

Writing circles project

Four 'writing circle' peer review classes
with PGT international students

What are writing circles?

Based on **Cathy Malone's** work at **Sheffield Hallam University**:

Students felt:

- lack of agency in academic writing
- poor control of process
- poor understanding of product
- high stakes in 3rd year

Support at Sheffield Hallam is centralised = problematic

- genre & disciplinary discourse
- social & identity issues

Scope needed to develop independent writing skills and judgement

Make writing development social + collaborative

Rooted in disciplines - socially & academically

Writing Circles – to edit and improve written work

- Students prepared by bringing along copies of work in draft form.
- Students share, read & mark work and respond to texts with 'two stars & a wish'
- Discussion: No excusing work
- Reflection: What will you do next with your text?

Peer feedback

Process writing theory

(Flower and Hayes 1981; Chenoweth and Hayes, 2001; Liu and Hansen 2002; in Lee, 2017)

- Students engage in peer interaction
- Build audience awareness / understanding of reader expectations

Collaborative learning theory and meaning negotiation

- Peer feedback provides social support and scaffolding.

(Long 1983, 1985; Long and Porter 1985; Swain 2006; Swain and Lapkin 1998, 2002; Hu and Lam 2010; in Lee, 2017)

Why run writing circle activities with international PGT students?

Anxiety

- English as an L2.
- Pre-sessional programme students.

Agency

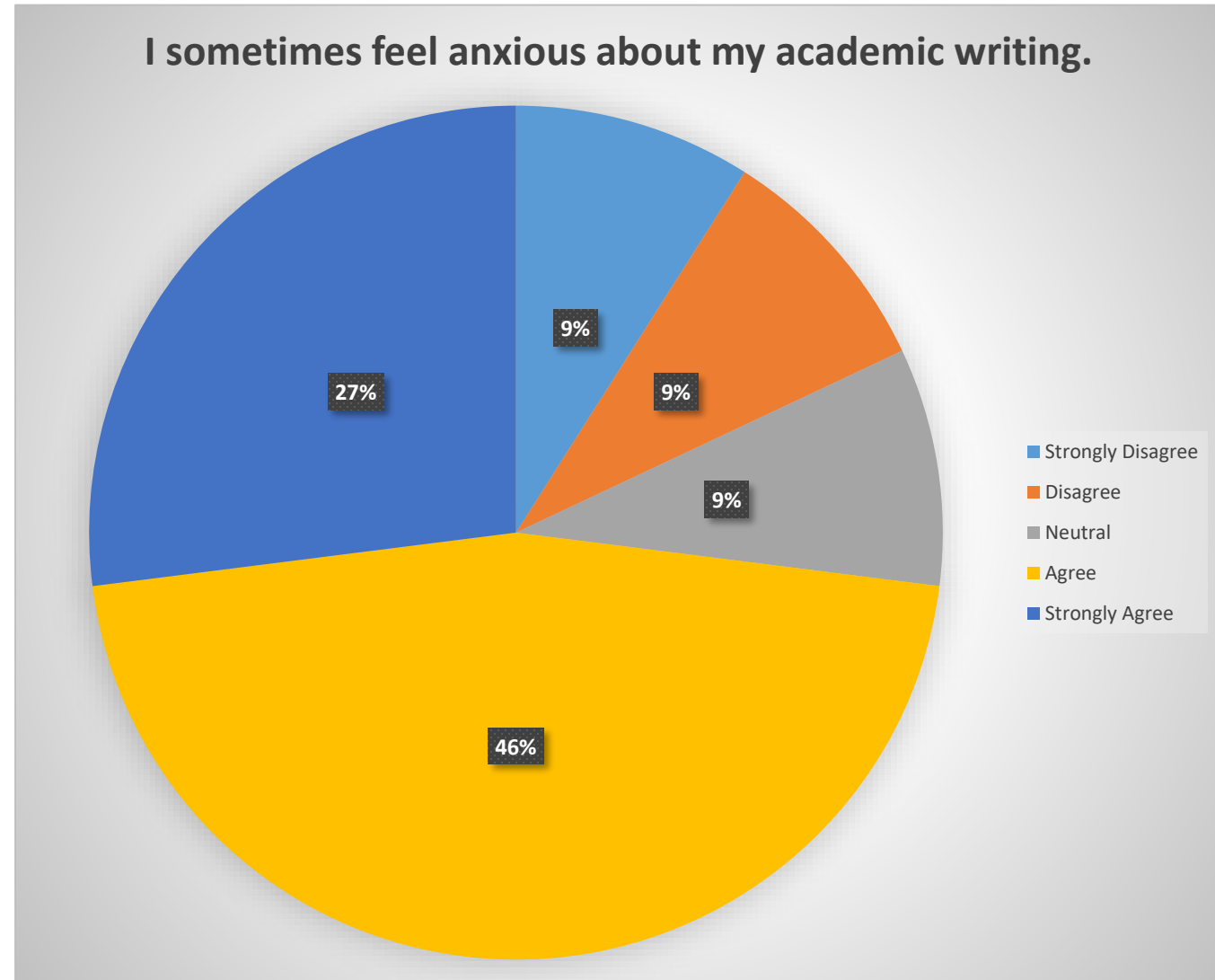
- To encourage / develop autonomy
- It establish the identity of the individual writer

Anecdotal

- Reports from teachers / tutorials

Plagiarism

- The highest number this year for this cohort



Procedure

- Each session followed a theme (e.g. paragraph structure; paraphrasing, etc) and began with a 40 – 50 minute presentation (input) on academic writing skills.
- Students (in groups of four) were given a published article that had been ‘deconstructed’ to match the ‘theme’ of that class (e.g. paragraphs had been restructured).
- Using prompts students were encouraged to work collaboratively to ‘notice’ the problems and then ‘reconstruct’ a version of the text together.
- The students’ reconstructed text was then compared to the original with an annotated version from the tutor which highlighted the problems.
- Students were then encouraged to look at each other’s work to notice and discuss both good and weaker examples of academic writing.
- The class ended with whole group discussion of some of the key points from the peer review.

Sharing work in groups

- Student groups were given prompts to use when discussing their work:

E.g. in a class about paragraph writing:

How are these paragraphs connected?

Do you need to develop this point here?

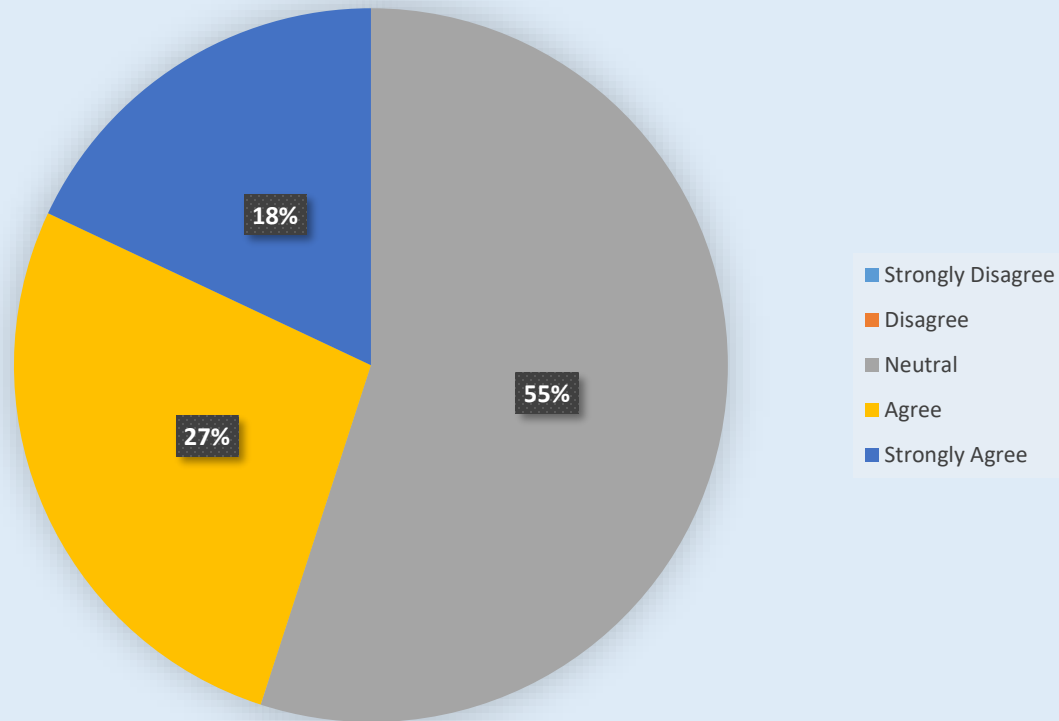
Could you be more critical/ evaluative here?

Are you repeating yourself anywhere in the text?

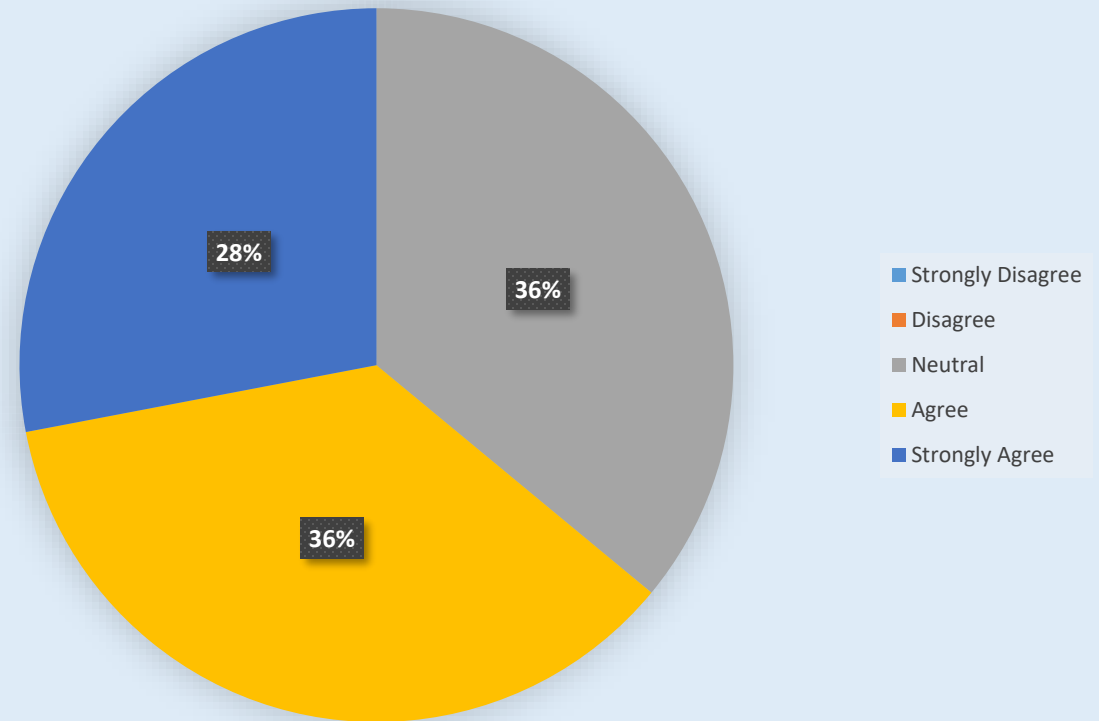
- Students were advised that they could share work that had been marked or work in progress and that they did not have to share work if they didn't want to.
- Students were also reminded that they should not make any negative comments and to try and frame advice and suggestions as questions.

Questionnaire feedback

There are benefits to sharing my writing with my peers.

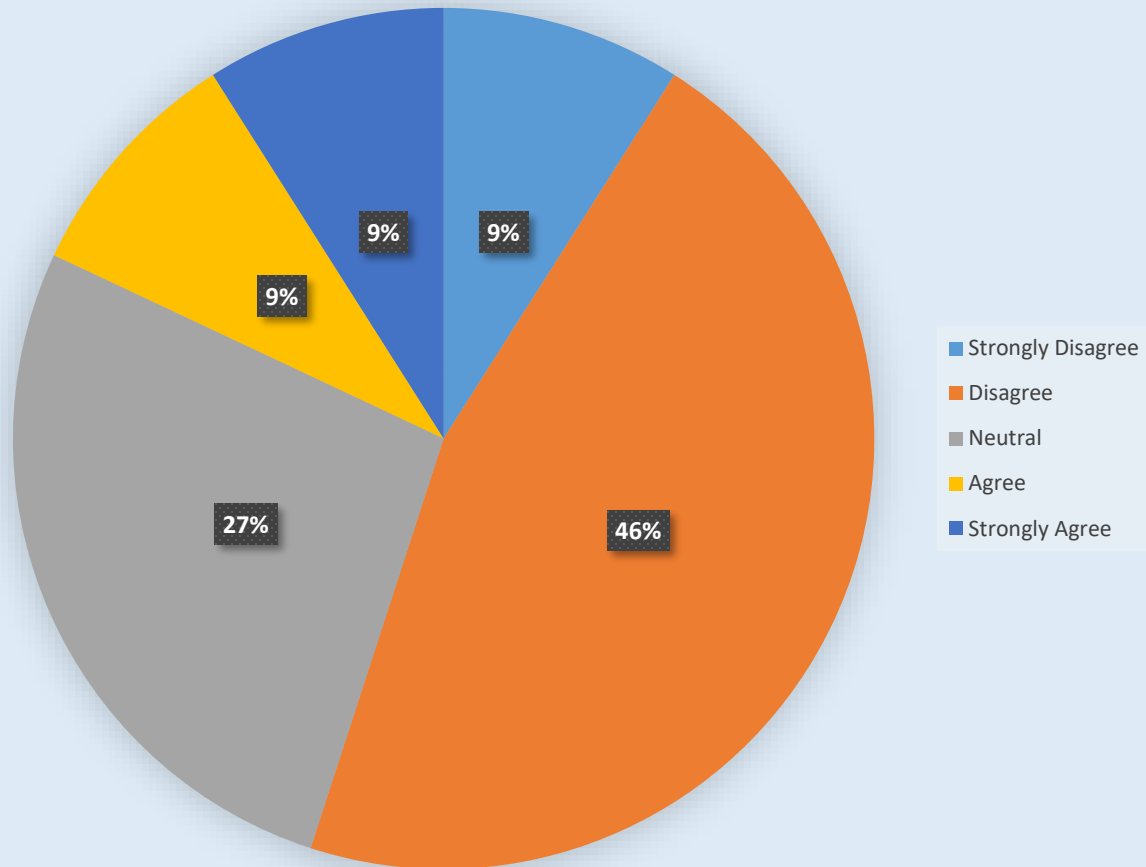


Looking at writing with my peers is a good way to develop my academic writing.

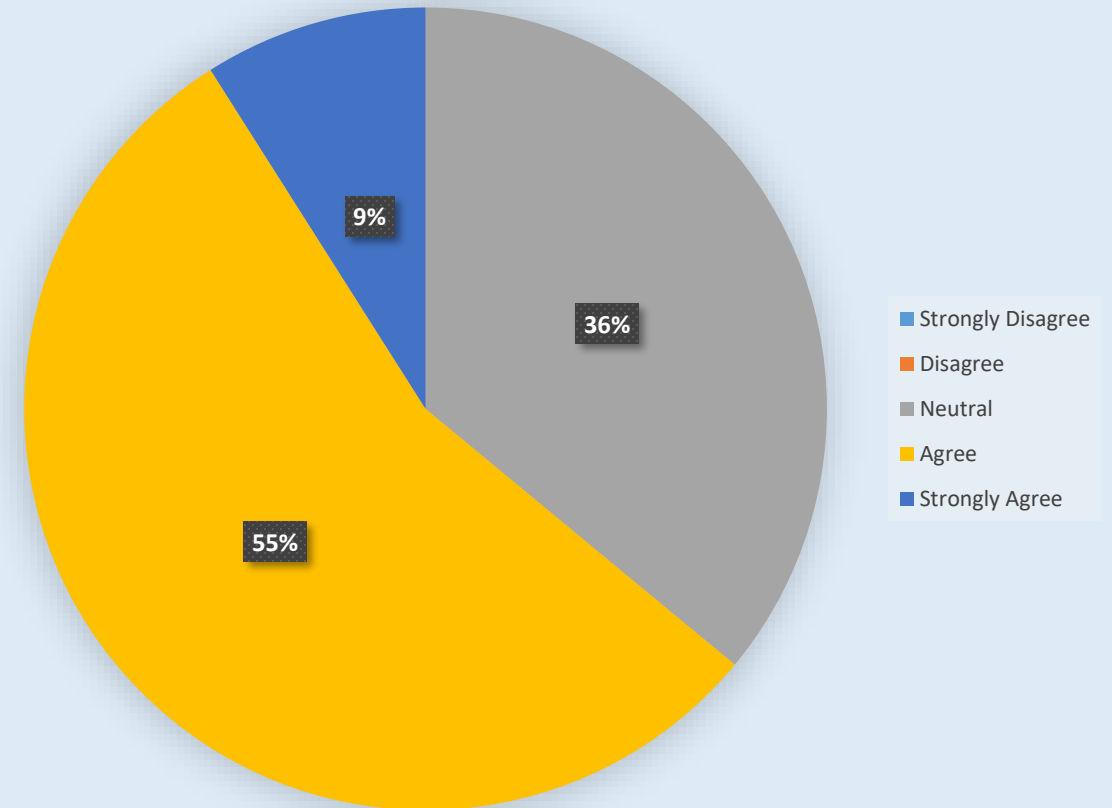


Questionnaire feedback

I often share my writing with my peers.



Writing circles can help students develop confidence in academic writing.



Class feedback: How do you feel about working in a group?

- “It’s a **very helpful** way to **improve my writing skills**, as I can get various **suggestions from peers**”
- “We could **share the ideas** which **help us to think more.**”
- “Classmates gave opinions and **helped each other** very well”
- “Fantastic, **we can exchange ideas**”
- “It’s interesting and **good to get peer review** from my groupmates”
- “Pretty good, especially when **members exchange their ideas**”
- “It’s **great to give feedback** for others because it **helps me find my own shortcomings**”
- “Working in group is much more **motivating**”
- “Partners are always **inspiring**”
- “It’s really **helpful to share papers** with partners. It **makes you think clearly**”
- “We could **learn from each other** in a group”
- “**I like to work in a group** because it provides me with feedback for my own writing”

Class feedback: How do you feel about working in a group?

- “**It helped me a lot** by communicating with my classmates”
- “**It is very helpful; sharing ideas** and getting comments about ones writing is **extremely effective**”
- “Peer experience **sharing is good**”
- “It largely depends on group members. **Active members will help a lot**”
- “**Inspiring, brainstorming**”
- “It’s great because we can focus more on the class and **learn from our classmates**”
- “**Very helpful**. I didn’t do peer review for my essays so **it’s great to have someone read my writing** and point out the weakness”
- “It’s **better to exchange each other’s opinions**”
- “Great... **interesting experience... can learn a lot**”
- “I like group working **and I can learn from others** and know different opinions”
- “It’s **useful to share information**”

Class feedback: How have writing circle activities helped develop your writing skills?

- “It provides me (with) **many good ideas from my classmates**”
- “(I) **understand more** about proofreading”
- “It’s effective since one gets an **insight into different writing styles**”
- “We got the answers clearly through **team work** (asking each other questions)”
- “We discuss peers’ essays and **learn from them**”
- “to gain a **deeper understanding** of how to support arguments”
- “They have **made me more aware** of my weaknesses and **how I can improve my writing**”
- “**critically examine** the work we have done”
- “It’s a **good way to share ideas** and find out some points which sometimes may be ignored (when working alone)”
- “Enrich my view by **listening to others’ ideas**”

Class feedback: How have writing circle activities helped develop your writing skills?

- “It helps me realise **the value of peer reading**”
- “I **learn how to organise**”
- “Peer discussion and outline (of) evaluation will **help me reflect**”
- “We can **exchange ideas** on our assignments and **get inspired by others**”
- “Got **useful knowledge** and perception from peer study and discussions”
- “To have an **opportunity to communicate with peers**”
- “I think **it would be more beneficial or helpful when students start working on their assignments and producing some paragraphs**”
- “To be honest, **it didn’t help much. It’s probably because not many students have started working on their assignments and because we as students who don’t have much experience of writing academically can’t really provide many constructive advice to our peers**”

Class feedback: What will be the next step in developing your academic writing skills?

- “To be even more critical”
- “ to do proofreading”
- “practise more, read more”
- “Try to present ideas more critically”
- “I’ll try to write everyday”
- “To organise better paragraphs, to link them all together”
- “try to organise my text in a clear way”
- “I’ll read more”
- “Learn to paraphrase well!”
- “write it quickly and edit it slowly”

On reflection: the benefits

- reminder to students that we write for a reader
- students were reminded that the questions they ask their peers are questions they need to ask themselves = greater autonomy
- listen and practise giving feedback
- normalise sharing drafts
- establish writing as a process
- move from writer to reader
- develop a simple metalanguage to discuss academic texts
- opportunity to read, comment & discuss work
- talk about process of writing (challenges)
- set micro immediate targets to progress

Reflections: moving forward

- Students need ‘scaffolding skills’; how to frame comments and questions constructively.

Solution: The first session will include support on peer work and peer review. Bring in the peer review activities gradually from lesson one and make links to their own writing more explicit.

- The input sessions often took longer than planned; the ‘deconstructed’ text activities were complicated.

Solution: Make sure the input and tasks are concise and focused.

- Some students felt it was not relevant as they had not started writing assignments yet (however, they did have work from semester one to bring in)

Solution: Remind students that it’s never too early to start writing!
Bring your writing to class!