



Ken Lackman & Associates
Educational Consultants

Error Correction Games for Writing

Getting Students to Correct Their Own Writing

Ken Lackman

Methods and activities for more effective teaching with less preparation

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Introduction

It's not unusual to find both students and teachers who dislike dealing with writing in the classroom. For students, it means leaving those interactive communicative activities and spending a half-hour or even an hour in solitude often just staring at a blank paper waiting for words to come. While they are writing, the teachers might enjoy the "time off" in the classroom where they can read a book or plan the next lesson but they know they will pay for it later. The punishment usually comes that evening when the teacher spends hours going over papers with a red pen trying to understand what the student was trying to say and then correct it. While there is no relief for students in the writing phase, there are a number of ways of sparing the teacher those evenings with stacks of papers and the red pen.

This collection of original error correction games eliminates the need for teachers to do any marking after the lesson. The games focus on getting the students to identify and correct their own errors, but in contrast to the actual writing stage, the games are fun, interactive, cooperative and competitive as students work in teams to find and correct more errors than their classmates can.

In order to use these activities, teachers need to get over the idea that every error needs to be corrected. Instead, the focus should be on common or recurring errors relative to the students' level. For example, a low frequency topic-specific word spelled incorrectly may not be worth spending class time on as the student may never use that word again. Likewise, errors with grammatical structures beyond the students' level are best left alone for the time being. The games require that teachers notice and categorize their students' frequent errors that are appropriate to their level. Any of the systems using symbols such as WO for Word Order and VT for Verb Tense will work or the teacher can develop their own method of categorization (see Appendix I). Once the teacher has an idea of the type of errors his/her students are making, the games can begin.

Peer Error Correction Race

This is a great activity to help students identify the errors in their writing. It's completely student-centred as each team finds and categorizes errors and then the other teams compete to find all the errors that their classmates had located. In doing this activity, they will become keenly aware of the type of errors they have been making.

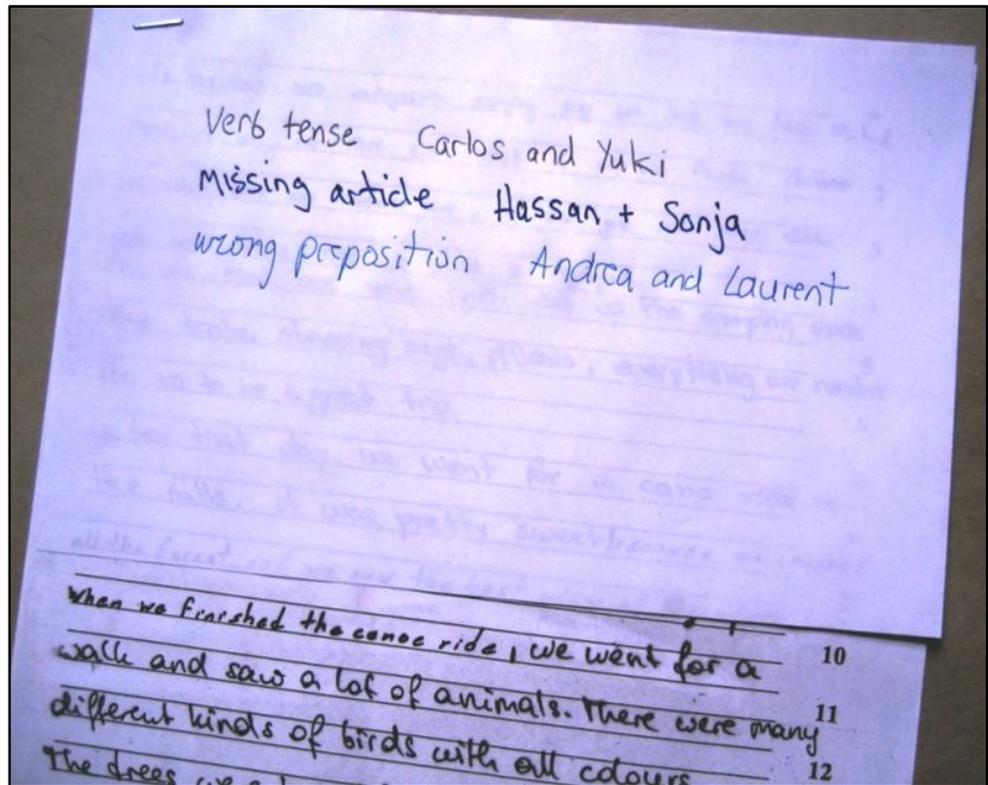
Preparation

Very little preparation is required and you can prepare for the activity in class immediately after students have finished a writing assignment. Simply collect the students' writing and attach a blank sheet of paper to each piece of writing. A half-sheet will do.

In class

List the most frequent errors your students make on the board. Use correction codes if your students are familiar with them or write out the whole category (e.g., Word Order). Put students' writing samples with attached sheets on your desk in a pile. Tell students to work in pairs and each pair is to come up and take one of the pieces of writing from the pile and to try to find one of the common errors in it. When they think they have found one, they call you over and check it with you. If they have actually found a typical error, they write the type of error it is on the attached blank sheet and they write their names next to it (e.g., missing article: Carlos and Yuki). Make sure they don't write on the actual student writing. They then have to put the student's writing back in the pile and take another one. At some point, the students will be taking sheets that already have notes about common errors found. They try to find a different type of common error to write on the sheet.

Sample



Student writing and attachment with error references

Error Correction Scavenger Hunt

This is a fun activity that gets students to work together to identify errors in each other's writing according to the categories from either the *Correction Code* or the *Common Error Strips* (see Appendix). It's a completely student-centred activity which involves little input from the teacher except when students want clarification on a particular error and its categorization.

Preparation

Prepare a scavenger hunt checklist like the model below. You can use either simple correction categories like "Verb Form" or you can use more complex and specific categories like those on the *Common Error Strips*, such as "Concord: Subject/Verb agreement". Of course, the level of your students will have some bearing on the categories.

In class

Put the students' writing up on the walls, spread throughout the classroom. Put the students in pairs (or threes) and give each pair a scavenger hunt checklist. Explain that they are to find as many of the items that they can and they should pay attention to the points as the team with the most points at the end will win. Explain that they will need to provide the initials of the student whose paper they got the error from (to be able to check it, if necessary) and they will need to write down enough of a context to make it clear what the error is. Then they can start the activity.

Stop the activity at any point once students have collected a significant number of errors. Ask each group to read out an error from their sheets that either they are not completely sure of or they are not sure how to correct it. Then correct it together as a class. Continue in this way. Then get students to total their points to see who wins.

Sample

ERROR	POINTS	S Initial	ERROR SAMPLE	TOTAL
a missing article	5			
a missing article	5			
a wrong article	15			
a missing preposition	5			
a missing preposition	5			
a wrong preposition	5			
a verb form error	10			
a verb tense error	10			
a word formation error	10			
a missing word	5			
2 or more extra words in a row	20			
a word order error	30			
a word choice error	10			
a punctuation error	15			
an incorrect collocation	25			
an awkward expression	30			
a subject/verb agreement error	50			