

Article

Engineering ChatGPT Prompts for EFL Writing Classes

Jerry Huang

Kansai University, Osaka, Japan

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Abstract

In the realm of EFL education, the labor-intensive task of providing feedback on student writing prompts educators to seek alternatives. Peer feedback and computer-based systems, such as ChatGPT, may offer solutions. ChatGPT's AI-driven feedback relies on Large Language Models, offering real-time assessments to alleviate the workload of teachers. Crafting precise prompts is pivotal to harnessing ChatGPT's potential, highlighting the necessity of cultivating digital literacy in the AI-driven educational age. Instead of replacing traditional teaching, AI tools like ChatGPT can become collaborators, enhancing personalized learning experiences for educators and students alike. This article will demonstrate effective prompts for writing classes.

Keywords

ChatGPT, Generative-AI, Prompts, EFL writing, feedback

1 Introduction

Teaching English as a Foreign Language (EFL) writing can be an enormous burden on educators, often resulting in an overwhelming workload (Chen, 2021). The task of providing individualized and constructive feedback to a classroom full of diverse learners is both time-consuming and mentally taxing. However, in light of these challenges, alternative methods such as peer feedback and computer-based feedback have emerged as viable options (Alnasser, 2018). Utilizing peer feedback motivates students to actively engage in the learning journey while providing them with valuable insights from their fellow classmates (Zhang et al, 2020). Similarly, computer-based feedback systems, equipped with advanced algorithms, can offer instant evaluations and tailored suggestions, alleviating some of the teacher's grading responsibilities, as demonstrated by Mizumoto and Eguchi (2023), highlighting the feasibility of automated essay scoring. These alternatives not only ease the teacher's workload but also promote collaborative learning and independence among students, making them valuable tools in the EFL writing classroom.

ChatGPT can serve as an excellent computer-based feedback tool for EFL writing classes. Its advanced language capabilities and natural language understanding make it adept at providing precise and personalized feedback to students. ChatGPT can offer instant evaluations of grammar, vocabulary, and sentence structure, helping learners identify and correct their mistakes in real-time. Additionally, it can suggest alternative phrasing and expressions, enriching students' language skills (Kohnke et al.,

2023). Furthermore, ChatGPT allows students to access feedback whenever they need it, promoting self-directed learning and improving overall writing skills (Dai et al., 2023). As an AI-powered feedback resource, ChatGPT not only lightens the teacher's workload but also enhances the quality of guidance provided to EFL students, contributing to more effective and efficient language learning experiences.

ChatGPT, an advanced AI language model from OpenAI, is founded on the GPT-3.5 architecture. GPT stands for Generative Pre-trained Transformer, is a type of AI model that can generate text and is built upon the Transformer architecture. It excels in facilitating natural conversations, understanding user inputs, and generating contextually fitting responses. With extensive training on diverse text sources, ChatGPT possesses a broad knowledge base. Its neural network framework comprehends queries and nuances, crafting human-like replies, making it versatile for support, content creation, and knowledge sharing. Despite occasional limitations and inaccuracies, ChatGPT exemplifies AI's evolution in understanding and generating human language, marking a new era of interactive technology.

The interface of ChatGPT is user-friendly and straightforward. On the main page, users encounter a text box to input prompts or questions, accompanied by a "send" button to trigger responses. ChatGPT is accessible for free during periods of low demand, and a paid version (ChatGPT 4.0) is available for quicker responses and priority access during peak times, alongside new features.

ChatGPT has already demonstrated success in language writing classes. Notably, Dergaa et al. (2023) conducted a study that highlights ChatGPT's capacity to enhance academic writing, while Schmidt-Fajlik (2023) found it to be especially beneficial for Japanese English Language Learners (ELLs), particularly in the realm of grammar. While valuable for language learning, ChatGPT's limitations, such as its potential to miss nuances and promote over-reliance, may hinder students' creativity, critical thinking, and raise plagiarism concerns (Marr, 2023; Granados, 2022; Stewart, 2023). It also is important to acknowledge that while ChatGPT holds promise as a language tool, it may occasionally generate results that lack depth, are overly generic, and fail to produce informative content (Barrot, 2023; Teng, 2023). As advised by Barrot (2023), the prudent approach involves using ChatGPT as a supplementary resource rather than relying on it as the sole feedback source. This balanced approach ensures that with thoughtful guidance from educators, ChatGPT can effectively contribute to the development of crucial writing skills and practices.

In this article, I will demonstrate how students can effectively utilize provided prompts to acquire valuable feedback on their writing. During the field testing of these prompts, I opted for the no-cost version of ChatGPT 3.5. Despite encountering sporadic instances of brief usability interruptions, typically lasting only a few minutes, such disruptions were relatively infrequent. As previously noted, ChatGPT 3.5 can be accessed for free during periods of low demand, while a paid version (ChatGPT 4.0) offers faster responses and priority access during peak times, accompanied by additional features. This study utilizes ChatGPT 3.5 to investigate an emerging trend in EFL education where readers can readily replicate the prompts and employ them without incurring any costs, contributing to broader and more accessible implementation for educational purposes.

RQ1: What prompts can be helpful for effective writing feedback?

RQ2: How should prompts be organized to target different parts of an essay?

2 Prompt: Generic Example

For ChatGPT to offer effective feedback, the selection of an appropriate prompt is crucial. A prompt in ChatGPT initiates responses and requests information through text input. To achieve this, the prompt should be as direct as possible. Furthermore, incorporating rubrics into the prompt becomes essential as it allows educators to streamline their grading expectations (Su et al., 2023). These rubrics serve as clear guidelines, directing ChatGPT to focus on specific writing aspects like grammar, coherence, or persuasion. When a student provides a prompt along with a loaded rubric, ChatGPT can precisely tailor

its responses to meet the specified criteria. This dual approach not only simplifies the feedback process but also ensures that the evaluation aligns seamlessly with the learning objectives of the assignment.

In the realm of Large Language Models (LLMs), two primary prompting techniques exist: zero-shot and few-shot prompting. Zero-shot prompting enables the LLM to generate responses or perform tasks without the need for task-specific training. It relies on its pre-existing knowledge base to provide meaningful results and is often used specifically for information retrieval. In contrast, few-shot prompting extends this approach by supplying the model with examples or demonstrations, aiding its comprehension of the task or context. Consequently, this augmentation leads to more accurate and contextually relevant information generation. In essence, zero-shot prompting leverages pre-existing knowledge in LLMs for task execution, while few-shot prompting further enhances performance by providing specific examples or demonstrations.

To enable ChatGPT to provide feedback effectively, neither zero-shot nor few-shot prompts are suitable. To clarify, the prompt should explicitly request a specific action. Here is an example of a prompt that is user-friendly for both students and teachers.

Example Prompt 1

Please review my paragraph, provide feedback on structure, grammatical errors, clarity, coherence, logic, and use of appropriate transition and cohesive device. I am not seeking rewrite, only feedback.

(Paste Your Paragraph here)

The prompt instruction is straightforward and clear, providing precise guidance on ChatGPT's intended action. Students can effectively utilize it to enhance their writing based on the feedback they received. It is important to note that failing to include phrases like "I am not seeking a rewrite, give me only feedback" can have unintended consequences. When omitted, ChatGPT not only offers feedback in accordance with the specified criteria but may also undertake a comprehensive revision of the paragraph. In such a scenario, students might be tempted to simply copy and paste the resultant text, potentially bypassing the core objectives of the assignment. This issue highlights one of the major concerns associated with the utilization of ChatGPT (Today, 2023).

3 Prompt Organization: An Illustrative Example

A specialized technique, known as "chain-of-thought prompting" (Wei et al., 2022), adds another dimension. This method guides LLMs through complex inference tasks by providing intermediate steps, which elevates the model's accuracy when paired with few-shot prompting. The key takeaway is that the effectiveness of an LLM improves with the inclusion of more specific examples in the prompt.

For this reason, to create an effective prompt for writing evaluation, it is advisable to utilize a prompt that includes specific examples, which serve as criteria. The prompt should be structured into three distinct sections: (1) task, (2) criteria, and (3) "my paragraph." The "task" section serves as the primary instruction, outlining precisely what ChatGPT is expected to do. It is crucial that this section is detailed and specific, as merely asking ChatGPT to provide feedback in a general sense can be too vague. Moreover, incorporating considerations such as feedback tailored to different language proficiency levels, like CEFR, is beneficial for accommodating various EFL learner levels.

Within the "criteria" section, educators can effectively align their expectations with grading rubrics. In academic writing, the widely utilized five-paragraph structure serves as a common framework. However, it is crucial to note that each distinct paragraph should be evaluated differently. Take the introduction paragraph, for example. In this case, the rubrics should specifically focus on elements like

the hook or attention-grabber, the provision of background information or context, followed by the thesis statement. Beyond this basic structural assessment, it is imperative to scrutinize aspects of organization, clarity, and coherence for a comprehensive and dynamic introduction paragraph.

By incorporating the aforementioned task and criteria and then inserting the student's work under the designated "my paragraph" section, this approach is exemplified in the sample provided below.

Example Prompt 2

<p>#### Task ####</p> <p><i>Based on the following criteria, please review the following paragraph and provide specific feedback that will help improve it. Provide your feedback at the B1 level of the CEFR. Instead of rewriting the paragraph, give specific examples and guidelines on how to revise. I am not seeking rewrite, give me only feedback.</i></p> <p>#### Criteria for the Introduction Paragraph####</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <i>1. Hook/Attention-Grabber: The introduction engages the reader with a compelling hook or attention-grabbing statement.</i> <i>2. Background Information/Context: The introduction provides relevant background information or context to set the stage for the essay topic.</i> <i>3. Thesis Statement: The introduction includes a clear and concise thesis statement that presents the main argument or purpose of the essay.</i> <i>4. Organization: The introduction demonstrates a logical and coherent structure, guiding the reader smoothly into the main body of the essay.</i> <i>5. Clarity and Coherence: The introduction is written in a clear and coherent manner, effectively conveying the purpose and direction of the essay.</i> <p>#### My paragraph ####</p> <p><i>(Paste Your Paragraph here)</i></p>
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Certainly, the previously mentioned prompt may not be as effective when applied to body paragraphs, given the distinct criteria for evaluating them. In contrast, body paragraphs require a different set of criteria for comprehensive assessment. Consider the following example criteria, which not only encompass aspects like the topic sentence, development and support, organization and structure, and transitions but also delve into higher-order skills such as analysis, critical thinking, and maintaining clarity and coherence.

Example Prompt 3

<p>#### Criteria for the Body Paragraphs####</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <i>1. Topic Sentence: Each body paragraph begins with a clear and focused topic sentence that introduces the main idea of the paragraph.</i> <i>2. Development and Support: Each body paragraph provides sufficient and relevant evidence, examples, or arguments to support the main idea.</i> <i>3. Organization and Structure: Each body paragraph demonstrates a logical and coherent structure, with ideas presented in a well-organized and connected manner.</i> <i>4. Transitions: Each body paragraph uses appropriate transitions and cohesive devices to create smooth flow and connections between sentences and ideas.</i> <i>5. Analysis and Critical Thinking: Each body paragraph includes thoughtful analysis, interpretation, or evaluation of the evidence or examples presented.</i> <i>6. Clarity and Coherence: Each body paragraph is written in a clear and coherent manner, effectively conveying the ideas and arguments.</i>

Finally, when examining the concluding paragraphs, attention should be directed towards several key components. These include the restatement of the thesis, a concise summary of the key points discussed, a closing thought that leaves a lasting impression, establishing a connection with the introduction, and culminating with a strong concluding sentence. The provided example criteria below outline the criteria for evaluating these crucial aspects within concluding paragraphs.

Example Prompt 4

Criteria for the Concluding Paragraphs

1. *Restatement of Thesis: The concluding paragraph includes a clear restatement of the thesis statement, reminding the reader of the main argument or purpose of the essay.*
2. *Summary of Key Points: The concluding paragraph summarizes the key points or main ideas discussed in the essay's body paragraphs.*
3. *Closing Thought: The concluding paragraph provides a thoughtful closing thought or final statement that leaves a lasting impression on the reader.*
4. *Connection to the Introduction: The concluding paragraph effectively connects back to the introduction, bringing the essay full circle and providing a sense of closure.*
5. *Concluding Sentence: The concluding paragraph ends with a strong concluding sentence that wraps up the essay and leaves the reader with a sense of completion.*

The crafted prompt showcased earlier demonstrates its versatility and adaptability. By offering a clear instruction followed by well-defined criteria, ChatGPT efficiently handles the feedback process. Notably, these criteria can be adjusted to align with the goals of different types of writing tasks. Undoubtedly, creating prompts tailored to the specific needs of a writing course can be a time-intensive process. Nevertheless, this effort is undeniably valuable, as it lays the groundwork for effective AI-driven feedback, playing a pivotal role in enhancing students' writing skills and overall learning experience.

The prompts discussed here did not emerge overnight. Rather, they were carefully crafted by the author through a process of trial and error, tailored to meet specific objectives while conducting classes. Ongoing empirical research is currently examining these prompts, and the validation results will be reported in due course. Meanwhile, based on my own experience as a practitioner who has tested this with learners, I believe they have proven to be effective in classroom teaching.

4 Discussion

Using ChatGPT for peer feedback holds the potential to significantly reshape EFL writing classes. For one thing, ChatGPT's AI-driven capabilities can provide quick and consistent feedback to students, fostering a sense of self-efficacy and independence in their learning process (Dai et al., 2023). It can also help students identify common errors and improve their writing skills. Furthermore, ChatGPT can accommodate different proficiency levels, tailoring feedback to beginner, intermediate, and advanced learners, making it adaptable for diverse EFL contexts. ChatGPT can also serve as a valuable writing assistance, suggesting alternative word choices, sentence structure, and idiomatic expression, enriching students' language skills (Kohnke et al., 2023). These advantages undoubtedly benefit students and can help alleviate the workload for teachers, especially in larger class sizes.

However, it is crucial to acknowledge ChatGPT is not infallible and may sometimes miss nuances, context, or the emotional aspect of feedback that a human peer or teacher can provide (Marr, 2023). Over-reliance on AI for peer feedback could potentially stifle creativity and critical thinking in students (Granados, 2022) and raise concerns about "high-tech plagiarism" (Stewart, 2023) if students use

ChatGPT to generate or heavily edit their writing pieces without proper citation. Therefore, a balanced approach that combines the benefits of ChatGPT with human oversight and guidance is essential to harness its potential effectively. In doing so, educators can empower students to become more adept to discerning and using AI-generated feedback in their learning journey while preserving the essential human elements of education. This review showcased the creation of prompts as a strategy to mitigate the disadvantages of ChatGPT utilization in EFL writing classes while still preserving its core advantages.

5 Concluding Remarks

Employing a meticulous prompt in educational settings when utilizing ChatGPT holds paramount importance (Tseng & Warschauer, 2023). The quality and precision of the prompt serve as a crucial foundation for the type of responses generated by the AI model. A well-crafted prompt not only ensures that the desired information or feedback is obtained but also facilitates the generation of relevant and insightful content. A careful prompt takes into account the specific context, objectives, and desired outcomes of the educational interaction, leading to more accurate and meaningful AI-driven responses. Moreover, a thoughtful prompt minimizes the risk of generating irrelevant or misleading outputs, contributing to a more effective and productive engagement between learners, educators, and the AI technology.

In the era of AI-driven education, both students and teachers stand to gain immense benefits from this technological revolution. However, at the heart of this transformative shift lies the essential prerequisite of digital literacy. The ability to navigate, comprehend, and effectively utilize AI tools and platforms is paramount. When it comes to AI-driven educational tools like ChatGPT, the art of crafting a prompt takes center stage. It is not just about copying and pasting questions but rather about formulating prompts that foster genuine learning experiences. In light of this, the saying “If you can’t beat them, join them” becomes particularly relevant. Embracing AI as a powerful ally in education can open new frontiers for personalized, efficient, and enriching learning journeys. It is not merely about adopting technology for the sake of it; it is about harnessing its potential to enhance the educational process for both educators and students alike.

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Jerry Huang is an English language instructor at Kansai University, originally from Los Angeles. He holds a master's degree from Hyogo University of Teacher Education and is currently pursuing a Ph.D. in foreign language education and research at Kansai University. Jerry's teaching expertise lies in English language courses, while his research interests encompass motivation, AI, ChatGPT, and Languages Other Than English (LOTE).