

《研究ノート》

**A Better Way of English Writing
— through the first semester exam for juniors
in paragraph writing course**

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abstract

In the first semester, some students in the international business course took “paragraph writing class.” In the examination, they were assigned to write an essay which recommends their university to high school students effectively with the reference of the information on the Internet.

In order to evaluate their writing, I decided to ask my American friend to check their writing. He is a very reliable person, William Walker, who knows both Japan and Japanese people. Because he had a career working for Japanese famous computer company as a designer of semi-conductor after he worked for IBM and other companies in the US. He graduated from U.C.Berkeley. He has an ability to judge Japanese students’ writing.

Keywords: topic sentences, plagiarism, superlatives, acronyms, articles

I. the content of the examination.

[The First Semester Examination]

Write an essay to recommend high school students to enter the Niigata University of International and Information Studies using the data on the Internet below.

Introduce the attractive features of the N.U.I.S,

Write an introductory paragraph, supporting paragraphs, and a concluding paragraph.

the data on the Internet. Niigata University of International and Information Studies was founded to nurture individuals who understand the differences between Japanese and other cultures and are capable of making contributions to the information culture across borders. Niigata University of International and Information Studies was founded to contribute to the elevation of human welfare

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across borders through taking a lead in the information-oriented society while respecting national, regional and human cultures.

Faculty of International Studies : 21 Faculty of Business and Informatics : 17
Faculty of International Culture : 6

Niigata University of International and Information Studies (NUIS) was founded in 1994. As of April, 2020, NUIS boasts of 6,654 graduates who are making great contributions both to the local and international communities.

NUIS consists of two faculties, under which there are three departments: Faculty of Business and Informatics (Department of Business Administration and Department of Information Systems); and Faculty of International Studies (Department of International Studies).

NUIS operates in two locations in Niigata City: Mizukino Campus and Chuo Campus. Mizukino Campus is situated in the west of Niigata City at the foot of Mt. Yahiko. As most classes and student activities are held here, this is where various facilities are concentrated.

Department of International Studies

People all over the world are brought ever closer together as the means of transportation and communication continue to advance at an unforeseen pace. This means that developments in a remote corner of the world will have direct impact on us here in Niigata. Therefore, it is essential that we obtain deep understanding of international affairs if we were to participate meaningfully in the society of the future. The fundamental goal of the Faculty of International Studies is to nurture people who are capable of learning about and interacting with the global community, right here on Niigata's soil. To that end, the three pillars of the Department are: Cross-cultural understanding, mastery of a foreign language, and study abroad experience. Therefore, it provides education in a well-balanced combination of international relations and foreign language studies. As a firm foundation of these three pillars, students go through practical training in English as an International Language (EIL) as well as computers. Every student will also belong to a small-scale and interactive seminars throughout their campus life.

II. NUIS Essay Grading by William Walker

Some common errors that many Japanese students make when writing in

English.

1. Copying passages verbatim from another source. You can do this, but you must enclose the passage in quotes and indicate where the material is from. Otherwise you could be accused of plagiarism, which is a literary crime! A small fragment of a few words (<10) is usually okay to copy, and even famous writers have been found to do this sometimes without realizing what they were doing.
2. “I recommend you to enroll…” is wrong. Instead write “I recommend that you enroll…” Also, it’s a little too pushy to write “recommend that you enroll”, it would be better to write “recommend that you consider enrolling…”, or “recommend that you apply to…”. When you go to the department store, does the clerk say “I recommend that you buy this dress”?
3. Starting sentences with “And” and “So,” . This usually sounds a little odd in English.
4. Vague references: “They can …”, “That is…”, “This is …”. An important feature of English is you never have to guess the subject, it must always be clearly stated. Instead of “They can nurture…”, write “NUIS teachers can nurture…”. “They can learn…” should be changed to “Students can learn…”
5. Using too many superlatives (“best…”, “finest”, other adjectives ending in “est.”) Superlatives indicate something that is number one. Superlatives can sound boastful when abused. Instead of “NUIS is the best university…” write “NUIS is a fine university…”, or change “NUIS is the best place to…” to “NUIS is a great place to…”
6. When using acronyms (CEP, NUIS) the first time you use them, spell out the words so the reader knows what they mean.
7. [Enter, enroll at, matriculate to] NUIS. Any of these verbs works, but maybe enroll is the best. Enroll means to enter a school in order to study. Try to learn some new English verbs every day and your writing will improve.
8. In English, we always say freshman, sophomore, junior, and senior, for first, second, third and fourth year students. The plural of freshman is freshmen, for the others, just add s.
9. Indefinite vs. definite articles. Incorrect article (the, a, an) usage is how we can tell the writer is not a native English speaker, they are really difficult to get right. But you should at least understand the difference between a definite article (the) and an indefinite article (a, an). “I read a book” is indefinite, it could be any book. “I read the book”, is definite, it refers to a specific book. Also, if there’s only one, then you must use the definite article, “I attend the University of Tokyo” [there is only one University of Tokyo]; compare to “I attend a University in Tokyo” [there are many universities in Tokyo, I’m not specifying which one I attend].

Number one suggestion:

In any essay, the first paragraph is the most important one, and the first sentence of the first paragraph is the most important sentence. Think of yourself as fishing for a reader. You need some tasty bait to reel them in. One good literary device is to start with a rhetorical question, which I noticed some students are doing, good! Think hard about who is your essay's target reader, and come up with a first sentence that will make him/her want to read on.

One of my oddball hobbies is studying the first sentence from great novels. You can learn a lot about writing with this hobby.

For example

"Every happy family is alike, each unhappy family is different in its own way."
[Tolstoy, Anna Karenina] This simple opening sentence is so provocative, you must read on!

III. An example of model writing and a student's answer

Essay with Grade B

Originality and English grammar are both good. Relating your personal experience is very persuasive. Opening paragraph could be stronger. Avoid using superlatives "best place".

English grammar needs work. See the corrected version below.

The Niigata University of International and Information Studies (NUIS) has many attractive features.

First, you can learn many languages and cultures. When you enter NUIS, you can choose two languages from four offered: English, Chinese, Korean, and Russian. Because there are professors of international studies at NUIS, you can learn not only languages, but also cultures. Studying other countries is very important because people all over the world say "respect diversity: gender and race".

Second, you can advance your skill in each foreign language, for example, to improve your score on TOEIC. Recently, internationalization is rapidly spreading throughout the world. Japanese companies want new employees who can speak and write other languages well. Therefore, a good TOEIC score is very useful when you seek employment. In fact, I got a higher score. Because of these characteristics, NUIS is a great place to learn foreign languages and cultures. I strongly recommend it.

Thank you.

The student's original answer

The Niigata University of International and Information Studies has many attractive features.

First, you can learn many languages and cultures. When you enter this school, you choose two languages in four, English, Chinese, Korean, and Russian, which you want. And, there are professors of international studies in N.U.I.S. Thus, you can learn not only languages but also cultures. Studying their country is very important because people all over the world say “to respect diversity: gender and races.”

Second, you can learn skills of each language for example, TOEIC. Recently, internationalization is rapidly spreading all over the world. And, Japanese companies want new employees who can speak and write their language well.

Therefore, good score of TOEIC is very useful when you seek a job.

For three features, this school is the best place to learn languages and cultures and I strongly recommend it! Thank you.

IV. How he gave the grades with some comments

Grade: B

- ① Good organization and flow and completely understandable. English could be improved as follows:
- ② Rather wordy, and too much parroting of information from the school web site, rather than trying to persuade in your own words. Below is corrected version, but it still needs to reflect your own voice.

Grade: C

- ① Good information, but too much of it parroted from the web site. Some confusing parts. The concluding paragraph is weak. Avoid phrases such as “the best” .
Some good points and personal experiences, but English needs work, as some sentences are barely understandable. Improved version follows, where I needed to guess what you meant to say in a couple of places:
- ② Rather wordy, and too much parroting of information from the school web site, rather than trying to persuade in your own words. Below is corrected version, but it still needs to reflect your own voice.
- ③ The English is okay, but the essay is rhetorically weak, with too much parroting of the school web site. A stronger opening paragraph is needed and perhaps more information based on your own personal experiences. Please study the corrections below.

Grade D

There is very little original content here, you mostly parroted the school

web site. Your first and last paragraphs are just bottle caps. I imagine your reader wants to learn about your experiences.

Closing

The students have learned how to write effective paragraphs for 5 months. I am very glad to find Mr. Walker estimated my students' essays diligently and warmly. I hope his comments will be a good help to improve their writing abilities.