A Study of Writing through Websites

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Abstract

This is a study of teaching writing in English through websites to Japanese students (Chinese and Korean students studying in Japan as well). Since the Internet began to be used widely in the late 1990s, we have been able to make use of the computer network for educational purposes. Writing needs frequent practice and the Internet makes it possible for us to share our writings online casually. E-mail correspondence is common among students particularly via mobile phones today. As they are familiar with the digital communication, their present writing habit may well be applied to our English classes with the Internet. Website building provides us with the chance for writing interactively; and it can be a substantial task for one semester program of an English writing course. We discuss the methods, contents, and problems of writing classes through websites as the following:

   Ⅰ．On Writing
   Ⅱ．Website Building
   Ⅲ．What to Write and How to Write
   Ⅳ．Interaction between Writers and Readers
   Ⅴ．Rewriting and Updating
   Ⅵ．Collaboration in Groups
   Ⅶ．Conclusion: Writing for Communication

Ⅰ．On Writing

Instructors of writing must be good writers. "To be good writers" does not mean to be professional novelists, essayists, or journalists. It just means instructors should know how to write properly and have enthusiasm for writing. When it is the matter of writing in a foreign language especially, instructors need continuous practice for maintaining the sense of the language and necessity for writing.

We can make use of a website on the Internet as a medium for writing practice. It makes us go on writing in the target foreign language (in our case in English) constantly. To write on the website means to *publish* our writings regardless of the length for virtual readers. In order to publish, we cannot avoid editing what we have written several times until it comes to be readable for others. The process of writing and rewriting makes us check words and

phrases as well as the main ideas, and the whole structure of a passage from plural aspects. It is exactly the process of writing which we want our students to follow. By assuming readers online, our writing activities become real. To think we might have readers is better than keeping our writings only to ourselves. The motivation of writing is nothing but the urge for communication. So website building for teaching English starts with the instructor's interest in its effectiveness.

The best and almost the only merit of putting our writings online is that we might be able to expect the reaction from readers. Unless there is any kind of interaction between a writer and readers, we cannot maintain the motivation for further writing. There may possibly be severe criticisms even to discourage us, but it is much better than getting no response from anywhere. Writing online, no matter what level of writing it may be, is a social activity. To upload our writings on a website is to live in a cyber world, a virtual society good enough for practice. We ourselves might be the first and the last readers sometimes; yet, a website gives us the opportunity to look at what we write from a reader's viewpoint.

When we have readers, we get the chance to improve our writing ability far beyond our imagination. As for the merits of sharing what we write, there is an example of an "off-line" session. Let us introduce a training course in writing for schoolteachers (all of them are native English speakers in principle): "The Virginia Writing Project." It is a concentrated summer seminar for teachers in practice in that area of the United States. The author had a chance to attend its workshops in 1997 as a visiting scholar of Curry School of Education in the University of Virginia. The course description reads:

One principle of the Writing Project is that you can teach writing best when you yourself practice writing and observe your own writing processes. Another principle is that teachers can gain much from the body of knowledge that is developing about the writing process and the teaching of writing. We ask that you read extensively in assigned and other readings, though not at the expense of your writing and other activities, and that you participate in discussions.

One more basic principle of the Writing Project is that teachers are the best teachers of other teachers. We ask that you prepare yourself to be a consultant to others throughout the curriculum and that you develop a specific inservice for your colleagues at home-- based on a sound philosophy and immediately useful in the classroom. You will conduct a portion of your inservice for all of us in the Project and provide an overview of the remainder.[1]

Here we find (1) the importance of teachers being writers, and also (2) the importance of having readers of their own writings. Through the process of writing, being read by others, reading the writings of others, having discussion, and several times of rewriting, we really experience the wholeness of writing. This kind of peer-training system is not very common in Japan; however, we can apply the essence of the Project to our writing classes in many ways. We insist that writing is an activity that requires practice as one of the habits of our life. An instructor as a writer cannot be an exception. We must write constantly if we wish to teach writing. A website on the Internet can serve "a virtual gym" for writing exercise for both instructors and students. Decades ago people used to say, "Publish or Perish." Today to publish does not mean solely to circulate printed matters. On-line publication is faster, quicker to get response, and easy to start. For practice, at least, a website is usefully here at hand.

II．Website Building

If we are seeking for a person-to-person correspondence, e-mail is the best way to choose. For group discussion on certain issues, the mailing list has merits. For casual exchange of opinions, "the bulletin board system" (BBS) works well. Conversational and impromptu exchange of written words is available on chatting lines. What then is the main point of writing on websites? Simply it gives us time to think and rewrite. A website is a showcase of the style, contents, and ideas of what we have in mind. We, the producer of such a showcase, are entitled to elaborate the display, namely what we write, taking time as long as we like. We may add graphics and sound for better expression as well.

A basic website for writing practice needs no fancy tricks. We had better know the fundamental rules of handling HTML (hypertext markup language) as we may want to give small changes and corrections to the display anytime, but we can depend upon the homepage-building software for setting up the framework. As long as the purpose of website building is for getting the medium to display our writings, we don't have to spend much time and energy for technical tasks. More and more network users are inclined to use "the Weblog" recently, a very simplified form of an individual site mainly for diaries. As time passes, new types of "showcase" will appear one after another; however, to write in English and upload our writings on the Internet, a website in its simple form has been working well so far.

 Suppose we have gone through the registration procedure with our network administrators, we are ready to build our websites. The first thing we do is to design the rough structure of the site; and then to decide what to call it. The title of the website implies its contents. When we build one for our own, we can devise its name thinking of our writing stance. When

we teach students, we should remind them that it is the first step of writing. Some students like to be fashionable and give their websites surprising titles; yet, the interesting thing is that most of them have a notion that their websites are their own private space calling them their "homes." This concept comes from the well-known phrase "homepage." In fact, "homepage" means the index page of a website initially. The index or the top page must include the table of contents at least. Like the title of a book, it should give the general idea of what is going to happen inside.

In principle, we are perfectly free to choose what we include in our table of contents, for we are a writer and editor. For teaching, we need to give a clear-cut instruction on what to write and what not. Even "at home," we cannot forget that we are in a showcase on the Internet. Students have to learn what it is to be decent in terms of language when they go into

Chart 1

[example-1]	an instructor's website for an English Writing Class	
Title	Keiko Kitada's Writing Wrokshop	
Subtitle	Learn to Write, Write to Learn	
Table of Contents	Introduction	Syllabus of the class
	Information	Class schedule and notices
	Topics for Writing	The list of assignments
	Writing Styles	Strategies for writing
	Tips for Writing	Basic rules for writing and checking
	Sample Passages	We can put our own writings and those of students in the past here.
	Links	Reference to useful websites, books, institutions
	Students' Pages	Linked to a portal site to students' websites

Chart 2

[example-2]	a student's individual website	
Title	Hikaru's Homepage	
Subtitle	A Studio for Hip-Hop Lovers	
Table of Contents	My Profile	Self-introduction
	My Hobby	On what s/he knows well (for example Hip-hop music/dancing)
	My Hometown	A report of the place where s/he is from
	My Favorite Photo	An essay with a photograph
	My Opinions	On a certain social topic of the day
	Hikaru's Music Diary	Three-lines-a-day*
	Links	Including the one going back to the instructor's portal site

three-lines-a-day* See "III. What to Write and How to Write" for more information.

the cyber space. Guidelines on manners on the Internet should be given at the beginning: the importance to respect copyrights and rights of portrait, never to insult others, and to observe etiquettes of the Internet. Here are examples of index pages in Chart1 and Chart 2.

Another possibility is to let students build websites in groups. The group project requires (1) the research for collecting information, (2) selection of materials, (3) writing articles, and (4) summing up all into one coherent website. Writing here is a part of the variety of activities but in the core of them. Each member of the group should be responsible for the page(s) s/he undertakes. As a practice of sending information via the Internet, the group project hopefully gives students the chance to observe their interest in perspective: their words must be trustworthy and reliable. Here is another example of the index page of a group website in Chart 3.

Chart 3

[example-3]	a students' group website	
Title	The Quest in the City of Korakuen, Tokyo	
Subtitle	A Study of a Complex of Sports and Amusement Resort in Tokyo	
Contents	Introduction	Introducing purposes and plans of the research. The share of responsibility for each topic should be written here with students' names.
	Tokyo Dome, "Big Egg"	A report of its history and function.
	Amusement Park	An inside report introducing attractions, facilities, and events.
	Korakuen Hall	An introduction of a home of combat sports.
	LaQua	A report of the comprehensive resort including spa in the metropolis
	Koishikawa Korakuen Gardens	A guide to the historical Japanese garden beside the extra-modern buildings for sports and entertainment.
	Our Observation	A summary of the research

Note: An individual student is the only person that can upload and edit files of his/her personal website while all the members of a group have the right to upload and change files to their group website although they need to decide who should be in charge of which particular pages. The leader of a group has to arrange the total integrity of the whole website.

From both of their individual and group websites, students are supposed to make links back to the instructor's portal site. Thus, plural websites are to be integrated into a comprehensive one supervised by the instructor. We can go back and forth between the main area of the instructor's pages and the branches of students' pages. For students, one of the most important things about writing on the website is to check their own writings as many times as possible until they can present reliable contents in decent expressions as senders of

information. Starting with what they know very well (most of the time about themselves and their hobbies), we lead them into larger perspectives such as cities/towns where they are from or they live, (social) topics of the day, a study of a commercial/historical area and more. The instructor's responsibility is, therefore, to check what they write: to see if there is no baseless information socially and if their English is good enough to display on the Internet to the general readers. We definitely need to make an agreement with students in advance on how to edit and rewrite students' drafts as you find in V. Rewriting and Updating.

Ⅲ. **What to Write and How to Write**

As we mentioned above, an instructor should have the enthusiasm for writing; otherwise, the checking of students' drafts will end up with just a sort of grammatical censorship, which has nothing to do with the pleasure of writing. No matter which level our students are in at the beginning, they can start from wherever they are. They have the possibility of growing up to be good writers even in a foreign language if only they have the experience of the joy of writing. Where does that sense of joy come from?

Freedom doesn't always mean relief. If we are allowed to write anything we like freely, we are very likely to be at a loss especially when we are in the elementary stage of handling a foreign language. Given a clear framework, we find something to cling to. The framework is far from the prison walls, but they can work as stepping boards instead. Within restrictions, strange enough, our imagination seems to start working very actively for relief. Let us introduce some of the activities (tasks) of a poetry writing workshop at the Virginia Writing Project 1997. In one session, the participants were told to write a poem using one of the following sets of words:

	word list[2]
1	slice, apron, clutter, blindfold, liquid, lurk, one, shoreline, leaden
2	pierce, frame, studio, shackle, dissolve, spleen, stocking, blow, unnamed
3	carve, kitchen, tilt, chain, streak, float, jazz, purse, cliff
4	toss, shade, easel, howl, daylight, recall, combo, mouth, arrival
5	inch, lawn, brim, peony, inhale, rise, background, beast, invent
6	stray, wagon, chandelier, binoculars, barge, middle, sway, prowl, motion
7	envelope, water, concert, money clip, stare, battle, branch, lap, density
8	globe, click, flicker, mailbox, dash, circle, bass, margin, startle

At a glance words of each set do not have any substantial connection to one another. Participants were supposed to write something meaningful in the style of a poem within a

limited time and then to share the writings with other members of their group. In spite of our first negative reaction to the instruction, once we concentrated on the words we chose, we could find (or create) some threads to connect the given words into a meaningful form. As a non-native speaker of English, the author had the evident vocabulary handicap compared to anyone else in her group, but even she found (created) a thread to write a stanza with the set of words in No. 8 (globe, click, flicker, mailbox, dash, circle, bass, margin, startle) in this way:

The <u>Globe</u>

When I <u>click</u> the mouse in my palm
There is the <u>flickering</u> on the screen
The arrow <u>dashes</u> to the letter-shaped icon
To open the <u>mailbox</u>, a treasure box of mine.
How different this mailbox is
From what I knew in my youth!
I <u>circle</u> around the long-waited mails
That reached me on-line from afar.
In <u>bass</u> they sing the songs of the globe
In the blank <u>margin</u>, too
Countless words unwritten <u>startle</u> me so![3]

(words in the list 8 are underlined above.)

It shows at least that words have the magic in themselves in the way of association. Once we complete a stanza, however short it may be, we get the feeling of achievement and this feeling brings us the pleasure of writing. The positive feeling encourages us for the next challenges. Can't this kind of feeling give our students the willingness to write in English, too? We present them with lists of words, sentence patterns, and the limit in length (of the passage/stanza). Depending on the level of students' proficiency, we may change the contents of restrictions. The restrictions or the rules of a writing task are to be included in the page under the title of "Writing Styles (strategies for writing)" in sample-1 of the instructor's main website.

Starting with personal topics, we go on step by step to social topics. We should not jump from personal ones to social ones at once. In the middle of these poles, how about giving a practice of describing something visual? Here is another example from the VWP. All the participants of the workshop were given photographs showing people against background

objects. Watching the photo each of them received, s/he was supposed to describe what the picture shows after the following guidelines:

GUIDED PICTURE WRITING[4]

1) Choose one of the following starter lines:

No one is here. . . .

In this picture, I am. . . .

The face is. . . .

This exists only in my memory. . . .

At first I thought. . . .

If there is one thing to be said. . . .

Then complete the sentence. Continue building on this opening line with the following sentences; this will be 12 sentences long.

2) Your next sentence should have a color in it.

3) Your next sentence should have a simile in it (a comparison using LIKE or AS).

4) Your next sentence should include the name of some part of the body.

5) Your next sentence should be over 25 words.

6) Your next sentence should be less than 8 words.

7) Write a sentence with one of the following words in it: arrow, oil, gauze, wrap, count, or linen.

8) Your next sentence should contain an animal.

9) Your next sentence should contain three words which alliterate (begin with the same first consonant).

10) Write a sentence which requires two or more commas.

11) Write a sentence with a smell in it.

12) Your last sentence should contain the word you selected for your title.

Given the directions above, the author wrote a stanza as follows in the workshop. Let us add some commentary which she wrote regarding the poem-like passage:

In fact the photograph that I received was showing two young lovers passionately hugging each other in a garden. It was a monochrome picture. At first I could think nothing about the youthful lovers. They looked too far away from my taste. Everybody

around me was grumbling of the pictures s/he got. But Margo (the instructor) didn't pay any attention to the noise. She just encouraged us to follow the directions in the handout. We could not help but start writing somehow. Then another miracle! Here is the poem I wrote based on and inspired by the picture.

A Slice

No one is here but two of us
Blue bright brilliant sky looks down on us
Like wild beasts we tackle to each other
Our breasts meet again and again
In the green shade we become a chain
Which swings in slow motion, swaying and clicking
Blown easily in the slightest breeze soft and sweet
You stare at me piercing to the core
An arrow it was, deep in me
I won't call you a faithful lion; you are a bird
Flying far away, forgetting me so soon
Believe me, or not, I caught you once
Rotten apples, ripen grapes or squashed peach called you
In a slice of life, I crystallize you, at least now

I wonder if anybody who reads this poem can picture the photograph in his/her mind. Margo said the procedure matters more than the products in writing poetry at the workshop. So do I hope! I was glad this poem-looking piece was not an object of any criticism. The principle was that we would learn how to handle words in time. It is almost like the process that children learn their mother tongue.[5]

With restrictions and an external object other than words, our association works more actively than only with words. Our students do not necessarily have to write a poem, but in prose too, we are able to do this kind of experiment. As we indicated in a possible example-2 of a student's individual website, we can let students combine a photo image that each of them brings and her/his own description of it. Students are to write on what they know well somehow, but within restrictions: they have to write about an object more concisely. As the author writes in the comment above, "handling words" is important here. Through exercises

like these, learners of a foreign language consciously use words to express ideas. Limitation in vocabulary is not always a handicap. The most essential point is to write what we think/feel simply and clearly. No decoration is necessary as William Zinsser says,

> Be grateful for everything you can throw away. Reexamine each sentence you put on paper. Is every word doing new work? Can any thought be expressed with more economy? Is anything pompous or pretentious or faddish? Are you hanging on to something useless just because you think it's beautiful?
>
> Simplify, simplify.[6]

Ⅳ. Interaction between Writers and Readers

In a special seminar like Virginia Writing Project, there are always writers and readers together. We are the writers and readers at the same time; we write and read each other's writings. Comments come immediately after writing. The interaction is actual and straightforward. That is the situation we hardly get when we are teaching and learning in Japanese institutions. We have to manage with what we have. Websites are helpful in several aspects under such circumstances. Peer-training is effective online.

One of the most negative criticisms that the author has ever received came while her students were working through the Internet websites in 2001, in the third year of the practice. A Japanese instructor of English said, "Isn't it a shame to expose students' writings in such poor English through their websites?" "Poor" indicates basically "ungrammatical," "with spelling mistakes," and "trivial contents from an educational view point." The author made no excuse to the disapproval. The only thing we can say about it is that websites of any kinds are always *in progress*; under the process of development theoretically. If we, Japanese instructors of English, are writing in our personal websites for creative purposes or for educational/academic use, all the criticisms should come to us with no reservation. As for students' websites which are run for the practice of writing in English, we the instructors should be blamed of the lack of sufficient support, not students for their insufficient knowledge. In this sense, writing practice through websites always has the possibility of getting direct negative response from any readers. However, reaction of readers is much more significant than no reaction at all. Exposure means experience. The reality of students' language competence is evidently displayed online but their progress can be also observed as we go along with them.

If we look at other aspects of interaction between writers and readers through websites, we recognize the actual communication online. Students in a distance can be connected with

each other through links included in their respective websites; instructors can do the same. Moreover, casual visitors may respond to the information sent from our websites. By taking access logs, we are able to check which pages are getting more visitors than other pages. Due to the amazing development of "the search engines," they are picking up "key words/ phrases" regardless of time and place. Readers may appear from anywhere. Let us introduce only one remarkable example about it. In the author's personal website, there is a section of reportage to introduce towns and parks in Tokyo with photographs and description both in Japanese and in English. This bilingual section in the website is entitled "Walking in Tokyo." When she takes photos and writes descriptions, she tries to look at spots in Tokyo with eyes of a stranger; thus, ordinary scenes show fresh appearances. There is an entry called "A Town along Rivers, Tsukishima at Midday in Midsummer." Tsukishima is famous for its food of downtown taste, "monja-yaki," the flour dissolved in water and mixed with meat/ seafood/vegetables to be fried on a sizzling iron plate. The main street of the town is called "Monja Dori," along which are many small restaurants of the food. Concerning the reportage with 29 photos, an e-mail came:

> My name is Michael Singer, and I live in Los Angeles, where I work in motion pictures and as a freelance writer. I came across your delightful website quite by accident, searching the web for information about "Monja Dori." I truly appreciated both your words and photographs. You obviously use both word and image to their best possible advantage: as a means of communication with the world. Your students are truly fortunate to have you as their *sensei*.
>
> Friday, 18, 2002

Nobody knows what interests unknown readers in the wide world. If we continue writing and showing what we have, there is the possibility of encounter with readers. Unless we write, we meet nobody.

Ⅴ. Rewriting and Updating

The first reader of a student's writings is the instructor. Rewriting and editing are indispensable for website building. As long as we "publish" information of any kind, we are responsible for the activity. We have to decide what to suggest after we read students' works. Usually readers pay attention to the points we mentioned above: grammar, spelling, and contents. We may add "construction of paragraphs" and "style" to the list. We need to make an agreement with students at the beginning. A possible list of agreement is as follows:

An Agreement on Proofreading

1. Students must use spelling check function of the word processor before they upload their writings.
2. Students may use the online dictionaries but are never allowed to use online Japanese-English translation websites for writing.
3. Students must report every updating of their websites to the instructor during the semester for proofreading.
4. The instructor checks their websites and sends the feedback via e-mail to them.
5. On receiving the instructor's suggestions, students must rewrite their articles and report the renewal again to the instructor.
6. The instructor checks the following points with the following marks: (1) grammatical mistakes with (   ) meaning "**delete**" and {   } meaning "**substitute/add**"; (2) questions to contents with 〔   〕 meaning "**read my comment and think again**"; (3) Further suggestions/advice are to follow student's text of articles.
7. Questions are welcome via e-mail

It is preferable to correspond with students in English via e-mail throughout the semester. If we find it too demanding for some of the students in class to conduct the English communication all the time, we may possibly agree with them that we can correspond in Japanese about the technical aspects of website building. Frequent correspondence is very demanding to instructors, of course; however, the frequency of writing in English is the best way for both parties to attain English fluency. We shouldn't be too meticulous about mistakes in e-mails, for they are not to be uploaded in the web-showcase.

We cannot underestimate the peer-instruction. As we mentioned in the introduction of VWP above, "teachers are the best teachers of other teacher." The principle applies to students too. Through websites they can read writings of other students anytime they like. We observe students' websites develop more than we expect as the semester goes on. The fact proves students are learning from each other. They also help each other in many ways. They are getting the keenest stimulation from their peer students. Therefore, it is not meaningless to point out some of the good performances in website building during the class time. Students even in the elementary stages in terms of English proficiency have a lot to say and show with their unique personal backgrounds. Students' contribution to the class through websites is indefinite. Compared to dynamic oral classes, writing classes are usually quiet and

less active; however, where website building is in the core of the classroom tasks, students become busy and active.

Frequency of correspondence between a student and the instructor makes a difference in the quality of websites for sure. Frequency means how often students get the chance to update their writings. There is no completeness but their attitude for better writing influences their work greatly. As a clear target for writing constantly, we can encourage students to keep a diary in English in their websites. Instructors do not have to respond to them every day but can make some comments once a week. The diary should not be long. One idea is to let them write three lines a day; no more or less. In order to write three lines, students have to pick up one topic from their wandering thoughts. This selection is not an easy task at the beginning for many of Japanese students. They tend to write anything vaguely in ambiguous words. For them, to be simple and clear is a big task. It is more difficult for them to write about a simple thing of life than to put a given Japanese sentence into English, for they have been taught that writing in English is *translation*. Translation, however, requires skills totally different from composing one's ideas into words. Keeping a diary is to draw something out of themselves. It is one style of creation. If students keep writing their diary throughout the semester, the total number of lines amounts to nearly ten pages. For a diary, to keep writing constantly is more important than "grammar, vocabulary, and contents." Keeping a diary means to take time to observe one's life. To find something to write in words requires students to check dictionaries; consequently, it leads them to increase their vocabulary. They learn words if the words are of their real interests. Here again, the only principle is to write simply and clearly.

In order to demonstrate that their websites are frequently updated, we need to tell students to indicate the latest date of every renewal. The update time plays a very important part in the maintenance of websites. Instructors, too, should not forget to mark the updating of their website. Visitors definitely check the latest update. Students will find out through keeping a web-diary how much they can write each day in English. Daily practice will diminish the foreignness of English gradually. At the end of one semester, students will feel more familiar with the English language than before. A habit of life helps us all.

Ⅵ. **Collaboration in Groups**

Starting with personal topics, students will be ready to write on more impersonal, social issues. One possible approach to website building is to let students work together in groups as we mentioned in ［example-3］, to build a students' group website. (Only one semester is not long enough for both individual sites and group sites; two semesters are sufficient for

both. Certainly very advanced students are able to do both in parallel.)

 Through brain storming, each group decides their targets and strategies. Their works contain (1) collecting information; (2) selecting what's really important; (3) thinking of the design to present the information attractively; (4) writing drafts and rewriting them; and (5) revising the pages several times. After the final adjustment, the group websites will be completed. Although it is a long procedure, if several groups can work as branches under the united topic of a class, the whole website will be a significant base for sending out some message to the world in English.

In sample-(3) above, we assumed a possible project: an area study. The project involves plural issues to be taken into consideration. We have to be careful not to violate the copy right, the profile right, and more of the people and property in concern. Writing comes to be a social activity. Writing for purposes drives students to action. For the undergraduate level, it is not necessary to require them to be specialists but it's more important for us to encourage them to be the donors/senders/transmitters of information about what they know and think well, what they are interested in, and what they like to tell in English to the global readers. Writing for this purpose is surely more exciting for them than to keep being recipients of information all the time. Generally speaking, Japanese students need to be more active. Website building in English can provide them with the opportunity for action through writing; that is to say, the opportunity for *giving*.

Throughout the whole procedure of building the group pages, the instructor has to be concerned with details as well as the grand design of the integrated website. There are variety of possible topics for group collaboration. The instructor should be well informed of the progress of students' works. Here the role of the instructor is clearly that of a facilitator. In terms of the English language, however, the instructor always takes the initiative to give suggestions, following the agreed method which we mentioned in Chapter Ⅵ. The best part of utilizing a website for collaboration is that anyone in a group can access the latest information uploaded on the Internet wherever they are and whenever they want. The close contact among students in a group via e-mail is as important as that between students and the instructor. As one semester project, the group work of building a website is a hard task to achieve. Moreover, one of the problems is what to do with the website after the semester. If the website is worth maintaining, the instructor has to collect all the files under his/her control. There is the possibility to continue the project with students to come and thus the instructor can give continuity to separate writing classes with website properties. We have former students' written materials to show as samples to the following ones. Thus, the instructor's efforts of checking students' writings will remain through websites.

Ⅶ. Conclusion: Writing for Communication

The motto of The Virginia Writing Project says, "Teachers teaching teachers, better ways to teach writing."[7] But what is the purpose of writing?

Our writing style, if there is anything like that at all, has been changing constantly these days. Up to the 1970s typewriters were domineering for those who wrote in alphabet; in the 1980s electronic typewriters started to be replaced by word processors: in the 1990s, word processors were replaced by personal computers and the Internet spread rapidly and dynamically; in the 2000s young people prefer e-mail communication via mobile phones to that via personal computers while they also use the latter without much aversion. Recently less and less people write letters for communication.

To our amazement, the majority of Japanese undergraduates have never learned cursive handwriting. When they write, most of them print and complain if instructors use cursive handwriting on the blackboard. Many of our students bring electronic dictionaries to the classroom. We see only a few of them turning pages of traditional dictionaries. Accordingly, the mode of literacy has not been the same as before. For writing instruction, we are challenged to present something really attractive to today's young learners. In the late 1990s when "digital communication" just started, it was yet novel to make use of websites for writing classes. After one decade, websites on the Internet have become something so common in our daily life that they have no novelty in themselves. Our idea here is, therefore, to place websites in the core of our writing practice now that they are a significant part of our students' life. To become the senders of information written in English gives students the chance to find some of the mechanism working behind the browser too. If they have abandoned to write neatly in handwriting for sending messages, they have to find their own way for communication.

The momentary exchange of short e-mails via mobile phones between individuals cannot be the final stage of the human communication in its written form. Thoughts, ideas, and emotions are to be expressed truly after self-reflection. In order to find out what we really want to say in exact words, it takes us time to look into ourselves. The insight makes it possible for us to express ourselves. Writing is one way to visualize our self-reflection.

Everybody can be a writer. Writing is toil and joy. If we are good writers and instructors of writing, we are surely able to share a lot with our students in the writing practice through websites. We write in English to send messages to the wide world. Websites open the way to interactive communication for individual writers.

Notes:

(1) Summer Invitational Institute, Central Virginia Writing Project, "Description and Expectations, Summer Institute-1997," Curry School of Education, University of Virginia, 1997, p.1

(2) "List of Words," an unpublished handout by Margo Figgings, Curry School of Education, University of Virginia, 1997

(3) Keiko Kitada, an unpublished poem, 1997

(4) Figgins ,"GUIDED PICTURE WRITING," a handout for VWP, 1997

(5) Kitada, an unpublished passage, 1997

(6) William Zinsser, *On Writing Well*, Harper Perennial, 1994, p.18

(7) "Teachers teaching teachers, better ways to teach writing" — the motto of VWP, a guide to VWP, University of Virginia, 1997