Effectiveness of Using Formative Assessment Strategies in Testing Writing Proposals of Third Year English Specialization Students at Hinthada University

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Abstract

In this research, the formative assessment strategies were introduced and used for writing "proposals" of third year English specialization students at Hinthada University. They had never been familiar with "writing proposal", including the problems and giving suggestions and reasons for these suggestions. Therefore, they were given a sample proposal with functional language and format for proposal writing. Then, they had to write a proposal on their own. The three strategies of formative assessment: eliciting, interpreting and acting upon the interpretation were applied to assess students' proposal writing. The data were (60) students' written materials, peer review checklists and post-test questionnaires. After the students had written the drafts, they evaluated the other groups' writing by using the peer review checklist. Then, the post-test questionnaires were administered to get the students' attitude to peer-editing. By the time they had written the three drafts for proposals, they can improve their proposal writing. The formative assessment strategies can be used to elicit students' mistakes in their drafts and interpret them and perform well for their final version. Therefore, formative assessment is very useful to assess students' writing skills.

Keywords: formative assessment, three strategies, peer review checklist

INTRODUCTION

Assessment is about building a picture over time of progress and achievement in learning across the curriculum. Information about how the student learns (the learning process) as well as what the student learns (the products of learning) shapes the picture. The teacher uses this information to identify and celebrate the student's current learning, and to provide him or her with appropriate support for further learning.

Global (level 3) coursebook gives the students a chance to develop their writing skills, providing the extended writing practice. It introduces the students how to write a proposal. The present research focuses on the three strategies of formative assessment: eliciting, interpreting and acting in every step of writing a good proposal. To evaluate the students' improvement on every step, the three strategies of formative assessment are continuously applied. A checklist is used for their first and second drafts. It aims to study the effectiveness of using the three strategies of formative assessment at the students' writing proposal. Writing a good proposal is a critical skill in many occupations. In planning this proposal writing, defining the audience, issues and suggestions are included. In Global (Level 3), coursebook, a sample proposal is designed to provide students with extended writing practice. When the students have finished their proposal and peer checking, free journal writing for their attitude on peer checking is used to reflect on their own learning.

Finally, the questionnaire to the students is distributed and responded to evaluate the students' attitude about the formative assessment strategies.

Aim and Objectives

The aim of the present research is to discover the effectiveness of using the Formative Assessment strategies in students' proposal writing, using the proper form of functional language.

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The objectives of the present research are:

1. To assess students' performance in every step of proposal writing by using formative assessment strategies
2. To study the effect of using peer checklist for proposal writing
3. To observe the production of proposal writing
4. To examine students' attitude to peer checklist by using "free journal writing".

LITERATURE REVIEW

In this section, the definitions of key terms and related researches to five main themes - formative assessment strategies, proposal writing, peer editing, free journal writing and post-test questionnaires are mentioned.

Definitions of Key Terms

According to (Irons, 2008), formative assessment relates to the kind of feedback teachers give students as a course is progressing and which, as a result, may help them to improve their performance.

Formative assessment is at the heart of effective teaching. There are three components of formative assessment: eliciting assessment information, interpreting eliciting assessment information and acting upon interpretation. Acting upon interpretation means providing feedback to students, reflecting upon and revising teaching. Feedback has to be from Teacher to Student, from Student to Teacher and from Student to Student. (Black,P.J & William,D, 2006)

Writing a good proposal is a critical skill in many occupations. The goal of a proposal is to gain support for a plan by informing the appropriate people. In planning a proposal, defining the audience is needed. Then, it should be clear to define what the issue is. After that, defining the solution should be straightforward and easy to understand for the reader. (Clandfield.L & Benne.R.B, 2011)

Marilyn Lewis (Lewis, Giving Feedback in Language Classes, 2008) noted that the checklist is used as students evaluate their own or someone else's work when the writing is finished.

Peer feedback gives feedback to one another. The process of peer feedback can be fun as well as useful; this becomes one of the many ways students can learn to improve their writing. The students need to exchange papers in order to peer-edit and report to each other on one good feature of the writing and one aspect that could be improved. The focus can be narrowed down to a particular feature, such as the use of cohesion or vocabulary.

Free journal writing (Lewis, Teaching Writing, 2009) is recommended in language classes for a number of reasons:

• Students have the chance to reflect on their own learning
• Teachers find out the students' learning needs.
• For some students, journal writing overcomes their shyness at speaking one-to-one with the teacher.
• The journal provides a permanent and ongoing record.

Related Research

The present research mainly focuses on the effectiveness of using the formative assessment to enhance the students' proposal writing skills. One of the most effective tools of

formative assessment, peer-editing was used to identify the students' needs and abilities. Moreover, the post-test questionnaire was used so that the students can respond to the peer-editing and proposal writing. There are a lot of researches that focus on the formative assessment in developing students' writing skills. In this present research, the two related researches are organized in terms of the themes: formative assessment, writing classes and questionnaire.

"Preliminary Study on Application of Formative Assessment in College English Writing Class" was conducted by Yang Liu (2013) at Changchun University of Science and Technology, China. The paper reviews the origin of formative assessment, and discusses its application in College English Writing Class. The compositions of the experimental class students have more novel ideas and their teamwork and cooperation consciousness have been strengthened. The conclusion is that the application of formative assessment is beneficial in advancing students' writing ability and cultivating their team spirit.

Another related research is "Importance of Formative Assessment in Developing Students' Writing Achievement, The Case of Second-Year Students of English at Biskra University" which was carried out by Bouzidi (2012). This research aims to study the importance of formative assessment and formative feedback in enhancing students' writing skills. It further attempted to investigate the effectiveness of formative assessment in developing students' writing skills. Then, the questionnaire was administered to second year English specialization students at Biskra.

The present research is related to these papers in using formative assessment during students' writing and post-test questionnaire.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Research Method

According to Irons (2008), formative assessment relates to the kind of feedback teachers give students as a course is progressing and which, as a result, may help them to improve their performance. The three components of formative assessment are eliciting assessment information, interpreting elicited assessment information and acting upon interpretations. In this present research, the three components of formative assessment were applied to evaluate students' proposal writing.

Research Design

The present research was carried out at English Department, Hinthada University. The subjects in this study were selected from third year English specialization students in 2016-2017 AY. It was about four months for second semester. There were (60) students and it was one hour and forty minutes in a week of writing period. The material is Global (Level 3), a coursebook for Communicative Skills. It provides various kinds of topics and forms of writing: compliant letter, Report, Proposal and Entry. This research focuses on proposal writing with functional language and format and punctuation. Then they were introduced peer-editing for their writing. At first, they did not want to accept peer-editing and they wanted to have the editing from the teacher instead, because they were worried they could not find out the other students' mistakes and weaknesses. So they wanted the teacher's feedback directly.

DATA COLLECTION

The third year English specialization students were provided with the techniques for the proposal writing in Global (Level 3), coursebook. After pre-writing steps, they were assigned to write a proposal. The data for this research were collected through this written task. They were asked to write down their proposal for the first draft, second draft and third draft. They were given the checklist for peer-editing other group's work. After peer-editing, they were asked to write small journal writing that reflects their attitude towards peer-editing. Finally, a questionnaire for their view on peer-editing was administered to the students.

Procedure

The third year English specialization students were introduced the proposal writing by giving an example of a proposal for the development of a university campus. After they were familiar with proposal writing including format, content, functional language and punctuation, they were asked to brainstorm to write a proposal on their own individually. Most students pointed out the development for their facilities at their department. For their first draft, they were formed into groups of four. They were asked to elicit the ideas for the problems and issues at their department and suggestions for them. They presented their ideas from each group. Then, they were allowed to write down their first draft in their group. While they were trying for the first draft, the teacher walked around and took note for their needs and mistakes. After that, the teacher asked them to exchange their paper to peer-edit. To peer others, they were given a checklist for their editing. Before editing, they were explained about the checklist for comments so that they could give the comments on the other groups' writing. During peer-editing, the teacher walked around the groups and took note again. Next, they received the comments for their writing given by other groups. They discussed and criticized to other groups if necessary. When they finished their discussion and review, the papers were collected by the teacher who will give feedback for common mistakes. Then the teacher gave the feedback to the students based on the notes and collected paper. Next, they were ready to write the second draft, being aware of their own mistakes and needs as well as others'. They exchanged their papers for the second time. Before they summited their papers to the teacher, they had a chance to view their mistakes on the second draft. They were given feedback for the common mistakes for their second draft. But they can see their development. Then they reached to the final draft that was the individual task for the proposal. Their final draft was summited to the teacher and the teacher gave the scores for the first, second and third draft confidentially according to the rubrics.

Students' Group Writing on Peer-editing

After writing their final draft, the students were instructed to write the free journal that can reflect the peer-editing on their proposal writing. Before they wrote down their attitude towards the peer-editing, they discussed in their groups. Some common comments were as follows.

- We can get other groups' ideas concerning with proposal writing.
- We can find out mistakes of each other.
- It is great to have feedback from others.
- The more comments we have, the fewer mistakes we make in the next version.
- We can improve our thinking skill as some criticize others' feedback.
- We can do better for our next task after reviewing our own as well as others' mistake.

Post-test Questionnaire

The post-test questionnaire for students' perception on using peer review checklist (PRC) for proposal writing was distributed to students after they had finished their final draft. There were (12) items for using PRC and writing proposal. In this questionnaire, the students were asked to respond the most appropriate choice for the given statements. There were four scales to choose - SA = Strong Agree, A = Agree, SD = Strongly Disagree. Students had to put a tick for their choice after they had read the statements carefully.

DATA ANALYSIS AND DATA INTERPRETATION

The following results section is from the first, second and third drafts for writing proposal of third year English specialization students at Hinthada University. These drafts were assessed and given scores according to the checklist and rubrics for proposal writing.

Table (1). Distribution of the Scores for the First Draft of each group in terms of Percentage.

Group No.	Format	Content	Reason	Functional language	Language	Total	Percentage
G-1	0.5	2	2	2	2.5	9	60.0%
G-2	1	2	3	2	2.5	10.5	70.0%
G-3	1	2	2.5	2.5	2.5	10.5	70.0%
G-4	0.5	1.5	1.5	2	2	7.5	50.0%
G-5	1	2	1.5	2	2	8.5	56.7%
G-6	1	1.5	1	2	2	7.5	50.0%
G-7	1	2	1.5	2.5	2.5	9.5	63.3%
G-8	0.5	2	1.5	2.5	1.5	8	53.3%
G-9	1	1.5	1.5	2.5	2	8.5	56.7%
G-10	0.5	2.5	2	1.5	2	8.5	56.7%
G-11	0.5	1	1	1.5	2	6	40.0%
G-12	1	1.5	2	2	1.5	8	53.3%
G-13	1	2	2	2	1.5	8.5	56.7%
G-14	1	1.5	2	2	1	7.5	50.0%
G-15	0.5	1.5	2	2	1	7	46.7%
Total	12	26.5	27	31	28.5	125	55.6%

The above table displays the total scores of each group gained in their peer-editing. Each group was given the checklist to give comments and remarks. It reveals that each group could do well in the format. In regarding with content, the problems and suggestions must be matched. In writing content, they need to match the problems and suggestions. Before they wrote the proposal, the functional language had already been studied. The next item was the assessment for the reasons whether they were suitable or not for the problems in the proposal. As the final item, the use of language was assessed and scored. The average achievement or mean score for the first draft is 55.6%.

Table (2). Distribution of the Scores for Second Draft of each group in terms of Percentage.

Group No.	Format	Content	Reason	Functional language	Language	Total	Percentage
G-1	1	2	2.5	2.5	2.5	10.5	70.0%
G-2	1	2.5	2.5	3	2.5	11.5	76.7%
G-3	1	2.5	2.5	2.5	2.5	11	73.3%
G-4	1	2	2.5	2	2	9.5	63.3%
G-5	1	2.5	2	2	2.5	10	66.7%
G-6	1	2	2	2	2	9	60.0%
G-7	1	2	2	2.5	2.5	10	66.7%
G-8	1	2	2	2	2.5	9.5	63.3%
G-9	1	2	2	2.5	2	9.5	63.3%
G-10	1	2.5	2	2	2	9.5	63.3%
G-11	1	2	2	2	2	9	60.0%
G-12	1	2	2	2	2	9	60.0%
G-13	1	1.5	1.5	1.5	2	7.5	50.0%
G-14	1	2	1.5	2.5	2.5	9.5	63.3%
G-15	1	1.5	2	2	2	8.5	56.7%
	15	31	31	33	33.5	143.5	63.8%

The results for the second draft of the students' writing are shown in table (2). After they had got the comments for their first draft through their peer feedback from the others and the teacher, they wrote their second draft. For the first item, the format, the second item, the content, the third one for functional language and the score for the reasons why they give the suggestions and the language used in the proposal were evaluated. The average score for the second draft is 63.8%.

Table (3). Distribution of the Sores for the Third Draft of the students in terms of Percentage.

Group No.	Format	Content	Reason	Functional language	Language	Total	Percentage
S-1	1	2.5	2	2.5	2	10	66.7%
S-2	0.5	2.5	2.5	2.5	2	10	66.7%
S-3	1	2.5	3	2.5	2	11	73.3%
S-4	1	2.5	2.5	2	2.5	10.5	70.0%
S-5	1	2.5	2	3	2.5	11	73.3%
S-6	1	2.5	2	2.5	2.5	10.5	70.0%
S-7	1	2.5	3	3	2.5	12	80.0%
S-8	1	2.5	3	3	2.5	12	80.0%
S-9	1	2.5	2	2.5	2.5	10.5	70.0%
S-10	1	2.5	2.5	2.5	2.5	11	73.3%
S-11	1	2.5	3	2.5	2.5	11.5	76.7%
S-12	1	2.5	3	3	2.5	12	80.0%
S-13	1	2.5	3	3	2.5	12	80.0%
S-14	1	2.5	3	2.5	2.5	11.5	76.7%
S-15	1	2.5	3	3	2.5	12	80.0%
S-16	1	2.5	3	2.5	2.5	11.5	76.7%
S-17	1	2.5	2.5	2.5	2.5	11	73.3%
S-18	1	2.5	3	2.5	2.5	11.5	76.7%
S-19	1	3	2.5	2.5	2.5	11.5	76.7%
S-20	0.5	2.5	2.5	2	2.5	10	66.7%
S-21	1	2	2.5	3	2.5	11	73.3%
S-22	1	2.5	3	2.5	2.5	11.5	76.7%
S-23	0.5	2.5	3	2.5	2.5	11	73.3%
S-24	1	2	3	3.5	2.5	12	80.0%
S-25	1	2.5	2.5	3	2.5	11.5	76.7%
S-26	1	2.5	2	3	2.5	11	73.3%

Group No.	Format	Content	Reason	Functional language	Language		Total	Percentage
S-27	1	2	3	3	2		11	73.3%
S-28	1	2.5	3	3	2.5		12	80.0%
S-29	1	2	2.5	3	2		10.5	70.0%
S-30	1	2.5	2.5	2.5	2.5		11	73.3%
S-31	1	2.5	3	2.5	2		11	73.3%
S-32	1	2.5	3	3	2.5		12	80.0%
S-33	1	2.5	3	3	2.5		12	80.0%
S-34	1	2.5	2.5	2.5	2.5		11	73.3%
S-35	1	2.5	3	3	2		11.5	76.7%
S-36	1	2.5	3	2.5	2,5		9	60.0%
S-37	1	2.5	3	3	2.5		12	80.0%
S-38	1	2.5	2.5	2.5	2.5		11	73.3%
S-39	1	2.5	3	3	2.5		12	80.0%
S-40	1	2.5	3	3	2.5		12	80.0%
S-41	1	2.5	2.5	3	2.5		11.5	76.7%
S-42	1	2.5	2.5	2.5	2.5		11	73.3%
S-43	1	2.5	2.5	3	2.5		11.5	76.7%
S-44	1	2.5	2.5	2.5	2.5		11	73.3%
S-45	1	2.5	2.5	3	2.5		11.5	76.7%
S-46	1	2.5	3	2.5	2.5		11.5	76.7%
S-47	1	2.5	2.5	2	2.5		10.5	70.0%
S-48	1	2.5	2.5	2.5	2		10.5	70.0%
S-49	1	2.5	2	2.5	2		10	66.7%
S-50	1	2	2.5	2	2.5		10	66.7%
S-51	1	2.5	3	3	2.5		12	80.0%
S-52	0.5	2.5	2	2	2.5		9.5	63.3%
S-53	1	2.5	2	2	2.5		10	66.7%
S-54	1	2.5	3	2.5	2.5		11.5	76.7%
S-55	1	2.5	2.5	2.5	2.5		11	73.3%
S-56	1	2.5	3	2.5	2.5		11.5	76.7%
S-57	1	2.5	3	2.5	2.5		11.5	76.7%
S-58	1	2.5	2	2.5	2.5		10.5	70.0%
S-59	1	2.5	2.5	3	2.5		11.5	76.7%
S-60	1	2.5	3	2.5	2.5		11.5	76.7%
	58	148	160	159.5	143		668.5	74.3%

Table (3) represents the scores for the students' final draft. The overall achievement for the final draft is 74.3%.

Description of Students' feedback on Post-test Questionnaire

The post-test questionnaire consists of (12) questions. It aims to investigate the students' attitude to proposal writing and peer-editing. The question number (1) was analyzed for proposal writing. The responses for question numbers 2, 3,4,8,10,11 and 12 were analyzed to identify the students' opinion about peer-editing. The third part, question numbers 5, 6 and 7 were to identify the attitude to the writing drafts.

Table (4) represents the data for the percentages of the students' attitude about the proposal writing, peer-editing and writing the drafts.

Table (4). Distribution of the Responses for Post-test Questionnaire in terms of Percentage.

Sr.No	Items	Attitude		Percentage
1	Writing Proposal	+		96%
		-		4%
2	Peer-editing	+		87%
		-		13%
3	Writing Drafts	+		99%
		-		1%

Table (4) shows the students' attitude to the three items: writing proposal, peer-editing and writing the drafts. According to the post-test questionnaire, almost all of the students enjoyed proposal writing even though they have never experienced this before. The result, 87% for using peer-editing, shows the positive attitude to it. The attitude to writing the first, second and third drafts is described as the positive one.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

In this research, the effectiveness of using formative assessment in testing writing proposal of third year English Specialization students at Hinthada University was studied. As the aim of the research was to discover the effectiveness of formative assessment strategies in the students' writing proposal, using the proper form of functional language, the three research questions were examined: How can the formative assessment strategies assess the students' performance in every step of writing a proposal? What are the effects of using peer-editing and checklists for proposal writing? How far can the formative assessment promote the students' proposal writing?

To cope with the first question, the three formative assessment strategies: eliciting assessment information, interpreting elicited information and acting upon interpretations were applied in the process of proposal writing. After the students had learned the format and functional language through the sample writing proposal, they were formed into groups of four to generate the ideas for writing. While discussing the ideas for writing at the pre-writing stage, the students were instructed to edit the ideas from each group. Before the first draft, the students were instructed to give the points for the checklist that they will use in peer-editing for the proposal writing given by the teacher was relevant or not. After they had been familiar with the checklist for a proposal, they wrote their first draft. Then they exchanged their papers to assess other groups' writing according to the checklist. They can elicit the assessment information for the information items, "format, content, reason for suggestion, functional language, language used in their writing." After eliciting the assessment information, they interpreted the elicited information, by giving the comments in accordance with the checklist. As the last stage, they acted upon the better draft, the third one by noticing the comments for their second draft. Before they started the second draft, they were given feedback for their common mistakes made in their first draft. For the second draft, the three strategies of formative assessment were used again. Finally, they finished their final version. Comparing their scores in their first, second and third drafts, it is sure that formative assessment strategies can assess the students' proposal writing by giving the proper feedback for their needs and strengths.

The second question "What are the effects of using peer-editing and checklist for proposal writing was examined by showing the results of their drafts. It is shown that the students can improve their performance in the second and third drafts by eliciting their needs

and abilities through their peers and receiving feedback from the teacher. Therefore, the students got the better scores for their second draft and the third one than the first draft.
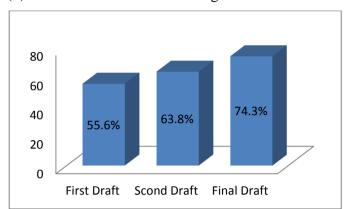
Figure (1). Distribution of the Percentages of the results of the first, second and third drafts.

For the third question, the above figure displays how far the formative assessment can promote the students' writing proposal. Comparing the results for the three drafts, it is undeniable that the students improved their proposal writing since they had peer- editing for their writing and they learned the mistakes made by themselves and others. One of the components of formative assessment is eliciting assessment information. By eliciting their weaknesses and mistakes, they learned what they were going to do for the next step. Based on the checklist, they gave the comments on other groups' writing. At this stage, the feedback was given by the teacher as well as the other group. Therefore, the feedback provides information for the students and teacher to identify their gap. So that they can avoid the mistakes in their second and third drafts. Clearly, the findings indicate that their final version got 74.3 %. It shows that they acted on the interpretation for the elicited information. In this present research, the three strategies of formative assessments were applied to promote the students' writing skills for a proposal. But there may be some difficulties to elicit the information for the students' strengths and weaknesses because they are at the same level. Sometimes, complaints and disagreements for their assessments may appear during their editing. Therefore, the teacher should administer the peer-editing. Moreover, in the process of formative assessment, the teacher is responsible for providing positive environment for the students.

In this present research, the results of the improvement of the students' writing skills were described, using the three strategies of the formative assessment. On top of that, the positive attitude of third year English specialization students to peer-editing was shown through the free journal writing and post-test questionnaire. As a result, the students got more confident and motivated to write proposals in their real life.

Particularly, formative feedback during the various stages of the students' writing helps them to get rid of their difficulties and thus improve their written product.

CONCLUSION

Formative assessment is regarded as a kind of feedback that the teacher gives the students as a course is progressing and as a result, it may help them to improve their performance in writing. In the writing context, the students can share their abilities and needs

through the three strategies of formative assessment as well as teacher's response to the students' output that may vary in accordance with their abilities, needs and performance. As a result, the students can improve their proposal writing and become more confident and motivated in their writing.

The present research highlighted the effectiveness of using formative assessment strategies in testing proposal writing of the third year English specialization students at Hinthada University, peer-editing and positive attitude of the students towards the peer-editing. But this study has taken only a few steps on proposal writing of third year English specialization students. Therefore, formative assessment should be applied to promote the students' performance in language production in teaching learning processes.

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Appendix (A)

Peer Review Checklist for Proposal Writing

1. Whether the format is correct or not (Introduction, Problems and Solutions)
2. Whether the problems and suggestions are matched or not
3. Whether the functional language for the proposal is used or not
4. Whether the language used in the proposal is correct or not
5. Whether the reasons for the suggestions are relevant or not

Appendix (B)

The attitude towards the peer editing on proposal writing

Name   _____

Roll No _____

Date   _____

Direction : Read the statements below and tick (✔) the appropriate response you think for each number.

Note : SA= Strongly Agree   A= Agree   D= Disagree   SD= Strongly Disagree

No	Statements	SA	A	D	SD
1	I enjoy writing a proposal.				
2.	I feel excited to check other group's writing.				
3	I feel bored to find other group's mistakes.				
4	I found other group's mistakes.				
5	I can do better using language and format in second draft.				
6	I hope less mistake in using language and format and vocabulary in my final draft.				
7	I feel bored writing first, second and third drafts.				
8	Instead of getting feedback from other groups, I want to get teacher's feedback only.				
9	I believe my final draft is the best one.				
10	I can get a chance to discuss with other groups through peer editing.				
11	I can learn the lesson from other people's mistakes.				
12	I enjoy the peer editing, exchanging the papers with other groups.				

Appendix (C)

Rubric for a proposal

Item	1	0.5	0
Format	Students can follow the given format for a proposal properly.	Students can partially follow the given format for a proposal.	Students can't use the given format for a proposal.

Item	3	2	1
Content	The clear, appropriate ideas and opinions can be expressed precisely and properly.	Some clear, appropriate ideas and opinions can be expressed.	Few clear, appropriate ideas and opinions can be expressed
Functional language	Functional language for a proposal can be applied properly.	Functional language for a proposal can partially be applied.	A few points for functional language for a proposal can be applied.

Item	4	3	2-1
Language	Students can use the correct form of words, terms and expressions to match with the ideas and opinions of a proposal very well.	Students can use the correct form of words, terms and expressions to match with the ideas and opinions of a proposal with a few errors.	Students can use the correct form of words, terms and expressions to match with the ideas and opinions of a proposal with many errors.
Reason	Students can give clear, logical and justifiable reasons that are matched with the suggestions for a proposal very well.	Students can give clear, logical reasons that are matched with the suggestions for a proposal to some extent.	Students can give the reasons but most reasons are unclear and unconnected with a proposal.