# An Approach for Developing Descriptive Paragraph Writing Competence through FRESH for Thai Tertiary Students[*]

Surapa Somsai and Siriwong Buttapeng
Rajamangala University of Technology Isan, Sakon Nakhon Campus, Thailand
Corresponding Author, E-mail: surapa.so@rmuti.ac.th

## Abstract

This experimental research aimed to 1) determine whether there are any significant differences in descriptive paragraph writing competence before and after practicing "FRESH" of students majoring in English at Rajamangala University of Technology Isan Sakon Nakhon Campus (RMUTI SKC), 2) examine students' attitudes towards learning English after practicing "FRESH", and 3) propose guidelines for developing students' paragraph writing competence through "FRESH" for Thai Tertiary students. The informants in the study included 54 students studying English at the Department of Liberal Arts, Faculty of Industry Technology, RMUTI SKC in 2020. They were selected by a purposive sampling method. The data were obtained through the written pretest and posttest and the attitude scale. The data were analyzed using the SPSS program. The t-test for dependent samples was used to compare and test the differences between the written pretest and posttest scores. The descriptive statistics, including mean, standard deviation, and percentage were used to describe the data basic patterns of the test scores and attitudes towards students' English learning.

**The results revealed as follows:**

1.   There is a statistically significant difference at .00 between the pretest and posttest mean scores. The students' descriptive paragraph writing mean scores in the pretest and posttest were 15.53 and 30.84, respectively. That means the students' descriptive paragraph writing competence improved after practicing "FRESH".

---

2.   The mean score of the students' attitudes towards learning English was at a high level (mean = 3.22).

It can be concluded that "FRESH" can be an alternative technique to help students organize ideas and make a meaningful sensory descriptive paragraph.

**Keywords:** descriptive paragraph writing; writing competence; FRESH technique; English major; Thai tertiary students

## 1.  Introduction

Writing skill plays a vital role in language learning. It is one of the crucial skills that the students must master. It is plausible among students that writing skill is more complicated than other skills. Masyhud (2010) states that writing is the most challenging subject compared to other language skills because writing expresses what writers feel and conveys an intended message to the readers. Therefore, it is pretty problematic for students to express themselves in written form.

Based on the syllabus of the English for Communication (EC) Curriculum at RMUTI SKC in Thailand, writing courses ranging from paragraph writing to essay writing are given as the core courses. The primary purposes of learning those courses are to enhance students' writing ability to express their ideas in a simple written form and apply their writing skills in their daily lives. So, the students need to be equipped with paragraph writing ability to master and be prepared for higher writing courses in the curriculum.

Unfortunately, the students' paragraph writing ability is not as expected. Whenever the students were assigned to write, they seemed reluctant, took a long time to think, and eventually got stuck. They did not know how to start, nor did their ideas transfer into a simple paragraph.

Faisal & Suwandita (2013, p. 240) state that "The most difficult text to write for the students is the descriptive text in the form of a paragraph". They also mention that most students lack the vocabulary and English grammatical knowledge. These statements seem accurate, especially for foreign language students worldwide, including in Thailand.

A teacher needs to find various strategies and techniques to solve or improve students' writing ability in language teaching. Faisal (2010) and Faisal & Suwandita (2013,

p. 243) proposed FRESH Technique to help develop the students' writing skills. Kurniawati, Syafar, & Hastini (2017) mention that "FRESH" is considered a learning technique that enables students to improve their comprehension. They state that ""FRESH" is a technique in which each letter has its meaning. That is "F" standing for "Fact", which means identifying the object, or it can be called a general description of the object. Usually, it contains an object's name and its kind. "R" stands for "Reason". They support ideas that strengthen the fact. "E" stands for "Elaboration". Elaboration means the explanation of the Reason. The teacher should elaborate on it in detail to get a more explicit description of the object. "SH" stands for "Shift", which shows the decision or conclusion of the paragraph. It is the conclusion of the leading information mentioned earlier". Through the FRESH guidelines, a sample descriptive paragraph composed by Faisal (2010, p. 10) could be formed as follows:

"My Adorable Cat

(F) I have a cat at home. Its name is Kean. It is a regular house cat. (R) I like my cat because it is an adorable cat. (E) The fur is beautiful. It is orange with white and black spots. It is soft, so I like to cuddle it. The eyes are so bright. Those are white and black with yellow in the middle. Those feathers make me love it so much. (SH) Of course, I will take care of it well".

Faisal & Suwandita (2013) studied descriptive paragraph writing development through "FRESH" with 78 participants. They found that the FRESH method was significantly effective and efficient in teaching descriptive paragraphs to the students.

According to an extensive literature review regarding "FRESH", the students' compelling descriptive paragraphs might improve. Such a technique will help organize the ideas and develop a message for students to get a good descriptive paragraph. Therefore, the researchers were interested in applying "FRESH" to teach students majoring in English at RMUTI SKC to improve their descriptive paragraph writing ability. "FRESH" might guide them to organize ideas and make a proper, engaging, and meaningful descriptive paragraph.

## 2. Objectives of the Study

1. To determine whether there is any significant difference in descriptive paragraph writing competence before and

after practicing "FRESH" of students majoring in English at RMUTI SKC.

2. To examine students' attitudes towards learning English after practicing "FRESH".

3. To propose guidelines for developing students' paragraph writing competence through "FRESH" for Thai tertiary students.

## 3. Research Methodology

1. Research Design

Based on research questions 1 and 2, the study was a pretest-posttest design shown below.

| Treatment group | Pretest | X | Posttest |
|---|---|---|---|

In this design, one experimental class was given the treatment as well as the pretest and posttest. The students were also required to answer the questionnaire at the end of the experiment.

The study aimed to examine the improvement of descriptive paragraph writing competence through "FRESH" of students majoring in English at RMUTI SKC and to examine their attitudes towards learning English.

2. Participants

The present study participants, selected through purposive sampling, were 54 EFL students studying EC at the Department of Liberal Arts, Faculty of Industry Technology, RMUTI SKC, Thailand, in 2020. They had already studied English as a compulsory subject in primary and secondary school. The age range of the participants was between 19-21 years old.

3. Research Instruments

The researchers developed the following research instruments to obtain data to answer the research questions.

3.1 Written Pretest and Posttest The pretest and posttest were the same tests given to the students before and after practicing writing descriptive paragraphs through "FRESH". The test itself is a blank paper with an instruction: "Think of a tree you have seen. What does it look, feel, and sound like? Write a paragraph describing that tree so that your readers can picture it clearly".

"Tree" was chosen as a topic for students to describe because trees were found everywhere, especially in the rural area where the students lived. According to WGU (2020), "students will take what they are being taught and link it to their previous knowledge and experiences,

creating a reality that's unique to them". Therefore, the descriptive written text would be more exciting and meaningful since the students could describe something close to them.

### 3.2 Lesson Plans on FRESH

There were 2-hour six lesson plans on FRESH created to teach students in the study. The main objective of each lesson plan was to get students to be able to compose a descriptive paragraph practicing FRESH in a particular topic, including My Mom, My Best Friend, My Bedroom, My House, My Favorite Tree, and My Pet. In each lesson plan, the students studied and practiced writing a descriptive text, with the assistance of a teacher, following the guiding steps provided in the acronym of "FRESH", namely "Fact", "Reason", "Elaboration", and "Shift". All the lesson plans were assessed for validity by three experts in English language teaching, and the validity was found to be satisfactory.

### 3.3 Questionnaires on Attitudes towards English Learning

To answer research question 2, the researchers constructed the attitude scale, consisting of 20 questions, using a four-point rating scale ranging from 4 (strongly agree) to 1 (strongly disagree) to measure students' attitudes towards English learning after practicing "FRESH". The layers of attitudes towards learning English of the treatment group are classified into three levels, based on the mean scores of the attitude, as "High" to those mean scores from 3.00 to 4.00, "Moderate" from 2.00 to 2.99, and "Low" from 1.00 to 1.99. The validity of the question content from three experts was found to be satisfactory, and the reliability of the questionnaire was 0.89 using Cronbach's alpha.

### 4. Data Collection

Before the instruction practicing FRESH started, the pretest was given to the experimental group. Then, the 2-hour six lessons were transferred to the treatment group for six weeks. In each lesson, the students were instructed to write a descriptive paragraph on a particular topic practicing "FRESH". Finally, when the treatment was done, the posttest and the questionnaire were given to the students.

### 5. Data Analysis

The obtained data were analyzed using the SPSS's statistics program, including a t-test for dependent samples, mean, standard deviation, and percentage. To compare the written text's pretest and posttest scores, a t-test for dependent

samples was employed. Descriptive statistics, namely mean, standard deviation, and percentage were used to describe the basic patterns in the data in terms of the test scores and attitudes towards English learning of students.

## 4. Results

1.  The Results of Students' Pretest and Posttest Scores

The students' pretest and posttest scores were summarized in Table 1.

**Table 1** The Average Score of Students' Pretest and Posttest (N=54)

|  | Pretest | Posttest | Growth |
|---|---|---|---|
| Student 1 | 18.50 | 32 | 18.50 |
| ⋮ | ⋮ | ⋮ | ⋮ |
| Student 54 | 25 | 36.50 | 11.50 |
| **Average Score** | **15.53** | **30.84** | **15.31 (98.58%)** |

According to Table 1, it is noticed that after practicing "FRESH", the students gained 15.31 higher average scores. In other words, the students' writing scores improved 98.58 percent in the posttest. The improvement had reached the given success indicator on growth, which was 20 percent.

2.  The Results of the T-test

The researchers conducted the pretest and posttest to determine students' descriptive paragraph writing competence after learning through "FRESH". The results of the t-test were shown and interpreted in Table 2.

**Table 2** The Results of Students' Pretest and Posttest Score Comparison

| Tests | Mean | S.D. | t | Sig. |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Pretest | 15.53 | 3.52 | -40.53[**] | .000 |
| Posttest | 30.84 | 3.45 | | |

[*]$p < 0.05$

The data results above revealed that the descriptive paragraph writing ability mean scores in the pretest and posttest of students were 15.53 (S.D. = 3.52) and

30.84 (S.D. = 3.45), respectively. The mean score in the posttest was significantly higher than the mean score in the pretest with Sig. (2 tailed test) at .000 (p < 0.05). That means the students' descriptive paragraph writing competence improved after practicing "FRESH".

The research findings highlighted the effectiveness of the application of "FRESH" as the guidelines for teaching descriptive paragraph writing to language learners. It can be concluded that the guiding steps provided in the acronym form "FRESH": "Fact", "Reason", "Elaboration", and "Shift" can help students create their meaningful sensory descriptive paragraph.

3. Students' Attitudes towards Learning English

The students were required to answer the attitude scale after learning descriptive paragraph writing through "FRESH" to investigate their attitudes towards learning English.

The data from the questionnaires were analyzed, considering mean scores and standard deviation. The mean scores were categorized into "low", "moderate", and "high" attitudes. The results of students' attitudes towards learning English were presented in Table 3.

**Table 3** A Summary of Students' Attitudes towards Learning English

| Statements | Mean | S.D. | Level of Attitude | Note |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Total | 3.22 | .65 | High | - |

The results presented in Table 3 illustrated that the overall mean of the student's attitude towards learning English was high (mean = 3.22, S.D. = .65). It revealed that most students had positive attitudes towards learning English through "FRESH".

## 5. Discussion

As seen in the above section of the results, the discussions of the research findings, including possible reasons for an apparent significant difference in the pretest and posttest scores of the students' descriptive paragraph writing by applying "FRESH", are presented. The findings are discussed in two aspects: the effectiveness of "FRESH" and the students' attitudes towards learning English.

1. The Effectiveness of "FRESH"

The study showed that the

students' descriptive paragraph writing competence significantly improved after practicing with "FRESH". One possible explanation for such a significant difference is the effectiveness of "FRESH" for descriptive paragraph writing teaching. Based on the pretest results, the students seemed to have some problems in their descriptive paragraph writing in all assessed aspects. The students could not think of what message they wanted to convey to the readers, and they got stuck for quite a long time. That might be because they got confused when they were about to start writing. After applying "FRESH", the students knew they would begin the paragraph with the "Fact" of what they would like to describe. For instance, one student started his paragraph with,"On the field next to my house, there is a big Malabar tree under which I love sitting doing various activities like playing with my dog".It might be said that the students clearly understood that they should first identify the name and the kind of the object.

Then they think of the following element: "Reason". The student kept on writing, showing the reasons supporting the main idea. He stated, "The Malabar tree is a medium-sized deciduous plant". The student realized that he needed to "Elaborate" the reason by adding details. He stated, "It is about 15 meters high with branches stretching out in a horizontal position like a tier. It looks so elegant with those tier-like branches". Since the researchers guided students by adding one or two more reasons to make their paragraph sufficiently comprehensible, he added one more reason to the paragraph, writing "The Malabar tree has got a lot of big, hairy, and thick leaves". The added details elaborating the second reason were: "The leaves are about 8-15 centimeters wide and about 12-25 centimeters long. Young leaves are light green and will turn dark green when they are old. Then they will turn into a red-orange color and are about to fall off. With those big thick leaves on tier-like branches, the sunlight can not go through to the ground".

Finally, the student moved on to the last step. "So I can sit cool under my beloved Malabar tree on the soft dried leaves and do my favorite activities" was expressed as the conclusion of the paragraph. It can be concluded that the students did not get lost throughout the elements of "FRESH", and they were able to complete a descriptive paragraph

effectively. The research findings are consistent with Kurniawati, Syafar, & Hastini (2017, p. 12) who concluded that "the applying Fact-Reason-Elaboration-Shift (FRESH) technique is effective to improve the writing skill of the seventh-grade EFL-learners".

Besides, the students' descriptive paragraph writing scores were assessed for the content, organization, grammar, vocabulary, and mechanics of their written texts. Based on the posttest scores, every student got better scores after the treatment in all the assessed aspects, and they all showed significant progress in their writing.

The student could express a complete and clear topic sentence with sufficiently related details regarding the content. They seemed to realize how to express their ideas precisely and could provide enough information on the object described.

For the organization, the students showed a better organization. They could organize their ideas clearly, putting them in sequence with proper connectives and making them easy to follow and understand.

The students could create more grammatically correct sentences in a simple present tense in terms of grammar.

Although few grammatical inaccuracies were found, they understood that the simple present tense was required in descriptive texts. The findings can support the study results conducted by Faisal & Wulandari (2013, p. 64), who studied how "FRESH" improved students' competence in writing descriptive texts of the VIII E class in the junior high school in Banyumas. They explained that "the students' understanding of simple present tense also improved. It could be seen when the students wrote descriptive texts; only some made a few mistakes in sentence construction. They also mastered the writing rule better than before, and their texts were easier to understand".

The students took a closer look at the vocabulary and employed the more expressive vocabulary language in the posttest. Few misuses of vocabulary were found. It might be possible to say that having a clear understanding of the texts' content and organization could help the students choose and use more meaningful and appropriate vocabulary. Faisal & Wulandari (2013, p. 64) put that "When students were asked to write a descriptive paragraph using "FRESH", they tried to get appropriate vocabulary for their ideas in each element

of FRESH".

Besides, mechanics in the written texts, including spelling, punctuation, and capitalization, were also considered. The results revealed that the students provided occasional spelling, punctuation, and capitalization errors. However, it was better than those found in the pretest. That might be because, in the teaching process, the researchers emphasized spelling, punctuation, and capitalization when writing. The researchers also kept checking errors while they were writing, which might lead to a few mistakes in the posttest. In summary, it could be determined that after applying "FRESH", the students could write better descriptive paragraphs with better content, organization, grammar, vocabulary, and mechanics.

2. The Students' Attitudes towards Learning English

Another factor that is likely to play a significant role in the results is the attitudes towards learning English of students. Starks & Paltridge (1996) avered that learning a language is closely related to language attitudes, which Al-Tamimi & Shuib (2009, p. 33) agreed. They asserted that "attitudes play a very crucial role in language learning as they would appear to influence students' success or failure in their learning". The study findings illustrated that the students held positive attitudes towards learning English at a high level.

Taking a closer look at the students' attitudes towards English writing skills, the students positively reported that they felt an improvement in their English writing skills. They did not feel bored when they learned to write in English. The most interesting point is that they realized that they could successfully express their written text ideas. They also reported that they did not think writing English was impossible with highly positive attitudes. They knew how to create a compelling descriptive paragraph. The students gradually had positive attitudes towards learning English. It might be noted that after practicing writing a descriptive paragraph through "FRESH", the students felt more confident to write a descriptive paragraph. According to Karahan (2007, p. 84), "positive language attitudes let learners have a positive orientation towards learning English". It might be possible that the students' positive attitudes towards learning English helped improve their descriptive paragraph writing competence and vice versa.

Concerning the students' orientation towards the importance of the English language for their future careers, their responses indicated that they would be successful in their jobs if they were well-equipped with English language at a reasonable level from their graduation. They also positively reported that English helps them learn and use modern technology effectively. Studying English makes them generate new thoughts, and being well-equipped with the English language improves their personality. These seem to be the basic requirements for getting a job. Additionally, due to the establishment of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), the member countries, including Thailand, have announced using English language as a medium of communication among the nations. It results in English language proficiency requirements for employment and promotion in almost all companies in the countries. These might contribute to the students' highly positive attitudes towards learning English in the study.

Last but not least, on the students' attitudes towards the atmosphere of learning English in the language classroom, the students showed positive attitudes at a high level. They reported that they enjoyed the English lessons. They felt that the atmosphere in the English classroom was not stressful but comfortable when they studied. They also wanted to learn as much English as they could. To some extent, such feelings might result from "FRESH" employed in the study. As Agullo (2006) expressed, teaching techniques should be used to develop motivation and positive attitudes for the learners. Anil (2017, p. 7) further suggests that "using innovative methodologies or techniques in teaching English in the classroom will pave a positive way for students to learn the language meaningfully. Students will understand the significance of learning English as a second language without any fear, which will help them to equip with the power of confidence and achievement". In addition, teaching techniques help to kindle the learning interest of learners. It might be worth mentioning that teaching techniques in the language classroom could mesmerize and encourage the students to learn the language. It leads to the occurrence of a pleasant atmosphere in the classroom, which is one of the significant factors for successful language learners.

In summary, it can be understood that "FRESH" avail possible guidelines for

students to develop an effective paragraph with good content, organization, grammar, vocabulary, and even other writing mechanics, i.e., spelling, punctuation, and capitalization. The written descriptive paragraph would be fluent, easy to under-stand, and clear enough for readers to picture the object described. Such success might lead to positive attitudes towards learning English in the study.

## 6. Recommendations

1. Recommendations for pedagogical implementation

1.1 The "FRESH" technique is one of the effective teaching methods that somehow contributes to all English language teachers, especially those who teach English writing courses. They can reconsider or redesign their writing courses by applying "FRESH" to introduce descriptive paragraph writing to their students.

1.2 According to the students' most challenging writing skills, applying "FRESH" might enhance their English writing competence or solve the writing problems they are about to encounter.

1.3 "FRESH" could more or less ease a descriptive paragraph writing teaching and learning. The obtained information

might help curriculum administrators design tailor-made courses that are a perfect fit for their curriculum development.

2. Recommendations for further studies

2.1 This study has investigated the implications of "FRESH" to enhance students descriptive paragraph writing competence. Other types of paragraphs such as a narrative, expository, or persuasive paragraph might be conducted with "FRESH" to determine whether "FRESH" can be effective with those types of written work.

2.2 The study was designed as quasi-experimental research using the pretest-posttest design. Future studies should involve the assessment of the retention method to ensure that the "FRESH" technique is genuinely adequate in teaching paragraph writing.

## 7. Knowledge Assets

The research findings shed some light on the guidelines of "FRESH" to effectively develop students' descriptive paragraph writing. Through the numerical guiding steps provided in the acronym form: "FRESH", namely "Fact", "Reason", "Elabora-tion", and "Shift", students can compose a descriptive paragraph completely. The

guiding steps compared to paragraph　　elements are presented in Figure1.

| The "FRESH" | F | R | E | SH |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Paragraph Elements | A topic sentence | Supporting sentences | Minor supporting sentences | A concluding sentence |

**Figure 1** The guiding steps of "FRESH" compared to paragraph elements

It can be stated that "FRESH" can be applied to introduce some parts of English writing courses, especially a descriptive paragraph. This technique could guide students to write a paragraph from the beginning to the end, leading to a proper, meaningful, and complete written work.

## References

Agullo, G. L. (2006). Overcoming age-related differences. *ELT Journal*, 60(4), 365-373.

Al-Tamimi, A., & Shuib, M. (2009). Motivation and attitudes towards learning English: A study of petroleum engineering undergraduates at Hadhramout University of Sciences and Technology. *GEMA Online Journal of Language Studies*, 9(2), 29-55.

Anil, B. (2017). Applying innovative teaching methods in a second language classroom. *International Journal of Research in English Education*, 20, 1-9.

Faisal. (2010). *Penerapan "FRESH" untuk mengembangkan paragraf deskriptif bagi guru LBPP LIA purwokerto*. Purwokerto: Unpublished Research Report.

Faisal & Suwandita, K. (2013). The effectiveness of FRESH technique to teach descriptive paragraph. *Journal of Education and Learning*, 7(4), 239-248.

Faisal & Wulandari, Y. (2013). Improving students' competence in writing descriptive texts through "FRESH" technique. *English Review: Journal of English Education*, 2(1), 57-65.

Karahan, F. (2007). Language attitudes of Turkish students towards the English language and its use in Turkish context. *Journal of Arts and Science Say*, 7, 73-87.

Kurniawati, N., Syafar, A., & Hastini. (2017). Applying FRESH technique in teaching writing descriptive paragraph of the seventh grade EFL-learners. *E-Journal of ELTS (English Language Teaching Society)*, 5(1), 1-13.

Masyhud. (2010). *The problems faced by students in writing essay both in individual work and in group work*. [Unpublished Thesis]. University of Muhammadiyah Malang, Indonesia.

Starks, D. & Paltridge, B. (1996). A note on using sociolinguistic methods to study non-native attitudes towards English. *World Englishes*, 15(2), 217-224.

WGU. (2020). Five educational learning theories. Western Governors University. Retrieved from https://www.wgu.edu/blog/five-educational-learning-theories2005.html#close.