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Subject: Progress of Writing Revisions

This report outlines the revisions to grammar and writing exams completed by the team and the tasks that still need to be accomplished.

I. Background

During the Fall II 2014 term, I, along with Katy Futchman and Caitlin Dau worked on implementing exam changes recommended by teachers during the level meetings. We specifically focused on the grammar exams for Writing levels 2-6. Katy took responsibility for levels 2 and 3, I did 4 and 5 and Caitlyn did 6. We had five main goals: ensure that current SLOs were being met on the exam, identify how they were being met by providing outcomes assessed for each, providing examples where needed, implementing recommended changes, and creating a unified format. Additionally, the grammar 5 test had been compromised so an entirely new test had to be created.

Each team member consulted the level meeting notes, level outcomes, and instructors in order to make changes to the exams. Once revisions were made, the new exam, a list of changes, the rationale, and some questions were emailed to Mike Williams and myself. Mike would then provide feedback and answers, and team members would revise again.

II. Results

At the end of the Fall II term, all grammar 2-6 midterm and final exams had been revised. The writing 2 midterm and final exams were also revised. These revisions brought exams closer to current SLOs. Some of these revisions came from feedback provided in level meetings and some from examining sources on the T: drive. For example, the grammar 4 exams didn’t test the adjectives and adverbs outcome listed on the syllabus. Another major change that Writing 5 teachers approved of was moving phrasal verbs to the final, which took some pressure off what needed to be taught before midterms. Other examples of changes made include clarifying instructions, providing more variety in the types of answers expected from students, writing new content based on previous content.

Another major change was creating outcomes assessed descriptions for each section of the test. This helped to ensure all outcomes were being met in the exams. Also, where appropriate, an example was created for each section. Sometimes providing an answer seemed too obvious or unnecessary (such as with multiple choice sections). However, in the future and for consistency, an example for each section is recommended. Another change was the reduction or deletion of
error correction. This was done for a few reasons. First, research has shown that error correction may lead to bad grammar habits and confusion. Second, in trying to keep the length down, while still covering all the SLO, error correction was the easiest to delete. Third, error correction can more accurately be assessed in the writing exams, where students are expected to edit their writing, so it isn’t really necessary in the grammar exams. One other goal in revision was to have a consistent point value for the exams. All the revised exams are now worth 100 points. Finally, a format was agreed upon. However, for some reason it was not used on the level 6 exams and there were issues noted during the revision process with the agreed upon format. Specifically, we had agreed on consecutive numbering of questions throughout the exam. However, numbering could not be used in paragraphs, which complicated issues. I would advise against consecutive numbering in the future.

III. Recommendations

Since this project occurred while team members were also teaching a normal course load, not everything was finished to the degree that we would have liked. Also, revising exams are a complicated process and often you don’t know what is a problem until students have taken the exam. For these reasons, here are the recommendations for continuing the revision process for the writing and grammar exams.

First, a format should be agreed upon and applied to all exams. One part of the format should include a special font in the examples, such as MV Boli, because it has been shown to help students understand that a similar response is expected from them. We should make use of such editing features as “first page only” headers so that the score is only on the top of the first page. I have attached a sample as Appendix A. Care should also be taken that instructions are not separated from the questions. Also, all sections should have an example.

Second, feedback is needed from instructors after students have taken the exam so that problem questions can be dealt with. This has been done in a few cases, such as an example in the Writing 6 grammar midterm that confused students. Questions that everyone either got wrong or right, are not valid questions. As instructors correct the final, they could note down on an extra exam copy problem questions, and they should be encouraged to suggest a solution.

Third, answer keys need to be provided. In some cases these were started, but once feedback is received, more changes will be made and new answer keys will be needed. Answer keys should also reflect that fact that sometimes more than one answer is possible and it should list these possibilities.

Fourth, alternate versions should be created for other terms in order to rotate exams. This is especially important because some students repeat the course and should take a different version. At least three versions are needed.

Fifth, new topics might be considered for the writing exams. The focus of this project was mainly on the grammar exam, so very little was changed to the writing exam.

Following these suggestions will help CIEP provide more reliable and valid exams for instructors and students.