraduate English composition course. Prior to beginning this course, these students were asked to fill out surveys to gauge their level of familiarity with English writing. All of the students reported having received a minimum of six years of prior English instruction, but this included little writing experience apart from paragraph writing specifically for admissions tests. Cheng does not report that any of these students had prior genre-based instruction. Cheng characterizes these students as “novice writers” (173). The following chart breaks down the changes in Ishikawa and Cheng’s classes in terms of grammar, rhetoric and organization, and appropriacy.

Class Type	Grammar/Sentence structure/Clauses	Rhetoric/Organization	Appropriacy
Japanese low-proficiency (Ishikawa)	1. Increase in total number of words per error-free clause 2. Increase in total words in error-free clauses	Increase in complexity of rhetoric	Increase in use of appropriate structures
Taiwanese first-year English majors (Cheng)	Increase in syntactic diversity	Improved syntactic diversity, frequency of appraisal expressions, correct use of vocabulary	Increase in frequency of obligatory and optional moves

Table 1. Summary of Findings for the Genre Approach in Two EFL Classrooms

(Ishikawa 54, Cheng 178)

3.2 Methods Used for Genre-based Instruction on Narrative Writing

The subjects in Ishikawa's study were divided into two groups, and worked with the same textbooks and classroom assignments—including writing a narrative based on a picture story between five to eight frames long. One class, denoted the *Q* group, answered approximately sixteen questions about the pictures and were graded on a scale of 0-2 points per answer—two points for an answer without flaws, one point for an answer containing some error but still being comprehensible, and no points for “incorrect” or “incomprehensible” answers. Another class, the *N* group, did not receive any questions about the picture story and were instead required to write a narrative based on the pictures. This narrative needed to be comprehensible and appropriate for narratives in English. This class was not given any prompt (or minimum/maximum length), and students were graded 0-3 points based on the clauses contained in their stories: “3 points given for each error-free clause, 2 points for an understandable clause with a few errors, and one point for an incomprehensible or inappropriate clause” (55).

A task similar to the above picture story task was used to test the students. This test, which required students to write about a ten-frame picture story in thirty minutes, was given to students at the start of the course as a pretest and then repeated at the end of the eight-week course as a posttest, with nothing changed. During the course, students were asked to complete six picture story tasks, and these stories were returned with “total” corrections after

waiting more than one week. These corrections included “explanations and examples where needed on each paper,” and this was the only form of feedback used, to minimize the influence of in-class feedback that may differ according to teacher (Ishikawa 55). Results from this study will be discussed later, but it is important to note that even low-proficiency students can be presented with a narrative writing task. Correctness, in this study, was defined as “correct with respect to discourse” (59). This study supports the idea that even low proficiency students may improve narrative writing skills when their attention is directed to “reference, coherence, and communication” rather than simply sentence by sentence exercises and corrections, an idea that is supported by the literature on the genre approach to teaching writing (Ishikawa 64).

For Fei-Wen Cheng’s class, texts produced by Taiwanese students were analyzed for the inclusion of appropriate elements found in narratives in pre- and post-test essays. Between these tests, the students received genre-based instruction to assist them in correctly identifying and using these elements. These students were asked to write two narrative paragraphs approximately 250-300 words in length, one prior to genre-based instruction and one afterwards. This instruction lasted for four class periods of two hours each (over four weeks), and broke down into three stages. The first involved encouraging students to ask questions regarding the content of narratives (“What is the social activity the text participates in?” “Who is the writer?” “What is the writer’s purpose?” among others). In the second

stage, students compared three genres to find similarities and distinctions between them. In the third stage, students focused specifically on the elements related to English narrative genres, and for homework students were asked to find examples of narrative writing to identify the elements described during class. During testing, students received prompts in English directing them to write about personal experiences. Each prompt “stated a hypothetical situation with various topics, audience, and purpose” (173). For example, one student wrote about finding and rescuing an injured dog in both the pre-test and the post-test essays (187). Another student wrote about her friend’s struggles with anorexia in her first essay (188) but changed her topic to a scooter accident in her second essay (189).

In conclusion, in these classes, change in skill level was measured over time. Teaching methods in these classes focused on presenting genres via real life examples, prompts for personal recollections, and picture story tasks. The following section will survey in closer detail both the assessment tools used for each class and the results gleaned from the data.

3.3 Results from Genre-based Instruction on Narrative Writing

3.3.1 The Assessment of Genre-based Tasks

My summary of findings (Figure 1) reflects a type of assessment tool that I would use in a class of EFL writers and the tool provided in my lesson plans (Appendix A). The three categories I used to measure the classes in this section form are inclusive of the results examined here. Ultimately, however, the decision to have three categories for grading in my

lesson plans reflects an assessment tool used by Sachiko Yasuda in her study on developing genre awareness in an EFL classroom (129). I have divided the results from the classes mentioned above into the three category names used by Yasuda: *appropriacy*, *cohesion and organization*, and *grammatical control*. The category *cohesion and organization* refers to anything related to structure, including appropriate transitions between paragraphs, use of topic sentences, and the ability for the reader to follow the text. *Grammatical control* examines the microscopic features of writing and anything related to proofreading. Of particular interest is the term *appropriacy* because it poses a very simple tool for assessing any genre—as if to ask “assuming we already know *what* is appropriate, is this appropriate?” In my assessment all scores related to the use of *obligatory moves* (necessary expressions in a text) and *optional moves* (acceptable expressions in a text) express appropriacy. In the following sections, we follow the categories I have chosen—grammar, rhetoric and organization, and appropriacy.

3.3.2 Changes in Grammatical Control

Ishikawa and Cheng’s studies measured grammar to some extent. Ishikawa discusses her use of objective measures in assessing this story writing task. Noting that “objective measures do not quantify all the qualities found in written work” she adds “holistic methods ... are not adequate either” and cites Hamp-Lyons’ 1990 study: “Writing quality is not a simple construct, and until we arrive at scoring procedures that respect that fact we will

continue to have both validity and reliability problems” (qtd. in Ishikawa 55).

Some support for the use of objective measures can be obtained, however, from the fact that these low-proficiency level learners are being measured using a very specific, short writing task—one that Ishikawa argues eliminates the criteria of “organization.” Both analytic and holistic scoring protocols may be effective for determining the writing levels of students, but since the students in the Ishikawa’s study are uniformly considered “low level,” neither protocol is satisfactory. G. Brown et al have developed an information based protocol suitable for picture story tasks like this one, with a “checklist of facts needed to convey a story adequately,” but this protocol requires all students to interpret a story the same way, and Ishikawa’s subjects generated a variety of interpretations. Therefore, instead of creating a new measurement scale to assess low proficiency EFL writers, Ishikawa uses established objective measures in assessment (Ishikawa 56).

The objective measures used by Ishikawa include number of *T-Units* or clauses and word lengths of these units, as well as the *correctness* of these units. A T-Unit, a term coined by K. W. Hunt in 1964, is a segment of writing found when we ignore a student’s punctuation and divide “discourse into the shortest segments which it would be grammatically allowable to write with a capital letter at one end and a period or question mark on the either, leaving no fragment as residue” (qtd. in Ishikawa 56). Ishikawa notes that researchers using T-units in writing assessment typically identify the ratio of sentences to

T-units in compositions. While numbers of words (in both T-units and the compositions as a whole) were counted in this study, low level students may produce strings of words lacking T-units or clauses; if we presume that language acquisition proceeds from words to clauses to combined clauses, then low-level students are misrepresented by this ratio. Previous studies on EFL writing have measured correctness by the number of T-units that do not have any form of errors, such as incorrect spelling or improper punctuation. In Ishikawa's study, correctness is measured differently: to better assess low-level writers, Ishikawa disregards punctuation "except at sentence boundaries" and spelling "unless it involved grammatical markers such as plurals" (58). Furthermore, "Contractions ... were counted as two words," and "Words mistakenly separated (e.g. *grand father*) were counted as one" (58). To assess the performance of the students in this study, "All cases of ambiguity, of whatever kind, were given the most favorable interpretation" (59). The emphasis on T-units in Ishikawa's study focuses on grammatical issues.

Yasuda's study provides data for "changes in language sophistication." Language sophistication here applies to the degree of formality employed; for example, in a request email, students were more likely to use phrases such as "I want you to" and "I would like you to" in the first assessment and comparatively sophisticated phrases ("Could you" or "I'd appreciate it if") in the second assessment (124). When applying this measure to Cheng's study, we find that the students in her classroom achieved higher posttest scores in all

categories measured, including syntactic diversity, and this came as a result of genre-based instruction (Cheng 177).

3.3.3 Changes in Rhetoric and Organization

For low-proficiency writers, Ishikawa found an increase in complexity and rhetoric in student writing samples when students were directed to the communicative and contextual goals of writing (64). Rhetorical and organizational content were also improved for more advanced narrative writers: Cheng discovered that content scores in her assessment showed significant improvement in the post-test. “Regarding the amount of elaboration in each rhetorical move (abstract, orientation, complicating action, evaluation, resolution, coda), scores for the posttest essays were significantly higher than scores for the pretest essays (117). The use and variety of action verbs in the student essays increased in the post-test, as well as syntactic diversity and the correct use of vocabulary. Based on these findings, “pedagogical intervention has enhanced [the students’] awareness of language usage in terms of several important linguistic features specific to narrative writing” (178).

3.3.4 Changes in Appropriacy

Ishikawa’s commentary on appropriacy ends at her assessment of grammatical structures, but before moving on, we should note that appropriate structures were in use by the students at the end of the study. Based on the findings in Cheng’s study, teaching how to write narratives has increased the students’ awareness of the key features of narrative writing. In

a relatively short time, this group of Taiwanese students made significant improvements in their ability to produce appropriate short narratives in English (178). The inclusion of specific details and evaluative statements is necessary to produce these narratives effectively, and class instruction on the properties of English narratives enabled students to incorporate these elements more freely in writing. Cheng's study makes a distinction between *optional moves*, which are expressions that are not required but allowed in the text, and *obligatory moves* that are expressions required to make a text appropriate. Optional moves include descriptions of the story's content, and coda statements which return the reader to the character's present situation. Obligatory moves in narratives include statements of orientation ("relevant background information about the characters' situation"), descriptions of the characters' difficulties, explanations of how these difficulties are resolved, and evaluative statements (judgments of value and worth, such as 'it was the best vacation I've ever had'). The areas that did not show improvement—including the obligatory move of evaluative statements—suggest that there is some interference being made by the first language literacy of the Taiwanese students. These Taiwanese students were in the habit of omitting evaluate statements (for example, "the service on the train was excellent") when writing in Chinese. Therefore, effective instruction on the correct use of these statements should be emphasized when teaching the genre of narrative to Chinese speaking students (184).

4. Biographies as Factual Narratives

Students in EFL writing classes are frequently asked to write about themselves. These activities have been researched to a much greater extent than biographical writing. The autobiographical forms of factual narrative may make for interesting subject matter—fears, goals, best and worst experiences, etc.—though the deeply personal nature of these issues may inhibit some students (Zacharias 103). These exercises are often predictable and tedious. Furthermore, students might feel more able to express themselves when writing about a true or hypothetical other (Zacharias 103). Students, when asked about themselves, may choose to direct attention only to their positive sides. For this reason, objectivity may be lost. Little research exists on teaching a genre related to autobiography, biography, though the teaching of narrative genres in general finds support in the literature on the genre approach to teaching writing. To be an appropriate genre, biography must stem from the so-called pre-genre of narrative (Swales 61). Narrative is considered a pre-genre because its elements exist in many genres and subgenres, including factual subgenres of narratives such as autobiographies and biographies (61). For biography to stand as a genre, it must build on the elements it shares with other genres, including fictional narratives.

The study of narrative is the study of how people, who are “storytelling organisms,” interact with and understand the world around them. Stories are both integral to communication and to self-awareness—“one theory in educational research holds that

humans are storytelling organisms who, individually and socially, lead storied lives,” thus “The study of narrative is the study of the ways humans experience the world” (Connelly and Clandinin 2).

Narratives naturally include biographical writing. Moreover, day to day interactions regularly include storytelling, as does speech and writing in the classroom (Soliday 511). These stories reflect culture, values, gender, and other attributes relevant to the storyteller. Storytelling begins in the home, at an early age, as we find ways to communicate our experiences and encounters (Soliday 513). The role of the storyteller, when telling life stories, is to organize information acceptable to the specific story being told. Biographies are generally thought to be objective, but the facts in biographies are grouped together idiosyncratically by the author according to the rules found in other narratives. While biographies, like other narratives, follow an essentially chronological sequence, grouping life events from earliest to most recent, anecdotes are sometimes used to explain context. Furthermore, the specific life events described are chosen by the author. This selection process is a creative process.

“The best biographers aim to account for six or seven lives, of the thousands a person lives” (Woolf, qtd. in Mailer 5). In this quotation, from a biography on Marilyn Monroe written by Norman Mailer, an interesting idea is presented—that individuals adopt thousands of different personas over time, and for alternate uses in various settings. Personas adapt to

circumstances, and personas change over time for internal and external reasons. Viewing lives in a narrative pattern (this happened to the subject because of this, and before that these things happened) we see that biographies qualify as narratives. Fictional and nonfictional narratives follow characters over time, and document significant outward and inward changes in a character's life. Gary Gilmore is a career criminal, turned lover, turned celebrity convict in Mailer's *The Executioner's Song*. In *Bird Lives! : The High Life and Hard Times of Charlie (Yardbird) Parker* by Ross Russell, we witness Charlie Parker's extraordinary rise from obscurity in Kansas City to becoming the inventor of a music genre that is now played internationally, before many years of drug abuse led to his death. The stories of both of these men are stranger than fiction, and yet follow the basic rules of fiction: each follows a narrative construction, and neither qualifies as being perfectly objective, for even the best biographies are incomplete representations of their subjects arranged according to the author's style.

Jerome Bruner leads us through this perspective in "The Narrative Construction of Reality": "cultural products, like language and other symbolic systems, mediate thought and place their stamp on our representations of reality" (Bruner 3). One may see a relationship between this narrative construction and contrastive rhetoric. However we measure where cultural cues, rather than individual creativity, shape narrative thoughts, it is clear that in neither case is a wholly objective reality presented. Though narratology is said to have two

branches—one related to the telling of stories, and the other related to the interpretation of reality (Genette 755)—neither can be said to be ‘factual’ though this word is often used to describe the latter. Even legal testimony is considered subjective in form, though to the speaker, it is usually understood to be objective truth (Bruner 15). Furthermore, within the framework of an English classroom, “Seeing and describing story in the everyday actions of teachers, students, administrators, and others requires a subtle twist of mind on behalf of the enquirer” and this ‘twist of mind’ refers to the creative process of structuring information (Connelly & Clandinin 4). This relates to Jerome Bruner’s concept of canonicity discussed below, which holds that stories have reasons to be told: sleeping, doing chores, being in transit, and other ordinary activities hold little interest without a creative twist (7).

Bruner provides us with ten features belonging to this narrative construction of reality. The first, he calls *narrative diachronicity*. This simply refers to the time element—that narratives are understood chronologically, but time in narratives is measured in “human time” rather than abstract or “clock time”; human time is “time whose significance is given by the meaning assigned to events within its compass” (3). Events with greater importance are the focus of narratives, rather than events that may take up greater measured time (such as long waits, sleep, or time spent in transit). Though stories may jump from one time period to the next, to reflect this significance, in the form of flashbacks or other digressions, generally

narratives move from past to present or from left to right (in text) even as other types of communication, like comic strips and stained glass art, move in the same direction (3).

Continuing with Bruner's article, *particularity* is the second feature of narratives, meaning that all stories are representative of particular types of stories. In other words, all stories share basic commonalities, such as types of details included, although these specific details differ. A narrative about a war hero would probably include the date of his enlistment, his occupation and rank, and the injuries he sustained.

Following particularity, Bruner describes *intentional state development*, or the fact that the state of all things in a narrative is clear and determined—objects in the story, personal and impersonal, have a purpose for the story directly related to the storyteller's beliefs or values (3). Next, *Hermeneutic composability*, in simple language, means "that there is a difference between what is *expressed* in the text and what the text might *mean*." There is a meaning independent of the narrator that the reader attempts to discern. Meaning attempts to be transmitted through the text (7). In human service terms, life histories are initially gathered by the social worker via the memories of the client, but the actual sequence of events in the client's life may vary significantly from the perspectives of either individual. Furthermore, the specific details of each text—the places where a person has resided, the exact dates of important events, and so on, may differ from what is initially determined by a social worker

in an intake interview. The intake interview reflects what the social worker initially determines to be true, yet this record is open to later revision.

Bruner describes the next feature, *canonicity and breach*. This begins with the idea of canonicity: although life follows certain scripts (waiting for a bus, buying coffee), many of these scripts are not worth expressing—narratives seek to express something of importance. Stories that hold our attention involve something newsworthy: “I was standing in line for the movies when I saw the accident” rather than “I was standing in line for the movies, and then I bought a ticket.” *Breach*, the second part of this feature, refers to the difficulty between transferring the *fabula* (plot) of a narrative to its *sjuzet* (mode of telling 12). Thus, the same story told by different narrators is told in a different way, even if the important points are the same—such as the life of Jesus in the four Gospels, or the court testimonies of several witnesses to the same crime.

Just as Bruner studies the factual understanding of reality, he considers the meaning of realism in fiction and why realism stands apart. In fiction, reality is frequently referenced. Narratives set in real cities require the reader to picture these places as settings for imaginary events. If cities are distorted to the author’s imagination, for example, Toronto with tropical weather, a story in this setting is less realistic than one that portrays Toronto’s climate accurately. This phenomenon is explained in the feature called *referentiality*, and Bruner asserts that “realism in fiction must then indeed be a literary convention rather than a matter

of correct reference” (13). The reality found in all narratives *refers* to places and characters that may or may not exist. A real character is only a reference to a real person, just as a real location in a narrative is only a reference to a real location. Some attempts to portray reality may be better than others, but “the distinction between narrative fiction and narrative truth is nowhere nearly as obvious as common sense and usage would have us believe” (13).

Genericness refers to the fact that genre represents both a type of text and a type of writing; for a biographical text to be counted as such, the writer must follow genre specific norms, such as presenting a life story in a mostly chronological order (with the exception of anecdotes). *Normativeness* represents how narratives are united under the norm of being unconventional and “tellable” (13). To be considered a normal text, it must express something with importance—this feature ties in with the above concept of canonicity.

The next feature of narratives, *context sensitivity and negotiability* refers to the reader (or listener) (14). This party is a relevant consideration, especially when we look at negotiations: “You tell your version, I tell mine, and we rarely need legal confrontation to settle the difference”. The perspective of any narrator is incomplete, even if one party is convinced of his/her accuracy; the reader brings a new perspective to the text that does not necessarily agree with the narrator. The reader is free to judge the reliability of any voice in the narrative.

Finally, *narrative accrual* is a feature representing the fact that narratives build on one another. Placed in defined settings, characters act in ways that are believable to the reader, and experiences shape characters over time. When telling a life story, even from collected narratives of fond memories or ordinary recollections, we view a “Self acting more or less purposefully in a social world.” This ‘self’ occupies the same role as a protagonist in a fictional narrative (Bruner 6-18).

The ten features described above in Bruner’s “The Narrative Understanding of Reality” provide a theoretical base for “Fictional Narrative, Factual Narrative” by Gerard Genette. In this article, Genette examines the different subgenres of narrative, and then explains the differences between fictional and nonfictional genres. Genette states that narrative texts need to be distinguished by type. These types have broad similarities yet key distinctions in terms of order, speed, frequency, mode, and voice (757).

In terms of order, “no narrative, including extrafictional and extraliterary narrative, oral or written, can restrict itself naturally and without special effort to a rigorously chronological order” (Genette 758). This means that it is natural for both fictional and nonfictional narratives to include anecdotes, and recollections, outside of the sequence of events in the lives of the characters. Moreover, the arrangement of this order is in the hands of the narrator. To confirm the true sequence of events in a character’s life, a source outside of the narrative is required. In both an allegedly fiction and an allegedly nonfiction account, a

comparison between the order of the *fabula* (plot) and the order of the *sjujet* (telling) is found to be impossible unless the reader has an external means of verification. If the narrator tells something out of sequence, placing one event incorrectly prior to or following another, who is to correct this recollection? Consider court testimony. Everyone holds a unique perspective, and narratives told by each party are held to this standard of being individual and incomplete. Nonfiction narratives (like biographies) may have discrepancies between *fabula* and *sjujet*, or sequence and mode, and it is up to the reader to determine what is true. Of course, in fiction, confirmations of these inquiries are less important—why should it matter, after all, if Lyster the librarian was actually visited by Joyce on June 16th 1904-- but in work that is presented as true, these distinctions matter. A nonfiction writer quickly loses credibility if found to be telling a story out of step (its *sjujet*) with the sequence of recorded events (its *fabula*). The panicked fugitive, writing a statement that places himself in locations without alibis, is an example of this loss of credibility (Genette 758).

Genette goes on to describe speed. Writers of factual narratives are not expected to match nor believed capable of matching their stories to the speed of the *fabula*. Statements of frequency ('every Thursday') also fit naturally here. The writer is allowed "accelerations, decelerations, ellipses, and pauses" as are commonly found in narratives: 'I've been afraid of heights since I was little' or 'after a long train ride home, we unpacked and had drinks' (760-761).

Genette then considers mode. It is important to note that our collective understanding of ‘fictional narrative’ is a specific kind of modern novel (762). Characters in fictional narratives are completely controlled by the author—whether June Woo in *The Joy Luck Club* or June Miller as ‘Mona’ in *Tropic of Cancer*, her perspective is her author’s perspective, and this explains the presence of ‘indices’ (statements made to imaginary third parties) and interior monologue (762). This ability is not permitted to characters in factual narratives, such as biographies, in which a writer is expected “to report only what you know as a fact, to report only what is pertinent, and to say how it is that you know these things” (763).

Finally, Genette provides us with the distinction of voice. These are basically person and level differences (763). Narration, even from a factual voice, draws on a variety of “intercalated narration, as in diaries” (764). While factual narratives do not require multiple perspectives, the information these narratives contain benefits by holding many points of view to confirm reported facts. A biography often includes a sample of the subject’s speech or writing—here the genre maintains its status as biographical even as it incorporates autobiographical elements, such as diaries and journals (763-770).

In closing, a few key points remain to be said about the genre of biography—of factual narrative. It may be easy to confuse the very restrictions required by this genre with restrictions on creative expression itself. In “BIOGRAPHY: A Manifesto” Leon Edel

reminds us that biography writing is a creative endeavor, in the restricted style of “narrative prose”:

Biography is a work of the imagination—the imagination of thought and style and narrative. The biographer is allowed to be as imaginative as he pleases, so long as he does not imagine his facts. Saturated with fact, he may allow himself all the adventures of literary artifice, all the gratifications of story-telling—save those of make-believe (Edel 1).

Students should understand that biographers take creative input—a life story—and produce creative output, a life story from a different point of view. Even when paying close attention to the facts, we are obligated to be creative with this input, as we reach for the goal of accurate portrayal. Humans must be written about in a creative way, for a purely objective representation is simply impossible. Furthermore, even if a representation of others seems accurate, much of the person is still lost. The depth of others is a complicated, beautiful, and mysterious thing. Anyone who has dedicated time to the service of individuals is well aware of this. We have many reasons to care about the life actions and destinies of others, especially those without grand historic relevance or dramatic powers. In each person we find treasures, and sometimes these are hidden well. A biographer allows us to see someone in a way that a camera never could. “The fascination of biography is that it

works in mysteries. A biographer is like a grinder of lenses. His aim is to make us see” (Edel 3).

5. Biographies and Contrastive Rhetoric

The specific properties of biographies (or factual narratives) in English speaking classrooms, must be identified as what they are—functions of a Western model. This includes the popularity of narratives about individuals who have found success from meager beginnings (Nemati 104). Over the centuries, Chinese biographies, for example, varied from dramatic memories retold as history, to rigid profiles listing basic information (Nivison 438). As the Western definition works only from a recent shift in writing (18th century) stemming from a specific type of text, it is unfair to assume that writing from different parts of the world has followed a similar pattern.

Grammatical, communicative, and rhetorical difficulties found in non-native English speaking writers show identifiable patterns within a language group. An explanation of how these diverse patterns express themselves is found in the writings of Robert B. Kaplan. Kaplan’s 1967 article “Cultural Thought Patterns in Inter-Cultural Education” coined the term *contrastive rhetoric*, representing the written products of these cultural thought patterns. In 1966, Kaplan analyzed 700 EFL student compositions and found several distinct patterns. Though it may not be helpful for every reader to think of discourse patterns as a curved or

jagged or linear process, these patterns highlight the logical direction of discourse. By placing his own language as the most basic form, Kaplan suggests his preference. Kaplan does admit, however, that “It has long been known that logic *per se* is a cultural phenomenon,” and if we understand rhetoric to be a series of logical guidelines, we see that rhetoric is also subject to cultural differences (Kaplan 2).

The ideas of contrastive rhetoric have been with us for a long time, but the practical application of these ideas has not been clear (Matsuda 46). This may be because of the complexity of the questions the issue of contrastive rhetoric poses—these include how writing structures reflect the writers’ perceptions, how writers understand what decision making process is in use when putting together discourse, and how first language writing differs from second language writing (57). First and second language writing styles have evident differences, but the implications of this research have yet to be understood (Wang 239). “The nature of transfer in L2 writing remains under debate;” however, “students’ L1 is shown to be an important resource rather than a hindrance in decision making in writing.” (Raimis 418). Furthermore the concept of contrastive rhetoric has undergone some criticism, including accusations of not being fully aware of cultural differences and creating an arbitrary Eastern/Western cultural divide that favors the latter (Connor 493). Factors apart from culture, including sex and social status, affect how we are taught discourse (such as life histories) by our peers (Pavlenko 216).

Ultimately, teachers need to guide their students by directing them to the contexts of written work and by reminding them of the communicative goals of writing (Matsuda 58).

A genre-based approach is driven by the identification of discourse communities. Discourse communities are groups that have common objectives, open communication and ways of making this communication possible, use a specific genre or genres, and have some degree of shared terminology (Swales 24-27). To write authentic discourse is to write with the discourse community in mind, and this task requires cultural knowledge. A genre-based approach to teaching writing draws on cultural anthropology, sociolinguistics and other disciplines (Swales 14). For this reason it addresses many of the concerns raised by contrastive rhetoric.

For the following lesson plans, all of these questions are kept in mind: how to motivate a diverse group of students; how to narrow biography to its definition by native English speakers; and how to direct students to a Western style of writing with an authentic example. Students will have the chance to write biographies using their classmates and the teacher as guides. By the end of this lesson, students will understand the creative differences found in English language biographies about the same subject.

6. Lesson Plans

6.1 Introduction

These lesson plans are designed to help students understand the process of writing the life story of an elderly individual, and how stories about the same individual may differ. The purpose of these lessons is to help students understand their subjects and to write about these subjects accurately and creatively. Students will interview the same subject, separately, and then compare drafts. The objective of this lesson is for students to learn how to write English language biographies. Students will learn how biographies of the same individual may differ because of the creative decisions that biographers make. By the end of this lesson, students will be able to write appropriate and accurate biographies about the individuals that they have chosen.

Prior to beginning work on these drafts, students will study selections from a real contemporary biography in English: *Audrey Hepburn: An Intimate Portrait* by Diana Maychick. An EFL teacher in Hong Kong selected another biography of Audrey Hepburn, a graded-reader text, for a series of videotaped lessons in Wendy Lam's 2009 study. Here it was found that this teacher was able to direct student attention to what was a popular subject with writing activities along the way. To keep students engaged in writing, they were presented with interesting writing assignments, including identifying Hepburn's hardships, and what gift they would give her and why (63). Students were interested in this subject

matter and motivated to perform well. Activities where students read and comment on famous individuals may be an appropriate way to introduce them to the writing of creative nonfiction. Thus, the choice of this subject is to inspire students to write about a living individual. Furthermore, the choice of an English language biography that a native speaker would read allows student to study an example that follows the standards of effective biographical writing outlined by Edel.

These lesson plans have the following goals: first, students will understand the idea that nonfiction stories have a similar structure to fiction stories, as outlined by Bruner; this concept is important for other tasks in creative nonfiction that will be explored in later units. Second, students will learn the appropriate order, speed, frequency, mode, and voice of nonfiction narratives (Genette 758-770). Third, students will obtain a clear understanding of how to judge a biography according to its compliance with these guidelines, and thus they will be able to determine whether a biography is an accurate representation of its subject. To achieve these goals, Maychick's book will be presented as an example of effective biographical writing and used to guide students through their drafts using the genre approach to teaching narrative writing. Moreover, each student will study one other biography (or several) during class discussion. These additional biographies may be chosen by the students or the teacher at the teacher's discretion. Students will not be asked to complete writing assignments about these biographies, but they will be asked to identify aspects of

time, mode, and voice in these samples.

During this instruction, students are told that they will interview elderly individuals.

Students will work as pairs to write interview questions, and then student pairs will interview the same individual separately. Once relevant information is gathered by interviewing this person, students will write biographies of approximately four pages in length, which will be assessed in terms of grammatical control, structure, and appropriacy as outlined by Yasuda (129).

Six classes of fifty minutes length are discussed here, with the first two classes focusing on reading and analyzing selections from a biography of Audrey Hepburn. These selections are later paired with writing assignments to prepare students for the next four classes: writing about an elderly individual. These lesson plans are designed for a course on creative nonfiction, which may also include historical accounts, travel literature, etc.

6.2 Class Description

The students for this class are Chinese speaking EFL students in China or Taiwan.

Students for this lesson will be undergraduates with intermediate to high English skills.

These students will have had some experience writing short essays for examinations, as well as at least one experience writing a graded term paper in English on any subject. Apart from meeting these basic requirements, students will have some academic experience in human services or other professional studies coursework that involves writing about others. These

students will be comfortable conducting interviews in Chinese and translating the answers they receive into English.

6.3 Materials

Electronic materials will not be needed in this class. If the classroom has internet access and is equipped with a projector, photographs and video clips of Audrey Hepburn can be presented to students at the teacher's discretion. In addition to copies of *Audrey Hepburn: An Intimate Portrait*, students receive copies of each of the appendices in class, where indicated in the lesson. Students are also expected to examine an additional English language biography, about any subject, for discussion and comparison.

6.4 Lesson One: Prereading

a. Introduction

In this first class, the teacher introduces the idea of life as a narrative. Following attendance and a brief introduction, the teacher draws a large Venn diagram on the board with one circle labeled 'fiction' and the other labeled 'nonfiction'. She then asks the students for help completing this diagram, to find how fictional narratives relate to nonfictional narratives. Students will volunteer answers such as 'magic powers' or 'imaginary cities' for fiction and 'real settings' or 'real people' for nonfiction. Students will be guided to focus on similarities in the middle part of the diagram. The teacher will help students fill in this part: both types of narratives have a beginning, middle, and end; both types of narratives highlight

events that are important to the characters; both types of narratives are open to interpretation by the reader. Most importantly, the teacher should stress that fiction and nonfiction narratives only tell part of the story, and that the line between fiction and nonfiction is not always clear (Bruner 3-18, Genette 758-770, Schabert 1-13). Many fictional narratives are believable accounts of what could happen in the real world, such as Joyce's descriptions of life in Dublin. On the other hand, many nonfiction narratives read like fiction, such as biographies of remarkable individuals or stories of extraordinary events (Truman Capote's *In Cold Blood* and Jon Krakauer's *Into the Wild* are popular examples).

This opening discussion leads into prereading exercises. The teacher announces to the class that they will begin a unit on biography writing. The teacher then writes the name *Audrey Hepburn* on the whiteboard and asks the students to identify who this is. If the students remain silent, the teacher may assist them by writing *actress* under her name. Once this has been established, the teacher hands out the assignment sheet in Appendix B and explains that for the next six classes over two weeks, the students will learn about Hepburn and read selections from *Audrey Hepburn: An Intimate Portrait*. To better understand both the author and the subject, students will complete short writing exercises about this biography. Furthermore, to help students understand this genre, students will examine other English language biographies during class discussion. At the end of the unit each student will write a brief biography. The teacher explains to students that they will work with a

partner in class. Students will be able to choose their own partners. As partners, they will find an elderly individual, and for each subject two distinct biographies will be written, which will then be compared in class. Twenty minutes are set aside for the opening discussion and prereading exercises.

b. Development

The teacher then answers any questions that the students may have. Once students are clear on the schedule for the next two weeks, they are guided through the assignment sheet (Appendix B), and any questions are answered. Students are then told to think about the partner they want to work with and given a list of area hospitals, community centers, or nursing homes where they may find elderly subjects. These subjects should be lucid and able to communicate well. Finding proper subjects will require some preparation by the teacher, perhaps with the help of students and/or other teachers. Once students have been guided through this process, they will begin the first classroom exercise (Appendix C).

Paragraph rearrangement exercises were chosen to help students recognize the appropriate organization of a sample of authentic discourse, as recommended by Kaplan (16). Prior to starting, the teacher asks students to think about the order, mode, and voice features of these paragraphs while completing this activity. Students have fifteen minutes to complete this task.

c. Conclusion

Once students have completed the exercise, students will discuss their results with the teacher until the end of class. Class will reconvene with the teacher at the board to write some of these results under the categories of time, mode, and voice. The teacher should help students see how time, mode, and voice are used in these paragraphs: events are presented in sequence, the information is confirmed by what Hepburn later reported, and Hepburn's voice is used to support this narrative. If any student does not get a chance to speak, this student will be called upon at the start of the next class. Students are instructed to read chapters four and twenty-six of *Audrey Hepburn: An Intimate Portrait* to prepare for the following class.

6.5 Lesson Two: Post-reading

a. Introduction

The second class of this unit focuses on post-reading exercises. In this class the students will examine what this book has in common with other English language biographies in terms of order, speed, frequency, mode, and voice. Students will be asked to identify these terms in the biographies that they have chosen to read alongside *Audrey Hepburn: An Intimate Portrait*. This information will be helpful for the writing assignment later on. Prior to this discussion, the teacher begins class by offering clarification on any of the terms that may still be confusing to students after reading the second selection. To

confirm that students have understood the reading and to encourage them to think about the life of Hepburn in greater detail, the teacher sits with the students in a circle of desks and elicits answers to the following questions: ‘What was happening in Hepburn’s life when she was young?’ ‘What was Hepburn’s realization on the night of the bombing?’ ‘How did Hepburn feel with her idol?’ ‘What did Hepburn want to accomplish by being involved with the United Nations Children’s Fund?’ The teacher then asks questions about the biography itself. ‘How has the author organized this material in terms of time?’ ‘What resources does the author cite for this information?’ ‘Apart from the author, who is speaking in this narrative?’ Each student is expected to provide some response, in an order determined by the teacher. To facilitate this process, the teacher may allow students to discuss questions with one another, while seated in the circle. This introduction should last approximately fifteen minutes.

b. Development

Following the introduction and any unfinished work from the previous class, the teacher then returns to the front of the room and reorders seating to explain the different aspects that define biographies within the context of narratives. The teacher begins this process by asking students to describe life events discussed in chapters four and twenty-six of *Audrey Hepburn: An Intimate Portrait*: ‘Hepburn started her life in poverty in wartime’ ‘She discovered her purpose by looking up to her idols’, etc. Here the teacher explains the order,

speed, and frequency of events by asking students to describe the scenes they have read.

The class should determine that while life events in biographies follow a basic chronological sequence, certain scenes in life can be written about very briefly (in this example, the very early years of Hepburn's childhood prior to discovering her purpose) and that others (the start of her career) should be written about at length. Furthermore, the placement of anecdotes at certain points in the narrative may disrupt the chronological order (Genette 760). Students are also asked to provide statements of frequency ('Over the years, she had been asked to support various UN causes with her presence and she had gladly given of her time.') The aspects of mode (that Maychick only reports what she has confirmed to be reliable information) and voice (that intercalated narration, including direct quotes from Hepburn) are also included in this discussion to give students a clearer idea of what language is acceptable in biographies (761). The teacher then asks students to look for similar examples in other biographies: as homework, each student is assigned to identify aspects of order, speed, frequency, mode, and voice in the biography that he or she has chosen. During class discussion these aspects will be shared as a group. For example, if a student has chosen to look through Russell's *Bird Lives! : The High Life and Hard Times of Charlie (Yardbird) Parker*, the aspect of voice can be identified through the various quotations provided by Parker's family and bandmates in this book.

Next, the teacher gives students the writing assignment in Appendix D. In this assignment, students are asked to write about Hepburn's interests and hardships, expanding from the prompts used by Wendy Lam (63). These questions are relevant to the structure of the biography itself, asking students to identify features related to time, voice and mode. Students have fifteen minutes to complete these writing exercises, and then are asked to share what they have written with the class. Students are allowed to pick two of the three questions on the writing assignment, but the teacher should make sure that at least one student has answered each question. For each question the teacher calls on a new student to read his or her answer, and then the class has the opportunity to contribute other thoughts or information that the reader may have missed. Ten additional minutes are allowed for this process.

c. Conclusion

The remaining ten minutes of class are used to prepare for the following class. Students are asked to think about someone they know who is significant to them in some way and to write an anecdote about this person. The teacher then copies and shares a personal example about someone significant to the teacher. The guidelines for writing biographical narrative are presented to the class: they should have a clear thesis centered on the significance of the subject, "compose an attention grabbing introduction, arrange events in a logical order, use colorful, specific descriptions to create a clear picture of the subject, adopt

a point of view from which to describe events and the subject, and close with a satisfying ending” (Seo 3). Furthermore, biographies should present meaningful details about the subject, such as the decision making process behind the choices they have made (Edel 3).

Lastly, students are reminded that biography writing is an art form. To further illustrate this, an example of realism in visual art may be used, such as a picture of a Glenn Close portrait.

The teacher may ask students if the face depicted in this painting looks like the person who posed for the artist. When students answer yes, the teacher then explains that the portrait is an example of realism in visual art. The students should then be told that biography writing is realism in narratives, and like realism in visual art, it is creative work bound to the rule of accurate representation.

6.6 Lesson Three: Prewriting I

a. Introduction

In the third class, students will focus on preparing to write their biographies. By this point students are more familiar with the features of biographical narrative. After a brief greeting, the students are given the Interview Outline (Appendix E) and this is explained to the students. During this time the teacher collects the written anecdotes from the students to be checked and returned later. The teacher also asks students to volunteer information about the five aspects of narratives (order, speed, frequency, mode, and voice) found in the biographies that they have selected. Not all students will be asked to speak at this time;

some students will share what they have found in the following class. This introduction should take approximately twenty minutes.

b. Development

In the next section of class students will work together, as partners, to form a list of appropriate interview questions. The types of questions to be asked are provided (appendix C), and students may work on them together, but each student writes a unique list. Partners should also use this time to figure out who they are going to interview and where; the teacher assists them by providing any information on local community centers or areas where they may interview elderly individuals. Student pairs may also interview the elderly family members of other classmates, provided that the interviewers have not met this person before. Students are told that they may also talk to others who know the subject, including relatives and medical staff, but this is not required. Students are allowed ten minutes to work on these questions as pairs, with the teacher walking around the classroom and helping as needed.

c. Conclusion

The remaining fifteen minutes of this class are used to complete the lists of interview questions and to discuss appropriate content for biographies. The teacher asks the students the following discussion question: “What information should each biography contain?” Students should respond with “birthplace,” “career,” “family size and members,” “important

life events” and so on. These are written on the board. The teacher then asks, “What information may differ between biographies?” Students should respond with “anecdotes,” “quotations,” “feelings towards subject,” “descriptive information,” and others. This is an opportunity for the class to see how biographies for the same person may differ according to the author’s perspective. Students are then told to use these questions to interview their subjects independently before the fourth class.

6.7 Lesson Four: Prewriting II

a. Introduction

After greetings and attendance, the teacher returns the anecdotes that the students have submitted and asks for one or two students to share their responses with the class. Students who did not get a chance to speak about the biographies they have chosen are also asked to speak at this time. Students are then introduced to the characteristics of a well-written biographical narrative: *characterization, supporting incidents, significance, tone, and organization* (Seo 2). Writing each of these characteristics on the board, the teacher explains them orally to the students. For the first term, *characterization*, the teacher states that writers of biographical narratives are expected to represent their subjects consistently and in a believable way. For *supporting events*, the teacher explains how specific examples are used to represent the subject: Arthur was a forgetful man, and we know this because he once bought a nice suit only to leave it on the bus on his way home. For *tone*, the teacher tells

students that the biography writer should also provide clear statements about the importance of the subject to him/herself and should maintain a voice that reflects this attitude. A biography of a career criminal would contain (in some form) the writer's disapproval of this subject's crimes, and would thus sound very distinct from a biography of a humanitarian. For the biographies the students are writing for this class, students should be curious and respectful, writing about their subjects as human services professionals might. This does allow for students to include their impressions—both positive and negative—and to incorporate themselves into their drafts to a limited extent (for example, “I was touched by the story [my subject] told me about leaving home without her brother”). Finally, for *organization*, the teacher explains that biographies generally progress from early to later years, but that fitting anecdotes need not follow this rule. Once these characteristics are explained to the class, the students find their partners to begin the next section of class. This introduction should take about twenty-five minutes.

b. Development

In the next section of class, partner groups will compare the information that they have found, and then distinguish how they may write about the subject as individual authors. Each student should have a unique anecdote about the person based on the information used in his or her individual prompt. At this point students are comparing answers, but each should have enough information to begin writing individual drafts, and it should be reiterated

that some of this information will be distinct. Student pairs are then given the short answer writing questions in Appendix F and told to work on them in class; these are then collected by the teacher. Twenty minutes are allowed for this task.

c. Conclusion

The remaining ten minutes of class are for students to ask any questions and for the teacher to provide any necessary follow-up. The teacher then directs the students back to the assignment sheet and interview prompt and instructs them to have a rough draft of at least one page in length completed for the next class. Students are told that they may contact their subjects again for any follow-up information necessary.

6.8 Lesson Five: Writing

a. Introduction

Following greetings and attendance, the teacher asks students to share interesting discoveries made about their subjects so far. Fifteen minutes are set aside for this introduction, and the teacher probes for information: if a subject changed careers in life, what circumstances and decisions prompted this change? If a subject was in the military, where did the subject serve? The class as a whole is encouraged to ask follow up questions, and the teacher prompts these by modeling examples like the above.

b. Development

The bulk of class time for this lesson is for students to work on their papers individually, as explained by the assignment sheet in Appendix B. During this time students may ask the teacher for help, and satisfying writing examples are shared with the class.

c. Conclusion

At the end of the class, the teacher provides words of encouragement to the students, and highlights strengths in the papers examined so far. The teacher also points out weakness, and directs students to the assessment tool to guide their progress. Students are told to bring in their final drafts for peer review on the final day.

6.9 Lesson Six: Peer Review and Evaluation**a. Introduction**

On the sixth and final class, students will have their first complete drafts ready. The teacher returns the short answer assignments (Appendix F) to the students and asks one partner from each pair to read an answer aloud, until an answer for each question has been shared with the class. This opening will take about ten minutes.

b. Development and Conclusion

For the remainder of class time, students will first exchange their papers with their partners and fill out the first portion of the Peer Review Form (Appendix G). Next, students will exchange their papers with another student in the class to fill out the second portion, and

once everyone has completed this form, the class will reconvene as a group to discuss the answers. The teacher then gives students copies of the Assessment Tool (Appendix A) and tells the students that this is how they will be graded—in terms of Appropriacy, Cohesion and Organization, and Grammatical Control. Students then exchange their papers one more time, with a new partner, and the teacher tells them to grade one another using this form. The teacher supervises this process and provides assistance to the students as needed. Prior to dismissing class, the teacher reminds the students of the deadline for the final draft and introduces the next genre of writing that the class will focus on.

7. Conclusion

The students in this class have had the chance to use language skills to accurately tell the life stories of elderly individuals. As partners, students have seen how life stories of the same individual may vary. Students have approached this task with the support of classroom discussion about the features of biographies. Current examples, beginning with Maychick's *Audrey Hepburn: An Intimate Portrait*, have directed students along the way. This class has learned that biographies are factual narratives. The remaining units in this class would explore other types of creative nonfiction, including first-person recounts.

Students presented with these lessons may have concerns beyond those addressed here. While it is helpful to guide students with fitting examples of biography, or of any given

genre, the features that make a writing example appropriate are sometimes hard to pin. Even the rigid realism behind biographical writing leaves the writer with a plethora of options, and writers may fail to use these options effectively. Future research on biography writing in EFL classrooms will hopefully address this issue.

In writing this paper, I learned much more than what I had originally expected to learn: at the core of life history is a curious subjectivity, fiction, but with tight rules. Perhaps *fiction* is misleading here; *incomplete truth* describes it well. It is interesting to consider the creative nature of this truth and the fictional frames in which we live our lives. When we see that conventions in discourse reflect, only incompletely, the diversity of human personalities and life stories, we are better equipped to be curious about and patient with others. Thus a humanitarian end can be achieved through directing students to this curious circumstance, and by encouraging them to view others with fewer assumptions. I believe that this result shapes character along with mind and promotes a healthy atmosphere for learning.

8. Appendices

8.1 Appendix A

Assessment Tool (adapted from Yasuda 129)

Task Fulfillment and Appropriacy (TFA):

- 1 Text does not have identifiable features of its genre or is mostly inappropriate although it might contain a few fitting words or statements.
- 2 Text does not fit context although it is comprehensible and appropriate at times.
- 3 Text may have mostly appropriate vocabulary but errors in usage are present; meaning of text is somewhat unclear though text generally fits its context.
- 4 Text is appropriate to context with few obvious errors and vocabulary is used effectively, with some inappropriate word choices.
- 5 Text fulfills all of its tasks and word choices are effective and appropriate.

Cohesion & Organization (C&O):

- 1 The organization of the text is difficult to follow.
- 2 Basic organizational ideas for text are missing, but some effort has been made to maintain cohesion.
- 3 Imbalanced use of cohesive tasks, such as repetition of cohesive statements, but awareness of appropriate organization is evident in writing.
- 4 Mostly appropriate organization but containing a few clear errors.
- 5 No organizational problems are evident.

Grammatical Control (GC):

- 1 Necessary grammatical structures are employed weakly or are missing.
- 2 Some usage of necessary structures but grammar in text is mostly flawed.
- 3 Grammar is mostly accurate but still containing obvious errors.
- 4 Grammatical errors remain present but these do not interfere with meaning in text.
- 5 Grammar has been used effectively in text.

8.2 Appendix B

Biography Writing Assignment

For this assignment, you and a partner will write about an elderly individual. This subject must be someone that neither of you have met. You may reach this person through your friends or family (as long as you have no outside connection to this person), or you may find this person in the community. Your instructor will assist you with this process, but by the fourth class you must have interviewed this person to complete the assignments in class. Partners will interview the subject separately using the prompt that they have worked on together.

Your task is to present a clear, accurate, and detailed representation of this person. Use anecdotes and real examples from the individual's life to explain who he or she is and what he or she is like. Assume that your reader has never met this person. This paper should be at least four pages in length and should open with an interesting anecdote. Provide specific examples—for instance, rather than simply saying that someone is “caring” include a specific example of why this person is caring (she asked me about how I feel, she volunteers at the food pantry, etc). Be sure to include at least one direct quotation from your subject. You may also quote other individuals who know this subject, such as helpers or family members, but this is not required. Prior to submitting your final draft, you will bring in a rough draft to class for peer review. The final draft of the essay should be well organized, and it should not have any major spelling or grammar errors.

8.3 Appendix C

Reading Exercise One: Hepburn's Early Life

Rearrange the sentences in each paragraph below to their original order:

Paragraph One (Maychick 29).

1. The sound of gunfire punctured the quiet night. 2. A half hour after the troupe got onto its bus and left, the Germans noisily blasted the streets of Arnhem. 3. Air-raid alarms screeched warning signs of danger. 4. Audrey and her mother returned home and slept in the basement, where Alexander and Jan and their nanny had found refuge.

Paragraph Two (Maychick 29):

1. "I was too exhilarated about meeting Fonteyn to be as frightened as I should have been about the war. 2. It was almost as if the bombing started and the shooting became constant because I screwed up my courage and told my idol that I wanted to be a dancer just like she was! 3. Oddly enough, I think my depression began to lift that night. 4. The sounds were like fireworks to me, an affirmation that I had desires and I finally voiced them. 5. All those things were true, and I began to feel them, and the fear of death, but everything was also finally all right. 6. It wasn't until morning that I realized it was damp in the basement, that there were mice and even rats, and I was shivering. 7. I was to become a dancer." 8. "It was for me the most amazing night," Audrey said. 9. I had discovered a purpose in life.

Reading Exercise Two: Hepburn's Later Life

Rearrange the sentences in the paragraph below to their original order:

Paragraph One (Maychick 226):

1. Over the years, she had been asked to support various UN causes with her presence and she had gladly given of her time. 2. Her involvement with the United Nations Children's Fund was a gradual development. 3. She wanted to make a real connection with the children, instead of passively using her celebrity status to raise money and awareness. 4. But Audrey wanted a more concrete involvement.

Paragraph Two (Maychick 227):

1. She talked to me about it at length, and I could see she was really struggling with the decision. 2. Princess Catherine Aga Khan, wife of UNICEF commissioner Prince Sadruddin Aga Khan, remembers talking to Audrey at a UN reception in the mid-1980s. 3. I think most celebrities would gladly have lent their name to the cause, but that would be it. 4. "She didn't want to let down the people who were counting on her. 5. Audrey, on the other hand, would not lend her name unless she could also promise her full commitment.

8.4 Appendix D

Please write a short answer, of 3-5 sentences in length, for two of the following questions. These will be discussed in class, so be prepared to speak.

1. What were Audrey Hepburn's greatest hardships, and where are they presented in this biography?
2. How did Audrey Hepburn feel about the world? Support your answer with as many voices from the narrative as possible.
3. What circumstances and abilities made Audrey Hepburn unique, and how are we able to verify this information?

8.5 Appendix E

Interview Outline

Together with your partner, put together a list of questions for your interviews using the questions below as guides. Each student should have a list of at least twelve questions (at least eight from the first question, and four from the second) to prepare for the interview.

What basic information about your subject should both of your interviews include? (*Ex.*

Where were you born? Where have you lived?)

What questions about your subject might be different for each of your interviews? (*Ex.*

What do you remember about going to school as a child? What is your outlook on life and

how has that changed? What are your greatest accomplishments/regrets?)

8.6 Appendix F

Please write a short answer, of 2-5 sentences in length, for at least two of the following questions. These will be discussed in class, so be prepared to speak.

1. What was your impression of your subject?
2. How did your impression differ from your partner's? How was it similar?
3. What was the most interesting answer you received, and why?
4. Picture yourself in an event or situation described by your subject. How would you respond to this situation differently?
5. If your subject could change one thing about his or her life, what would it be and why?

8.7 Appendix G

Peer Review Questions

Part One: Read your partner's rough draft and answer the following questions:

1. How was your partner's rough draft similar to yours, and how did it differ?

2. What advice would you give your partner to improve his or her rough draft?

Part Two: Read another biography in class, for a new subject, and answer the following:

1. What did you learn about this subject?

2. How may your new partner improve what he or she has written?

Works Cited

- Bruner, Jerome. "The Narrative Construction of Reality." *Critical Inquiry* 18.1 (1991): 1-21.
- Cheng, Fei-Wen. "Scaffolding Language, Scaffolding Writing: A Genre Approach to Teaching Narrative Writing." *The Asian EFL Journal* 10.2 (2008): 167-191. Print.
- Connelly, F. Michael and D. Jean Clandinin. "Stories of Experience and Narrative Inquiry." *Educational Researcher* 19.5 (1990): 2-14. Print.
- Dai, Fan. "English-language Creative Writing in Mainland China." *World Englishes* 29.4 (2010): 546-556. Print.
- Edel, Leon. "BIOGRAPHY: A Manifesto." *Biography*. 1.1 (1978): 1-3. Print.
- Gao, Jiajing. "Teaching Writing in Chinese Universities: Finding an Eclectic Approach." *Asian EFL Journal: English Language Teaching and Research Articles* May 2007. Web. 24 Sept 2012.
- Genette, Gerard. "Fictional Narrative, Factual Narrative." *Poetics Today* 11.4 (1990): 755-774. Print.
- González, Virginia, Chia-Yin Chen, and Claudia Sanchez. "Cultural Thinking and Discourse Organizational Patterns Influencing Writing Skills in a Chinese English-as-a-Foreign-Language (EFL) Learner." *Bilingual Research Journal* 25.4 (2001): 627-652.
- Harmer, Jeremy. *The Practice of English Language Teaching*. Essex, England: Longman,

2001. Print.

Hyland, Ken. "Genre: Language, Context, and Literacy." *Annual Review of Applied*

Linguistics 22 (2002): 113-135. Print.

Hyland, Ken. "Genre Pedagogy: Language, Literacy, and L2 Writing Instruction." *Journal of*

Second Language Writing 16 (2007): 148-164. Print.

Hymes, Dell. *Foundations in Sociolinguistics: An Ethnographic Approach*. Philadelphia:

University of Pennsylvania Press, 1974. Print.

Hyon, Sunny. "Long-term effects of genre-based instruction: a follow-up study of an EAP

reading course." *English for Specific Purposes* 20 (2001): 417-438. Print.

Ishikawa, Sandra. "Objective measurement of low-proficiency EFL narrative writing."

Journal of Second Language Writing 4.1 (1995): 51-69.

Johns, Ann M. "The future of genre in L2 writing: Fundamental, but contested, instructional

decisions." *Journal of Second Language Writing* 20.1 (2011): 56-68.

Kang, Jennifer Yusun. "Written Narratives as an Index of L2 Competence in Korean EFL

Learners." *Journal of Second Language Writing* 14 (2005): 259-279. Print.

Kaplan, Robert B. "Cultural Thought Patterns in Inter-Cultural Education." *Language*

Learning 16 (1966): 1-20. Print.

Kormos, Judit. "Task Complexity and Linguistic and Discourse Features of Narrative Writing

Performance." *Journal of Second Language Learning* 20 (2011): 148-161. Print.

- Lam, Wendy. "Directing Learner Attention to Language Knowledge and Language Use in the EFL Classroom: The Voice of an Expert Teacher." *English Language Teacher Education and Development* 12 (2009): 61-66. Print.
- Mailer, Norman. *Marilyn: A Biography*. New York: Grosset and Dunlap, 1973. Print.
- Mauchlan, David. "Using Genres and Genre Analysis as an Effective EFL Teaching Tool." *The Journal of Liberal Arts, Nagoya University of Arts and Sciences* 1 (2005): 79-96. Print.
- Matsuda, Paul Kei. "Contrastive Rhetoric in Context: A Dynamic Model of L2 Writing." *Journal of Second Language Writing* 6.1 (1997): 45-60. Print.
- Maychick, Diana. *Audrey Hepburn: An Intimate Portrait*. New York: Birch Lane Press, 1993. Print.
- Nivison, David S. "Aspects of Traditional Chinese Biography." *The Journal of Asian Studies* 21.4 (1962): 457-463. Print.
- Pavlenko, Anita. "Narrative Study: Whose Story Is It Anyway?" *TESOL Quarterly* 36.2 (2002): 213-218. Print.
- Raimes, Ann. "Out of the Woods: Emerging Traditions in the Teaching of Writing." *TESOL Quarterly* 25.3 (1991): 407-430. Print.
- Schabert, Ina. "Fictional Biography, Factual Biography, and their Contaminations." *Biography* 5.1 (1982): 1-16. Print.

Seo, Ruth. "Biographical Narrative Writing: A Springboard for the Oral History Project."

California Writing. California Writing Project. Web. 28 Nov 2012.

Soliday, Mary. "Translating Self and Difference through Literacy Narratives." *College*

English. 56.5 (1994): 511-526. Print.

Swales, John. *Genre analysis: English in Academic and Research Settings*. Cambridge

University Press, 1990.

Tannen, Deborah. "Oral and Linguistic Strategies in Spoken and Written Narratives."

Language 58.1 (1982): 1-21. Print.

Wang, Wenyu and Quifang Wen. "L1 Use in the L2 Composing Process: An Exploratory

Study of 16 Chinese EFL writers." *Journal of Second Language Writing* 11 (2002):
225-246. Print.

Yasuda, Sachiko. "Genre-based Tasks in Foreign Language writing: Developing Writers'

Genre Awareness, Linguistic Knowledge, and Writing Competence." *Journal of Second
Language Writing* 20 (2011): 111-133. Print.

Zacharias, Nugrahenny T. "Lifting Silent Voices through the Use of Narrative in EFL Writing

Classroom." *English Education* 7.2 (2007): 93-106. Print.