

# VIETNAMESE TERTIARY EFL STUDENTS' REFLECTION ON USING SELF-ASSESSMENT CHECKLIST IN LEARNING WRITING

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**Abstract:** There has been a scarcity of research on how EFL students employ the self-assessment checklist in the higher education setting of Vietnam. This study focuses on investigating second-year English major students' reflection on the role and the use of self-assessment checklists in their writing process. The study involved eighteen students who utilized self-assessment checklists in their writing course. Data were collected with a questionnaire, completed checklists, reflective journals, and essay drafts. The findings revealed that the students' reflections on the role of the self-assessment checklist were positive and highlighted its effectiveness as a tool for improving their writing skills. The use of self-assessment checklists was reported to enhance the students' self-assessment abilities and facilitated the identification of strengths and weaknesses in their writing. The study suggests integrating self-assessment checklists in EFL writing instruction, emphasizing the advantages of promoting self-regulated learning and empowering students to enhance their writing skills.

*Keywords:* Self-assessment, checklists, writing skill

## 1. Introduction

Writing is a necessary skill for English as a Foreign Language (EFL) students, particularly at the tertiary level, as it plays a crucial role in academic and professional success. To enhance writing proficiency, students need to be actively involved in the learning process and engage in reflective practices that foster self-awareness and improvement (Lee, 2017). Self-assessment has recently emerged as a significant focus of educational research, allowing learners to self-assess their own progress and achievements. With a growing emphasis on learner-centered approaches in education, self-assessment has gained prominence as an essential practice in facilitating students' engagement and metacognitive development (Boud, 1995; Xu, 2019; Wang, 2017).

Within the domain of writing, self-assessment checklists have gained recognition as effective tools for students to self-assess their writing and promote self-reflection on writing processes. O'Sullivan and Chambers (2016) observed that self-assessment checklists provide students with a formal framework to self-assess their writing by directing their attention to specific criteria, such as the organization of their ideas, clarity of expression, coherence of paragraphs, proper use of grammar and punctuation, and adherence to the assignment's requirements. Students can systematically review their writing against these criteria, identifying areas of strength and areas that need improvement. The checklists serve as valuable tools that allow students to reflect on their work in a structured manner, becoming actively engaged in the evaluation process. Consequently, self-assessment checklists play a significant role in empowering students to become more independent and confident writers.

Despite the existing body of research on self-assessment and its potential benefits, there remains a significant gap in understanding its specific application among Vietnamese tertiary EFL students, particularly in the context of writing skills development. This study seeks to bridge this gap by exploring the perspectives of Vietnamese tertiary EFL students on the practical use and role of self-assessment checklists in their writing learning process. Specifically, this research addresses the following research questions:

- (1) What do EFL students reflect on the role of self-assessment checklists in their writing?
- (2) What do EFL students reflect on the use of checklists for self-assessment in their writing process?

## **2. Literature review**

### **2.1 Self-assessment**

Self-assessment plays a crucial role in empowering students and fostering a deep understanding of their own learning and growth. Researchers and educators emphasized its significance in promoting self-regulation, metacognition, and learners' ownership of their learning. Zimmerman (2002) stated that self-assessment is an essential component of self-regulated learning because it enables students to monitor their progress, pinpoint areas for improvement, and set developmental goals independently. This process allows students to take an active role in their education, shifting from passive recipients of feedback to engaged participants in the learning process. Moreover, self-assessment provides students with a sense of autonomy and control over their learning endeavors. By reflecting on their strengths and weaknesses, students can identify aspects that require further attention and develop strategies for improvement. As a result of active engagement in the self-assessment process, students gain a deeper understanding of their own skills and challenges, empowering them to make well-informed decisions regarding their learning methods and identifying areas that warrant additional practice and development (Butler, 2016).

### **2.2 Self-assessment checklists in EFL writing**

In the literature on formative assessment, checklists, rubrics and rating scales for reflection are common tools to help students with self-assessment. Each of these tools has specific criteria or standards for guiding students in assessing their own products. In the writing classroom, self-assessment checklist is one of the valuable tools to help students in diagnosing their strengths and weaknesses and improving their writing ability based on predetermined criteria of assessment (Bowman, 2017; Ferry, 2020). Several prior studies asserted that the advantages of self-assessment checklists are relevant to both evaluative and instructive instruments because they are constructed based on the assessment scales and standards that are already accessible (Andrade & Boulay, 2003; Wang, 2017). Regarding the application in writing classes, during the self-assessment process, specific criteria in checklists serve as valuable reminders to help students think about what they wrote. Students can use self-assessment checklists as a thorough roadmap for them to independently analyze, self-assess, and improve their writing products. Andrade and Boulay (2003) recommended that checklists should be used as a self-assessment tool to improve the effectiveness of teachers' grading and help students justify their scores of performances.

Recently, much empirical research on self-assessment in writing has focused on the use of checklists or rubrics to investigate students' practices of self-assessment (Bowman, 2017; Fahimi & Rahimi, 2015; Ferry, 2020; Xu, 2019, Wang, 2017). The results indicated that students' writing skills improved gradually (Fahimi & Rahimi, 2015; Ferry, 2020), students improved their confidence in self-assessment and demonstrated more significant progress in the post-test (Xu, 2019), and students perceived the usefulness of self-assessment checklists for all levels of writers (Wang, 2017). Additionally, much research has also shown that using self-assessment checklists for students' self-assessment of their writing might help them create a sense of responsibility for their learning and make them feel less worried about learning writing (Elgadal, 2017; Wang, 2017). Furthermore, self-assessment checklists allow students to understand their strengths and weaknesses in writing, foster their independence in learning writing, and awareness of the strategy of self-regulated learning (Ratminingsih, Marhaeni, & Vigayanti, 2018).

As was mentioned above, the use of self-assessment checklists obviously provides numerous advantages to students in the process of learning writing with self-assessment, especially in terms of improving the quality of students' writing skills. In this study, the use of self-assessment checklists is a major component of students' self-assessment procedures in writing.

### **2.3 Previous studies**

The use of self-assessment checklists in writing skills development and reflective journal writing for self-assessment has gained significant attention in the field of language teaching and learning in the world. Prior studies have explored the role of utilizing self-assessment checklists as instructional tools to aid students in diagnosing their strengths and weaknesses in learning writing and guiding their improvement based on predefined assessment criteria (Bowman, 2017; Ferry, 2020). These checklists offer students a systematic method to analyze and self-assess their writings, leading to improved writing products and overall skills development, such as better organization, clarity of expression, and adherence to grammar and punctuation rules. In the context of reflective journal writing, a few studies have emphasized its role in enhancing students' self-awareness and metacognitive processes, contributing to a deeper understanding of their learning experiences (Lee, 2017; Ahmed, 2019). For instance, in Ahmed's study (2019), students reported a greater ability to identify their specific strengths and weaknesses in writing. This awareness allowed them to focus on specific aspects of their writing that needed improvement, such as sentence structure, coherence, and vocabulary usage. Additionally, the students were more mindful of their writing process, actively monitoring their progress and making adjustments to their strategies based on their reflections.

Furthermore, research findings from various studies highlighted the positive results of using self-assessment checklists in learning writing. Fahimi and Rahimi (2015) reported gradual improvements in students' writing skills, while Xu (2019) observed increased confidence in self-assessment and significant improvement in the post-test. Additionally, Wang (2017) found that students of all writing proficiency levels perceived self-assessment checklists as valuable tools for improving their writing skills.

There is limited research on the practical application of self-assessment checklists in the Vietnamese context, particularly among tertiary EFL students' writing skills. For instance, a study by Lê Thị Tuyết Hạnh and Bùi Thanh Tịnh (2022) explored the use of peer-review checklists

among non-English major students learning writing. The results revealed that EFL students who employed the peer-review checklist demonstrated improved writing performance, particularly in task completion and vocabulary usage, in comparison to their counterparts in the control group. In another study, Phan Xuân Thanh and Phương Hoàng Yến (2017) investigated EFL students' perceptions and challenges in using analytic rubrics for speaking self-assessment. The result showed that the students had positive perceptions toward the use of the Analytic Rubric for their self-assessment. However, they lacked a clear understanding of the potential drawbacks associated with the rubric. The limitations highlight the need for further research on the practical implementation of self-assessment checklists in the Vietnamese context, particularly for tertiary EFL students.

More research on students' use of self-assessment checklists is needed, especially specific investigations into their perspective of using this assessment tool and its effect on their productive skills. Therefore, the present study aims to explore Vietnamese tertiary EFL students' reflections on the use and the role of self-assessment checklists in their writing learning process.

### **3. Methodology**

#### **3.1 Research design**

This study expands upon the previous research conducted on tertiary EFL students' perceptions of self-assessment in writing skill, specifically targeting second-year students from two universities in southern Vietnam. The primary objective of this phase is to further investigate self-assessment practices in learning writing using the self-assessment checklist for students' self-assessment of their writings. To gather comprehensive data in this study, the research design adopts a blend of quantitative and qualitative approaches, including a questionnaire, self-assessment checklists, students' reflective journals, and their writing papers. By employing this mixed-method approach, the study aims to gain insights into EFL students' perspectives on the significance of self-assessment checklists and their application in the process of self-assessment of writing skills.

#### **3.2 Research context**

This study focuses on the courses of writing skills in the training programs for English majors at two distinct universities in southern Vietnam. In the non-public university, the curriculum consisted of four courses in writing skills, starting with fundamental sentence structures and advancing to research writing through Writing 1 to Writing 4. On the other hand, the public university offers writing courses in five semesters, including Writing 1, 2, 3, 4 (Advanced Writing), and Research Writing. Despite the differences in syllabus design, both universities prioritize the process approach in teaching writing, encouraging students to practice writing through pre-writing, drafting, revising, and editing activities. Collaborative writing and scaffolded instruction methods are also utilized to facilitate peer interaction and provide explicit guidance. The primary objective of choosing these universities was to explore second-year students' perspectives on the significance of self-assessment checklists and their utilization for self-assessing their writing skills. To achieve this, an eight-week online course was designed to support the students in enhancing their writing skills. It was purely voluntary, and the student's performance in this course did not contribute to their curriculum grade.

### 3.3 Participants

This study involved 18 second-year students from two universities in southern Vietnam who voluntarily participated in an online writing course, eight of which from the public university and ten from the non-public university. Of these participants, seven were male and eleven were female, ranging in age from 19 to 24. The participants in this study had previously completed the courses of Writing 1, 2, and 3, having their prior basic experience with academic English writing and self-assessment. At the time of the study, students from both universities were enrolled in the Writing 4 course, which was in their fourth semester. Throughout the study, these participants engaged actively in various writing activities, including essay writing, self-assessment using checklists, revising and editing their writing, as well as willingly maintaining reflective journals to document their writing experiences and self-assessment practices.

In this study, the researcher played a dual role as both a researcher and an instructor. This position enabled a comprehensive understanding of the students' experiences, challenges, and expectations throughout the self-assessment process of their writing. While serving as an instructor, the researcher provided explicit instruction and guidance on the effective use of the checklists, emphasizing the significance of self-reflection and critical self-assessment of their own writing. Moreover, the researcher regularly monitored and reviewed the data to identify any inconsistencies and to ensure that the data collection methods were being implemented correctly and that the collected data remained standardized and objective. The researcher also used blinded analysis and cross-validated the findings to strengthen the analysis's objectivity and mitigate potential interpretation biases.

### 3.4 Writing course structure

In preparation for the writing course, a self-assessment checklist was developed, consisting of eighteen close-ended Yes/No questions and two open-ended questions to facilitate effective self-assessment practices among the students. The checklist served as both a data-gathering tool and a means to guide the students in self-assessing their essay writing based on specific criteria, such as coherence, logical organization, unity, grammar, and paragraph and essay structure. The design of the checklist was informed by established writing assessment rubrics and the frameworks proposed by Brown (2017), Divis and Liss (2006), and Jones (2019). Notably, these frameworks provided clear and explicit criteria for writing skills, encompassing elements such as essay content, organization, and language proficiency. As Jones (2019) highlighted, providing precise criteria is essential for directing students' self-assessment and offering valuable feedback for their development. Such clarity enables students to comprehend the expectations and forms the basis for meaningful self-assessment. Moreover, the use of the self-assessment checklist fosters consistency, fairness, and transparency in students' self-assessment process. Smith (2018) affirmed that a well-designed assessment system ensures uniform criteria for students to evaluate their own writing, promoting fairness and transparency. Additionally, the utilization of the self-assessment checklist empowers students to actively engage in the assessment process, thereby reducing the influence of subjective judgments or biases that can affect the assessment of writing skills.

During the eight-week online writing course, held twice a week through the Microsoft Teams app, students were exposed to various essay types, including argumentative, cause and effect, descriptive, and classification essays. The instructor devoted the first three weeks to help

the students review the writing techniques. The course material was based on the book *Effective Academic Writing 3* by Divis and Liss (2006), closely following the academic writing guidelines of the students' curriculum. In the following five weeks, participants were required to complete one writing topic each week, which included writing the first essay draft, doing self-assessment, editing, and revising the version. After the students completed each writing topic, the instructor provided the students with a self-assessment checklist. Using this checklist, the students were instructed to self-assess their essays by following items in the checklist and subsequently revise their work to produce a revised version. The submission folder sent to the instructor included the first essay draft, the completed self-assessment checklist, and the revised essays. Ultimately, this research project gathered 90 folders from 18 participants over the course of eight weeks.

### **3.5 Data collection instruments**

#### **3.5.1 Questionnaire**

The purpose of the questionnaire is to investigate students' reflections on the role of self-assessment checklists in enhancing their writing skills. The content of the questionnaire items is based on the role of checklists, the concept of self-assessment and its impact on fostering metacognitive processes and independent learning. Metacognition, as defined by Boud (1995), involves the ability to think about and monitor one's own thinking processes, crucial for effective learning and problem-solving. Through self-assessment, learners become more aware of their strengths and weaknesses, enabling them to identify areas for improvement and develop strategies to enhance their writing skills. Moreover, the framework highlights self-assessment's role in promoting independent learning, as students take responsibility for their own writing development and proactively seek opportunities for improvement (Jones, 2019). This empowerment fosters active participation in the assessment process and a sense of ownership over the learning process.

The questionnaire consists of 11 items designed to assess specific aspects of self-assessment checklists' impact on students' writing practices. Participants are asked to rate their level of agreement with each statement using a five-point Likert scale response format, ranging from 'Strongly Disagree' to 'Strongly Agree'. For example, items 1 and 2 inquire about the students' perception of self-assessment checklists as effective tools for improving writing skills and encouraging self-reflection on the strengths and weaknesses of their writing works. These items align with the theoretical framework by emphasizing the role of self-assessment in enhancing writing proficiency and metacognitive processes (Ahmed, 2019; Boud, 1995). Other items, such as 5 and 6, focus on how self-assessment checklists encourage students to establish organization in their writing and take greater responsibility for their learning. These items are consistent with the concept of self-assessment promoting learners' autonomy and active participation in the learning process (Xu, 2019). Additionally, items 8 and 9 assess the participants' perception of self-assessment checklists as tools to identify and correct mistakes in their writing works and solve writing problems. These items align with the research of O'Sullivan and Chambers (2016), who emphasize the value of self-assessment checklists in guiding students to recognize areas of improvement in their writing.

The inclusion of the questionnaire in the research design is essential as it provides valuable insights into students' perspectives and experiences with self-assessment checklists. The researcher can gain a deeper understanding of students' perspectives on the effectiveness of these

checklists in facilitating writing improvement and metacognitive development (Ahmed, 2019; Lee, 2017).

### **3.5.2 Reflective journals**

Reflective journals are a valuable data collection tool in research. They offer the researcher an opportunity to gain profound insights into students' thoughts, experiences, and reflections on their learning process, specifically related to writing process and self-assessment practices. At the end of the writing course, the students were required to write reflective journals, and it was recommended that they use Vietnamese as their language of choice for journal writing.

The reflective journals used in this research include a wide range of contents, such as students' reflections on their writing progress, their use of self-assessment checklists, their editing process, and their essay revising. Additionally, they capture the challenges encountered, perceived strengths and weaknesses, and overall learning experiences of the students. Through these journals, students express their thoughts, emotions, and insights about their writing process, providing authentic and rich qualitative data (Ahmed, 2019). The in-depth nature of these journal entries allows researchers to gain a comprehensive and nuanced understanding of students' self-assessment practices and writing development, contributing to a thorough analysis of the data. Moreover, unlike closed-ended questionnaires, reflective journals provide students with the freedom to openly express their thoughts, enabling the researcher to gain deeper insights into their cognitive processes, attitudes, and emotions related to their learning experiences. This approach guarantees that the collected data is more comprehensive and truly representative of students' perspectives and reflections on self-assessment practice. As designed in an open-ended format, the reflective journal provided specific prompts or questions related to self-assessment practice, metacognition, and writing skills to guide students' reflections and ensure the data collected aligns with the research objectives (Creswell, 2014).

### **3.5.3 Self-assessment checklist and students' writing papers**

As stated in section 3.4 concerning the course structure, the main objective of collecting self-assessment checklists and students' writing papers in this study is to delve deeper into the role and utilization of self-assessment checklists in improving students' writing skills. The self-assessment checklists are essential tools for students to evaluate their writing against specific writing criteria such as idea organization, clarity of expression, paragraph coherence, grammar, and adherence to assignment requirements as well as reflect on their writing.

Meanwhile, the gathering of students' writing papers, encompassing both initial drafts and revised versions, enables the researcher to analyze and compare the levels of the participants' self-assessment of their writing. The collection of students' different writing drafts allows the researcher to precisely measure the aspects of writing that students had self-assessed and revised. This triangulation of data sources, which includes both self-assessment checklists, students' writing papers, and reflective journals enhances the research findings and enables a comprehensive analysis of how the use of self-assessment checklists influences students' writing development

## **3.6 Data collection and analysis**

During the eight-week writing course, a total of 90 self-assessment checklists and 180

students' writing drafts were collected from 18 student participants. The data collection process involved weekly assessments in which each student wrote the first draft of an essay, completed scales in a self-assessment checklist and wrote the revised draft every week in the last five weeks. The data obtained from the Yes/No responses in the self-assessment checklists were computed using Microsoft Excel for the percentages and were analyzed in a combination with the students' writing products. The data obtained from two open-ended items in the checklists, eighteen reflective journals, and students' essay drafts during the writing courses were analyzed through a combination of qualitative content analysis (Creswell, 2014).

The questionnaire was distributed to the student participants on the last day of the online writing course, and all 18 of them completed it. The researcher processed the questionnaire data using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) software program (version 20.0) and organized it into a database for analysis. This analysis of quantitative data was done with descriptive statistics, which was based on measuring levels of Mean (M) and Standard Deviations (SD) for each item.

## 4. Findings

### 4.1 Students' reflection on the role of the self-assessment checklist

Table 1 presents findings that indicate a high level of performance, with an overall mean score of  $M=4.33$  and  $SD=0.491$ . This result is significant in terms of students' reflection on how useful the use of self-assessment checklists is in students' learning writing. The eleven items, measured on a five-point Likert scale, indicate participants' responses to their use of self-assessment checklists in assessing their writing, ranging from  $M=3.61$  to  $M=4.72$ . The data in this table reveal that the majority of participants expressed agreement or strong agreement with their reflection on the self-assessment instrument. Notably, most participants strongly agreed that self-assessment checklists are effective tools for improving their writing skills ( $M=4.72$ ). Two items with the same rating ( $M=4.67$ ) indicate that self-assessment checklists not only help students eliminate unnecessary or redundant details but also enable them to identify mistakes related to grammar, vocabulary, spelling, and punctuation in their own writing tasks. Further analysis of the data demonstrates that the self-assessment criteria in the checklists encourage participants to reflect on their strengths and weaknesses ( $M=4.56$ ), take greater responsibility for their learning ( $M=4.44$ ), evaluate their writing ( $M=4.39$ ), and enhance their independent learning abilities ( $M=4.28$ ). Moreover, most participants believed that self-assessment checklists assist them in problem-solving in their writing ( $M=4.22$ ) and enable them to focus on each step of the writing process, thereby improving their independent thinking skills ( $M=4.17$ ).

The standard deviation (SD) analysis from Table 1 reveals a small variance between the data and the mean, and the result about students' reflections on the role of self-assessment checklists in their writing process is reliable. The overall SD of 0.491 and the mean of 4.33 indicates high agreement among students. Some statements received high agreement, such as statement 1 ( $M= 4.72$ ,  $SD= 0.461$ ), statements 8 and 10 ( $M= 4.67$ ,  $SD= 0.485$ ), suggesting that checklists are a good tool to improve writing and help students recognize their writing mistakes and eliminate redundant details.

**Table 1.** Students’ reflection on the role of the self-assessment checklist

No	Items	Min	Max	Mean	SD
1	Self-assessment checklists are a good tool to help me improve my writing skills.	4	5	4.72	.461
2	Self-assessment checklists help me reflect on the strengths and weaknesses of my own writing works.	4	5	4.56	.511
3	Self-assessment checklists help me focus on each step of the process of my own writing.	4	5	4.17	.383
4	The use of self-assessment checklists improves my own independent thinking.	3	5	3.89	.676
5	Self-assessment checklists encourage me to establish organization throughout my writing.	3	5	3.61	.548
6	Self-assessment checklists encourage me to take more responsibility for my learning.	4	5	4.44	.511
7	Self-assessment checklists increase my independent learning.	4	5	4.28	.428
8	Self-assessment checklists help me find the errors relating to grammar, vocabulary, spelling, and punctuation in my writing works.	4	5	4.67	.485
9	I know how to solve problems in my writing works through self-assessment checklists.	4	5	4.22	.428
10	Self-assessment checklists enable me to eliminate unnecessary or redundant details in my writing works.	4	5	4.67	.485
11	I prefer to evaluate my writing by using self-assessment checklists.	4	5	4.39	.485
Total (Mean & Standard Deviation)				4.33	.491
<i>Note: N=18 students, S.D = Standard Deviation</i>					

Additional findings regarding participants’ reflections on the role of the self-assessment checklists are reported from the participants’ reflective journals below. The following excerpt provides insights into how the students felt about this self-assessment tool:

*“I have never assessed my essays by using a self-assessment checklist. I feel a bit nervous because this assessment method is new so I haven’t adapted to it yet. ...my writing teacher often asks my classmates to edit other students’ essays and then she corrects them afterward.” (St-2)*

The findings from the students’ reflective journals suggest a notable disparity in writing assessment approaches, with a clear contrast observed between self-assessment checklists and traditional classroom assessments. The majority of students had limited exposure to self-assessment checklists and some might experience initial apprehension toward this new method.

It is remarkable that the vast majority of participants shared their reflections on the role of the self-assessment checklist in their writing improvement process. The findings highlight the checklist's pivotal role in empowering the participants to actively engage in error identification and correction, enhancement in writing skills, and critical reflection on their writing process. For example, several participants wrote,

*“The self-assessment checklist enabled me to identify mistakes in my essay, and I took responsibility for rectifying them on my own. Through self-assessment, my essay significantly improved in its final version. I always dedicate time to reevaluating the content and organization of my essay.” (St-12)*

*“The checklist aided me in identifying and addressing errors related to spelling, capitalizations, and grammar. It also contributed to the development of my independent thinking skills in writing.*

*I gained valuable experience through self-editing.” (St-18)*

*“The self-assessment checklist proved to be invaluable as it helped me identify mistakes that I hadn't initially noticed in my essay. It prompted me to reflect on the reasons behind those mistakes.” (St-10)*

The findings indicate that the participants perceived the self-assessment checklist as a valuable tool for identifying and rectifying mistakes in their essays independently, leading to significant enhancements in their revised essay versions. Engaging in self-assessment also resulted in considerable improvements in their writing skills as they dedicated regular time to re-assessing the content and organization of their essays, thus self-assessing the overall writing quality. Furthermore, the checklist aided participants in identifying and addressing language-related mistakes, such as spelling, capitalization, and grammar issues, thereby not only refining the technical aspects of their writings but also fostering the development of independent thinking skills in learning writing. Lastly, participants highly valued the self-assessment checklist for prompting reflection on their work, facilitating the recognition of previously overlooked mistakes and encouraging deeper exploration of the reasons behind these mistakes. This reflective practice fostered a deeper understanding of their writing process and highlighted potential areas for improvement.

Likewise, the majority of students recognized positive results regarding the use of self-assessment checklists in writing such as enhanced confidence and autonomy, improved writing progress, and the promotion of self-reflection and self-improvement. Several examples can be seen in the excerpts below.

*“I always feel more confident when I assess my own essay. I think that I am an assessor.” (St-5)*

*“... self-assessment helps me control my writing progress. I can find errors and correct them by myself.” (St-12)*

*“Now, I like the writing subject more than ever before. ... The most important thing is how I can improve myself. ...no one could help me correct all my writings.” (St-17)*

The findings highlight the positive impact of the self-assessment checklist on various aspects of their writing process. The participants reported enhanced confidence and a sense of empowerment when assessing their essays, viewing themselves as competent assessors. The self-assessment process provided them with greater control over their writing progress, enabling them to identify and correct mistakes independently. Additionally, the participants developed a more positive attitude toward writing, expressing a newfound appreciation for the subject. They emphasized the importance of personal growth and improvement through self-assessment, recognizing its role in fostering the continuous development of writing skills. The self-assessment checklist's value as a tool for self-reliance and acknowledging the limitations of external assistance also emerged from their reflections.

Nevertheless, a minority of the participants encountered difficulties when utilizing the self-assessment checklists in relation to their writing abilities and the self-assessment process. They wrote,

*“... I think my writing skills are still weak, so my ability to recognize errors in grammar, vocabulary, and the content of my writing for self-editing is limited ...” (St-2)*

*“... I have become accustomed to teachers correcting my mistakes because I do not have enough proficiency to recognize all the errors in my writing. ... This self-assessment method is still quite new, so I haven't fully adapted to it yet. ... I still believe that I need guidance to perform better.” (St-7).*

*“... I can recognize where my writing is wrong, but I may not be able to correct those errors completely ... It could be because my knowledge is still limited... I need help from the teacher.” (St-8)*

The provided information indicates that a small number of the participants recognized their writing skills as weak, particularly in identifying errors related to grammar, vocabulary, and content. They have become accustomed to relying on teachers for mistake correction, implying a lack of confidence or proficiency in self-assessment. The self-assessment process is perceived as new and challenging for some students, suggesting a need for more practice and adaptation. The students express a desire for guidance and help from teachers to improve their writing skills.

#### **4.2 Students' reflection on the use of self-assessment checklists**

This part reports the findings of students' reflections on both the self-assessment checklists and the self-assessment of their first essay drafts by eighteen students. Results of the students' self-assessment practices were analyzed based on three main themes of the checklist and then the results before and after students' self-assessment of the first draft essay.

##### **4.2.1 Students' self-assessment of essay contents**

The checklist demonstrates the criteria employed by the students to self-assess their essay contents (see the Appendix). The percentages show students' self-assessments of their initial drafts. The comparison of the students' self-assessments and their revised drafts aims to elicit the students' use of the self-assessment checklist in improving their writing skills.

It can be stated that the assessment of introductory paragraphs was carried out by the majority of students. A significant number of students identified and corrected different content omissions in their introductory paragraphs. For example, in Student 7's writing, a sentence was added to the revised introduction, stating *“Nowadays, the Internet plays an important role in the development of the world.”* This additional sentence suggests that the essay could center on the importance of the Internet in global development. The student established the essay's tone and provided readers with an insight into the main theme or topic that would be explored throughout the paper. However, out of the ninety essays assessed, only two introductory paragraphs remained unchanged in the revised version, with Students 2 and 4 failing to include a clear thesis statement. For example, Student 4's final version was: *“Today, the internet is an indispensable part of everyone's life. However, it is widely believed that the internet has as many drawbacks as it does benefits. In my opinion, I completely agree with this statement.”*

In terms of the body paragraph contents, the majority of the participants demonstrated accuracy in self-assessing their revised drafts. They presented evident improvements in the revised drafts, highlighting the modifications made after the students' self-assessment and editing of their initial essays. The majority of the essays exhibited a clear structure in each body paragraph, encompassing a central idea, supporting details such as facts, evidence, explanations, and examples, and a concluding statement. For example, below are excerpts from Student 7's writing,

***The initial draft of the essay body***

In my opinion, people need to understand the primary causes of obesity. Firstly, unhealthy eating habits are the major cause of obesity in people. In fact, people prefer to eat junk food or fast food over healthy meat, vegetables and fruits. Secondly, inactivity is also a main reason of increased obesity rates. For example, they tend to relax by watching TV, surfing the web or playing computer games rather than exercising. In addition, stress, anxiety, or insomnia can all contribute to people becoming overweight. In short, there are several causes that most people are unaware of.

***The revised draft of the essay body (Underlines are the changes after using the self-assessment)***

In my opinion, there are two primary causes of obesity. Firstly, unhealthy eating habits are the major cause of obesity in people. In fact, people prefer to eat fast food over healthy meals. For instance, in foreign countries, many people will eat fast food because it is more convenient, accessible, and time-saving. Secondly, inactivity is also a reason of increased obesity rates. Human’s body fat continues to accumulate, leading to obesity because they do not like to exercise. For example, human tend to watch TV, surf the web or play computer games rather than exercise. In short, it is clear that main causes of obesity are bad eating habits and lazy lifestyle.

Regarding the self-assessment of the contents of the conclusion paragraphs, the majority of the participants presented well-crafted versions after conducting the assessment with the checklist. Most of the students effectively addressed the contents of the conclusion paragraph by providing a summary of the main points or restating the process, which included evaluation, recommendation, or warning. For instance, in the revised version of Student 14’s writing, the conclusion is as follows: “*In conclusion, it is evident that while the Internet has negative consequences, it undeniably facilitates people’s lives. Therefore, individuals should utilize it for positive purposes while being cautious of its harmful effects.*”

In summary, the majority of the students used the checklist quite well in self-assessing their entire essay content, demonstrating the ability to identify areas where improvements were needed and making appropriate revisions. On the other hand, a few participants encountered challenges specifically in self-assessing their introductory paragraphs.

***4.2.2 Students’ self-assessment of essay organization***

As depicted in the Appendix, seven questions encompassing criteria from the self-assessment checklist yield an overall assessment of students’ self-assessment of their essay organization. 100% of the participants indicated that their essays exhibited a well-structured organization of paragraphs, employing connectors to add information, establish time relationships, and utilize transition words to highlight similarities or differences. Around 95% of the participants affirmed that each body paragraph included a topic sentence.

Most of the students self-assessed the organization of their essays, and the outcomes indicated that all essays demonstrated a consistent structure. For instance, Student 7’s essay had an introductory paragraph that highlighted the significant role of the Internet in the world. Each body paragraph began with a topic sentence, presenting the advantages or disadvantages of the

Internet. The conclusion paragraph summarized the importance of the Internet and offered suggestions. Moreover, the findings from the students' self-assessment of their essay organization revealed that most of the students utilized transitional words to establish connections between sentences and paragraphs. For example, they employed contrastive connectors (such as *on the other hand*, *but*, *however*, so on), adding connectors (*and*, *furthermore*, *in addition*), and other common connectors (*firstly*, *secondly*, and *finally*).

#### 4.2.3 Students' self-assessment of language knowledge

This section presents the findings of the students' self-assessment concerning language mistakes in their initial draft essays, including punctuation, capitalization, spelling, vocabulary, subject-verb agreement, and grammar mistakes when using checklists. As seen in the Appendix, most of the students identified a considerable number of language mistakes in their essays: 100% had grammar mistakes, 83.33% subject-verb agreement, 77.78% punctuation, 72.22% spelling, 38.89% capitalization and 33.33% vocabulary. More than half of the students expressed satisfaction with their first draft essays (55.56%).

It can be observed that the students demonstrated a certain level of ability to self-assess their spelling in their writing. Most of the students actively utilized the checklist criteria to evaluate their language usage and made revisions accordingly. The results indicated that the majority of spelling mistakes in the first essay drafts were identified and corrected by the students in the revised version. However, a number of spelling mistakes persisted in the students' revised drafts. For instance, the following excerpts showcase examples of language mistakes, with the underlined portion representing the specific type of mistake being discussed.

*For instances, some students spend more time online playing games ..., Further more, it makes people lose the ability to communicate ...” (St-2)*

*“Some people thinkl it provides us with .... Fisrtly, social media is ...” (St-5)*

*“... some information being utilized by bad guys to perturbarive to a life of people... In conclusion, the internet has both advantages and downsides...” (St-6)*

*“One the one hand, it is true...” (St-7).*

Regarding capitalization mistakes, all of the students demonstrated competency in self-assessing and subsequently editing their initial draft essays. For instance, in Student 17's first draft, words or phrases such as “... the sunday times reported ...” and “... published on Wikipedia ...” were identified and subsequently revised in the edited drafts as “... the Sunday Times reported...” and “... published on Wikipedia...”. The results indicated that the majority of the students successfully addressed and edited most of the capitalization mistakes after conducting their self-assessment of the first draft essays. However, several capitalization mistakes persisted in the revised versions of the students' essays. Examples of such mistakes include “... i agree with this statement ...” (St-2), “...people use portals like google, bing, yahoo, facebook, zalo, ...” (St-4), “In fact, Many people are being harassed ...” (St-7), and “... social networking apps like facebook, zalo, Instagram, etc.” (St-18). Remarkably, some words might confuse students whether to use capital letters or not. For instance, variations such as “*the Internet*” and “*the internet*” were commonly found in the students' revised drafts.

Moreover, the findings indicated that the majority of the students demonstrated accurate

use of punctuation in their initial drafts. This suggests that the students exhibited fewer punctuation mistakes in their writing. A few punctuation mistakes in the first draft were identified and rectified by the students. This indicates that the students addressed common punctuation mistakes related to commas (,), colons (:), periods (.), semicolons (;), apostrophes (’), and quotation marks (“...”). For instance, in Student 14's first draft, she recognized the omission of a comma in the phrase “*To sum up the Internet has many benefits...*” and added a comma to revise it as “*To sum up, the Internet has many benefits...*”. However, punctuation mistakes continued to pose challenges in the writing for several students. A small number of the students were unable to identify and correct all of these mistakes. The following excerpts demonstrate instances where punctuation marks should be added or have been misplaced and should be omitted using a star symbol (\*) and two stars (\*\*), respectively.

*“In my opinion (\*) I strongly agree with...” (St-6)*

*“For example: (\*\*) You can read ...” (St-15)*

*“... the Internet has many benefits such as: (\*\*) it is a great source of information for mankind, connecting people across the globe (\*) and the benefits of the internet in learning” (St-11)*

*“They will spend a lot of time playing video games (\*) especially violent games.” (St-17)*

Regarding vocabulary mistakes, the students acknowledged that they made a minimal number of mistakes in vocabulary or word order (33.33%), as indicated in the Appendix. The results of their self-assessment demonstrated that there were very few vocabulary mistakes in both their initial drafts and the revised versions. The students exhibited competency in vocabulary usage during their first writing attempt and further enhanced it through self-assessment during the revision process.

It is not surprising that all of the students acknowledged making more grammar mistakes in their initial draft essays (see the Appendix). As a matter of fact, the more mistakes students made, the more they were able to identify and correct them using the self-assessment checklist. Notably, the majority of the students successfully addressed common grammar mistakes in their initial essays through self-editing, including mistakes in articles, run-on sentences, pronouns, prepositions, subject-verb agreements, and sentence structures. For example, the excerpt of Student 12's writing can illustrate these mistakes:

***The initial body of the essay***

The possible effects of overweight include many disadvantages which is not good for life. Initially, obesity results in incorrect functioning of the human body and developing many illnesses. For example, if a person's body fat increases, they may suffer to diabetes or heart disease. Moreover, being overweight also lower people's productivity. People who are overweight often feel stressful and tired. For example, obese person needs to put more effort to do jobs than a person with normal weight. In short, obesity cause risks relating to both mental and physic health.

***The revision body of the essay:*** *(Underlines are the changes after using the self-assessment)*

The possible effects of being overweight include many disadvantages which are not good for people's life. Initially, the main results of obesity can lead to incorrect functioning of

the human body and can cause many illnesses. For example, if a person's body fat increases, they may suffer from diabetes or heart disease. Moreover, being overweight also lower people's productivity. People who are overweight often feel stressed and tired. For example, an obese person needs to put more effort to do jobs than a person with a normal weight. In short, obesity causes risks relating to both mental and physical health.

In the revised draft, Student 12's writing included the verb "being" and changed "is" to "are" in the first sentence. The second sentence was paraphrased as "*the main results of obesity can lead to incorrect ... and can cause many illnesses.*" Furthermore, the student made adjustments to the preposition "suffer to" by replacing it with "suffer from". Additionally, articles were added, and the mistake of subject-verb agreement was corrected in the last two sentences.

The self-assessment checklists offered students an opportunity to review their initial draft essays and identify mistakes. However, it is evident that certain common grammar mistakes persisted even after students assessed their first drafts. These mistakes were found in several participants' revised drafts including mistakes in subject-verb agreement, as seen in examples like "*Obesity meaning an abnormal ...*" (St-6) and "*... Obesity is a big matter that impact ... Its causes is created ...*" (St-11). A few students encountered issues with pronouns in their revised versions, such as "*...they can buy anything you want and need without leaving the home.*" (St-18). Article problems were also observed, such as "*Obesity is genetics and unhealthy diet...*" (St-2) or "*... due to a inactive lifestyle.*" (St-5). Additionally, run-on sentences were present, as illustrated by the following excerpt: "*People acquire weight quickly for a variety of reasons We can see those causes plainly if we go out on the street; there are many places serving fast food, and the prices are also extremely low*" (St-6). Moreover, a small number of mistakes were also noted in plurals, sentence structures, adjectives, adverbs, and conciseness in their revised versions.

Regarding the first open-ended question in the self-assessment checklist on the students' strengths and weaknesses in learning writing, the findings reveal that all eighteen students identified their strengths and weaknesses in their writing skills. This is a positive indication that the use of the checklists allows the students to have experience in self-assessment to further enhance their writing skills in future endeavors.

The other open-ended question asked students how they could enhance their essays. Each student realized their way to improve their writing skills, which depended on their own weaknesses. For instance, they expressed,

*"I should focus on improving my grammatical proficiency."* (St-1),

*"I need to increase my writing frequency to enhance my skills."* (St-2), and

*"I aim to expand my vocabulary and enhance both simple and complex sentence structures by learning synonyms."* (St-6).

The findings indicate that the students have demonstrated a keen awareness of areas requiring improvement in their writing skills. They have identified key aspects such as grammatical proficiency, writing frequency, vocabulary expansion, and sentence structure enhancement.

## 5. Discussion

With respect to two research questions, this study sought to explore Vietnamese tertiary EFL students' reflections on the role and the use of self-assessment checklist in learning writing.

The findings from a questionnaire and reflective journals suggested that the students' reflections on the role of the self-assessment checklist were positive and highlighted its effectiveness as a tool for improving their writing skills. The self-assessment checklist is perceived as valuable in promoting students' self-awareness, and encouraging active learning. These results indicated that the self-assessment process, facilitated by the checklists, positively contributes to the students' writing development and their overall learning experience. These findings are somewhat consistent with Wang (2017) who provided evidence that students who utilized checklists for self-assessment exhibited higher levels of self-regulation in their learning compared to students in control groups. Therefore, this study also highlights the connection between self-assessment activities that utilized checklists and self-regulated learning.

The participants recognized the role of the self-assessment checklist in identifying and correcting writing mistakes, while also promoting a sense of responsibility and autonomy in their writing process. This finding aligns with Fahimi and Rahimi's (2015) research, indicating the checklist's potential to foster a more independent writing approach. Moreover, the findings of the current study indicated that the utilization of the self-assessment checklist played a significant role in enhancing the overall quality and efficacy of students' writing. These results align with the research conducted by Bowman (2017), Ferry (2020), Xu (2019), and Wang (2017), who also highlighted the positive impact of using checklists as effective tools for improving writing skills. The present study adds to the existing body of knowledge by demonstrating the value of self-assessment checklists specifically in the context of Vietnamese tertiary education and their potential for facilitating writing improvement among EFL students.

Additionally, the present study's findings revealed that the integration of the self-assessment checklist in learning writing prompted students to engage in self-reflection, become active participants in their own learning and understand their writing strengths and weaknesses. This reflective practice encouraged students to take responsibility for their learning process of writing. These outcomes align with the research conducted by Ahmed (2019) and Lee (2017), emphasizing the importance of reflective activities in fostering metacognitive development and enhancing the learning process. The current study contributes to the existing literature by showcasing the role of self-assessment checklists in promoting metacognitive skills and self-directed learning among EFL students in the context of Vietnamese tertiary education.

Furthermore, the findings from the participants' reflective journals provided additional insights into their reflections on the role of the self-assessment checklist in their writing improvement process. While the majority acknowledged its pivotal role in empowering them to actively engage in error identification and correction, some students initially expressed apprehension toward this new assessment method when they admitted encountering challenges with the self-assessment checklists in the writing course. These individuals struggled to identify mistakes in grammar, vocabulary, and content during the self-editing process, highlighting potential limitations in their language proficiency and error recognition abilities. Additionally, a few students exhibited a dependence on teachers for error correction, indicating a lack of confidence or familiarity with self-assessment practices. For these students, the self-assessment

process was perceived as new and demanding, suggesting the need for more practice and adaptation to this approach. The participants expressed a desire for guidance and support from teachers to facilitate the development of their self-assessment abilities.

Regarding the second research question, the findings from the students' completed self-assessment checklists and students' essay drafts suggested that the students engaged in self-assessment of their writing using the checklists, including self-assessing the essay content, essay organization, and language usage in their essays. The results showed that the students generally demonstrated a strong ability to self-assess the content of their essays and improve specific aspects of their essays, particularly the clarity of introductory and concluding paragraphs. Furthermore, the self-assessment process allowed the students to identify and address mistakes and weaknesses, leading to enhanced writing skills with the production of more polished final drafts.

In terms of the assessment of overall essay organization, a substantial proportion of the students demonstrated an understanding of the crucial aspects, such as crafting clear introductory and concluding paragraphs, as well as well-developed body paragraphs. These findings align with prior research conducted by Fahimi and Rahimi (2015), providing support to the idea that checklists play a facilitative role in enabling students to identify essential elements in their essays. The majority of the students exhibited accuracy in self-assessing the structure of their essays, with all essays displaying consistent organization. The adept use of transitional words and topic sentences showcased their competency in creating coherent and well-structured essays. These results are partly consistent with previous studies by Xu (2019) and Wang (2017), underscoring the advantages of utilizing checklists as a guiding tool for students in effectively organizing their written work.

Concerning language knowledge, the results suggest that when using the checklists, the students demonstrate the competence to identify and correct a considerable number of language mistakes in their initial draft essays to produce revised drafts. Notably, spelling and vocabulary mistakes were successfully addressed through the self-assessment process, implying a certain level of language proficiency among the students. These findings are consistent with prior research conducted by Ahmed (2019) and Lee (2017), which highlights the importance of reflective practices in nurturing language awareness and promoting metacognitive abilities in students. The students' ability to engage in self-assessment and improve their language knowledge through reflective activities further emphasizes the value of self-assessment checklists in fostering language development and enhancing writing performance.

Despite the generally positive results, the present study revealed certain challenges concerning students' ability to identify and correct mistakes through the use of the self-assessment checklist. Specifically, a small number of students faced difficulties in recognizing language mistakes in their writing, particularly in areas such as verb tenses, subject-verb agreement, punctuation, spelling, capitalization, and vocabulary. These challenges persisted even in the revised drafts of their essays, indicating that these students may need further support and practice to enhance their language skills and self-assessment abilities. The findings imply that students' language proficiency level plays a significant role in their capacity to effectively self-assess their writing through checklists and teachers' support is indispensable.

## 6. Implications

The findings of this study suggest that integrating self-assessment checklist into writing instruction can empower students to promote their self-improvement and enhance their independent learning abilities. In the writing classroom, EFL teachers can consider integrating self-assessment checklists as a regular component of writing assignments to increase students' self-reflection, self-regulation, and independent learning. Moreover, the benefits of self-assessment checklists in identifying and rectifying mistakes highlight the importance of promoting metacognitive awareness for students in learning writing. From the students' reflections in this study, self-assessment activities that utilized checklists were found to promote active learning; in other words, students actively evaluated various aspects of their writing, such as essay content, organization, and language usage when provided with self-assessment checklists. By engaging in self-assessment, students can develop a deeper understanding of their strengths and weaknesses, which can benefit them in setting goals and making targeted improvements in their writing. To ensure the effectiveness of self-assessment checklists, teachers should provide students with explicit instruction on how to use self-assessment checklists, guiding them in the process of identifying mistakes, revising their drafts and reflecting on their writing.

## 7. Limitations

This research is not without its limitations. First, due to time constraints and the extensive amount of data, it was not possible to conduct a thorough analysis of all the information derived from the students' reflective journals relating to the use of the self-assessment checklists and their essay drafts. Second, the study's sample size was relatively small, comprising only 18 students, which might restrict the generalizability of the findings.

These limitations highlight the potential for future research on the use of self-assessment checklists. It would be valuable to invest more time to investigate the long-term effects of using these checklists on students' writing proficiency and their ability to transfer self-assessment skills to other academic areas. Additionally, exploring the impact of self-assessment checklists on a considerable sample size with different student populations, such as English language students with diverse learning needs, could provide insights into their effectiveness in promoting writing instruction.

## 8. Conclusion

This study investigated the EFL students' reflection on the role and effectiveness of self-assessment checklists in learning writing skills. The findings indicated that the students' reflections on the role of the self-assessment checklist were positive and highlighted the effectiveness of the self-assessment checklist as a tool for improving their writing skills. Specially, the students recognized the importance of writing clear introductory and concluding paragraphs, as well as well-developed body paragraphs. They also demonstrated good results in self-assessing essay organization and language knowledge. Furthermore, the findings showed the positive influence of the self-assessment checklists on students' metacognitive development during the writing process. Thus, these findings offer valuable insights for the implementation of self-assessment checklists to enhance writing skills in Vietnam's tertiary education context.

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## PHẢN HỒI CỦA SINH VIÊN ĐẠI HỌC VIỆT NAM VỀ VIỆC SỬ DỤNG DANH MỤC KIỂM TRA TỰ ĐÁNH GIÁ TRONG QUÁ TRÌNH HỌC KỸ NĂNG VIẾT

**Tóm tắt:** Đến nay vẫn chưa có nhiều nghiên cứu về cách sinh viên tiếng Anh sử dụng danh mục kiểm tra tự đánh giá trong bối cảnh giáo dục đại học tại Việt Nam. Nghiên cứu này tập trung tìm hiểu suy ngẫm của sinh viên năm thứ hai ngành tiếng Anh về vai trò của danh mục kiểm tra tự đánh giá và việc sử dụng danh mục kiểm tra trong quá trình tự đánh giá kỹ năng viết. Mười tám sinh viên đã sử dụng danh mục kiểm tra để đánh giá bài viết của họ tham gia vào nghiên cứu này và cung cấp dữ liệu nghiên cứu thông qua bảng câu hỏi, danh mục kiểm tra đã hoàn thành, nhật ký phản ánh và các bản viết bài luận. Kết quả cho thấy suy ngẫm của sinh viên về vai trò của danh mục kiểm tra tự đánh giá là tích cực và họ đánh giá cao hiệu quả của danh mục kiểm tra tự đánh giá như một công cụ hỗ trợ cải thiện kỹ năng viết. Việc sử dụng danh mục kiểm tra đã được báo cáo là cải thiện khả năng tự đánh giá và giúp sinh viên xác định điểm mạnh và điểm yếu khi viết. Nghiên cứu này đề xuất việc tích hợp danh mục kiểm tra tự đánh giá vào giảng dạy viết tiếng Anh, nhấn mạnh lợi ích của việc thúc đẩy người học tự quản lý việc học và trao quyền cho người học nâng cao kỹ năng viết.

*Từ khóa:* Tự đánh giá, danh mục kiểm tra, kỹ năng viết

### Appendix: Criteria for students' self-assessment of their essay draft

No	Items	Yes	No
1	Does your essay have a clear introductory paragraph?	83.33%	16.67%
2	Does the introductory paragraph include a thesis statement?	100%	0%
3	Does your essay have clear body paragraphs?	66.67%	33.33%
4	Does your essay have a clear conclusion paragraph?	83.33%	16.67%
5	Is your essay organized into paragraphs?	100%	0%
6	Does each body paragraph contain a topic sentence or one main idea?	94.44%	5.56%
7	Are the paragraphs connected by the use of transition words?	100%	0%
8	Does your essay use connectors to show contrast/ difference?	77.78%	22.22%
9	Does your essay use any connectors to show adding information?	100%	0%
10	Do you use any time clauses in your essay?	100%	0%
11	Does your essay use connectors to show time relationships?	100%	0%
12	Does your essay have any spelling mistakes?	72.22%	27.78%
13	Does your essay have any capitalization mistakes?	38.89%	61.11%
14	Does your essay have any punctuation mistakes?	77.78%	22.22%
15	Does your essay have any grammar mistakes?	100%	0%
16	Does your essay have any errors in subject-verb agreement?	83.33%	16.67%
17	Does your essay have any vocabulary errors?	33.33%	66.67%
18	Are you satisfied with this draft of your essay?	55.56%	44.44%
19	After checking each criterion, what are your strengths and weakness in writing?		
20	After checking each criterion, how can you enhance your essay?		