

Creative Writing in Relation to Formal Essay-Writing Skills and Understanding of Literature

(Language and Literature: explorations along the border)

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Summary of survey and interview results

by

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1. Context

The focus for the study was a first-year undergraduate class consisting of sixty students. The students studied one module in creative writing as part of an English Literature degree programme. This gave students an opportunity to experience a different dimension to their reading and writing; providing a lens through which to explore awareness and perceptions of creative writing in relation to literature.

The aims of the study were:

- To explore the nature of the relationship between creative writing and literature;
- To investigate students' perception of the skills they have acquired through creative writing;
- To identify the perceived relevance of creative writing skills and activities to the study of English Literature programmes.

The main research questions were:

- What are the main skills that students perceive they have gained through participation in a creative writing module?
- In what ways do students perceive these as transferable to other academic/literature contexts?
- In what ways do skills and perceptions differ between those students who have previously studied literature and those who have previously studied English language?

2.1 Methods

Initial data was collected by a questionnaire to which 38 students responded. This was followed up by focus groups and interviews. Twelve first-year students took part and five second-year students who had taken the course in the previous year. Second year students were included because perceptions of the benefit of a course can change in the light of subsequent experience. An attempt to interview/survey students who were taking all the English courses *except* creative writing, as a kind of control group, unfortunately came to nothing because of difficulties of persuading busy students to give up their time. Online transcripts from the discussion boards on the virtual learning environment were also examined for supporting evidence on students' reception of and attitudes to the course. Discussion board comments are not quoted. Although students know that discussion board comments are monitored, some comments were used essentially as a private discussion. Moreover, students were allowed to post anonymously, causing problems should copyright permission need to be sought.

A research assistant not involved in teaching the students distributed and collated questionnaires, interviewed students and subsequently transcribed interviews.

2.1.1 Questionnaire

The questionnaire contained both open and close-ended questions. The close-ended questions, arranged on a likert scale, asked students to indicate the degree to which they believed they had acquired a range of skills during the creative writing session. There were also several open-ended questions.

2.1.2 Interviews

Focus groups and interviews were semi-structured and centred on the overall experience, skills learnt and connections with literature. This format ensured that students could raise issues that had otherwise not been anticipated. To obtain additional information on perceptions several second-year students were asked about the longer-term impact of an early creative writing element within a literature degree. The full interview transcripts run to twenty pages, therefore to avoid repetition, only indicative comments and quotations are used in the report.

2.2 Profile of the students

All but one of the 38 first-year students who completed the questionnaire was full-time. The students had a range of prior study and experience in English and creative writing: twenty of the 38 students had A level literature only; 5 had English Language A-level; 8 had studied both Literature and Language in separate A-levels, while only 2 students had taken the combined Literature and Language A-levels. Three students had *other* qualifications and four students also had previous 'non-academic' or professional experience of creative writing.

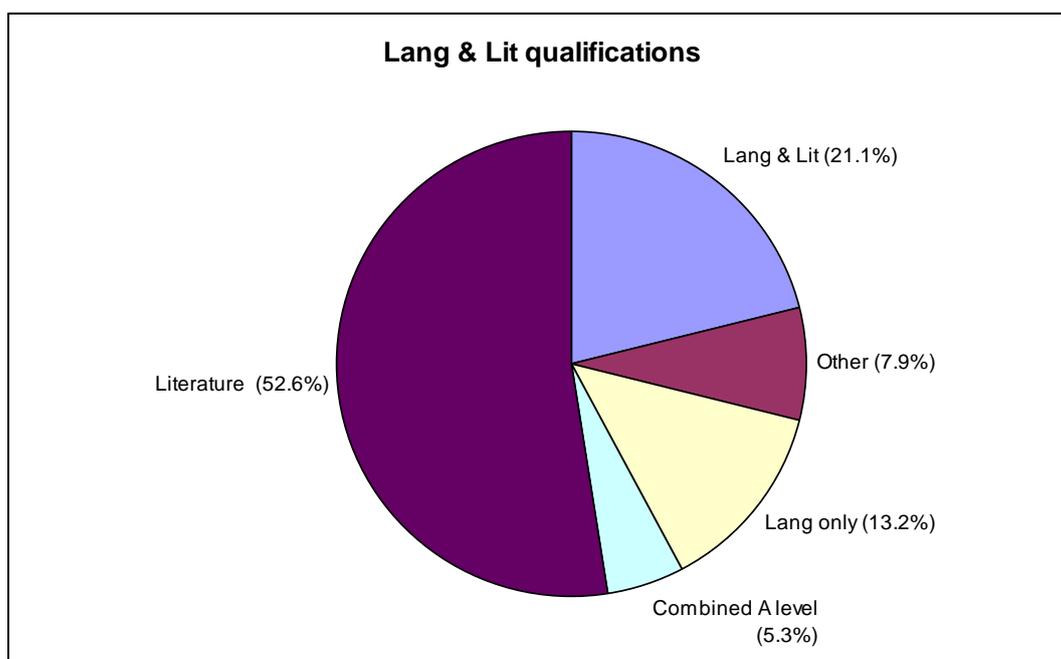


Figure 1. Students' Prior Qualifications

Thirty of the students (almost 80%), were aged between 18 and 21. This made it difficult to make generalisations or pin-point age-related differences in responses.

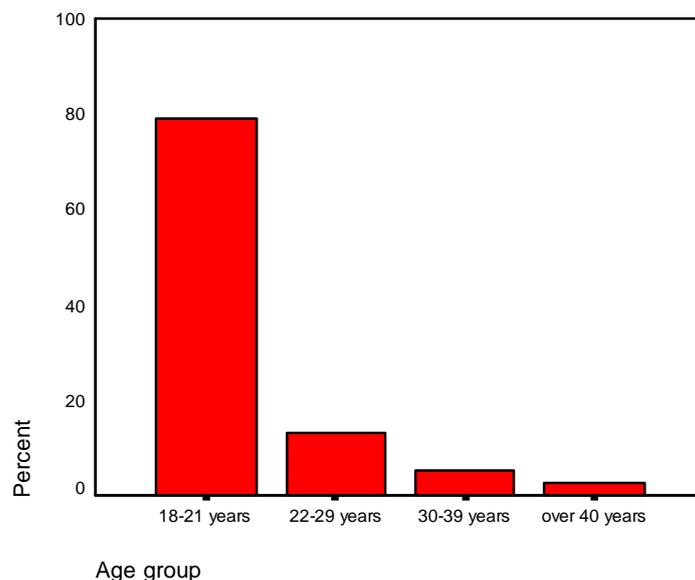


Figure 2: Percentage of students in each age group

3. Findings

The findings are divided into several themes. Firstly, an overview of the main skills and aptitudes acquired through creative writing as perceived by the students from questionnaire responses is supplemented by comments from interviews. The next section provides an overview of the students' perception of any relationships and links between creative writing and literature, followed by the perceived impact of prior experience of language, literature and creative writing. Finally, students comment on the creative writing exercises they found most useful.

Extensive quotations from student responses to questionnaire and interview are included; these are sometimes hasty and occasionally lack precision; however, they convey a vivid sense of students' engagement with the course and represent an attempt to articulate what they gained from it. The responses frequently point to areas beyond the scope of the questionnaire and address issues which were not envisaged when setting up the project.

3.1 Perceptions of skills acquired

Students were given a list of particular skills they might use and asked to indicate whether they thought that creative writing had had a positive impact on their abilities in these areas..

Table 1. Overview of skills and perceptions

Creative Writing has a positive impact on:	S. agree	agree	disagree	s. disagree
Confidence in writing	9	22	7	
Comfort with others viewing own writing	10	19	9	
Grammar and punctuation skills	5	24	9	
Formal essay writing skills	1	16	21	
Critical reading of literature	7	21	9	1
Vocabulary and form	11	21	6	
Expressiveness of writing	14	20	3	1

What stands out here is the generally positive perception of the range of skills that are acquired through creative writing, with “expressiveness” scoring particularly highly. This was also evidenced in the open-ended questions and interviews. However, the majority of students perceived limited benefit in terms of formal essay writing. This result was explored further in interviews and focus groups.

3.1.1 Editing and drafting

A majority of students (almost 95% - 36 students out of 38) agreed that the practice of creative writing had given them a better understanding of the editing process. Once again, this was backed up in replies to open-ended questions and in interviews. No major trends were identified when figures were viewed according to student prior experience, although only students with A-level literature did not agree that their skills in drafting and editing had improved.

In response to an open-ended question asking what were the most valuable skills learned from creative writing, most of the students (30 of the 38 students) made reference to editing, drafting and revising writing. A wide range of other skills, often associated with drafting and editing, were tied in with these responses: in particular, giving and accepting critical and constructive criticism; greater expressiveness, seeing writing in a different way and grammar and punctuation skills.

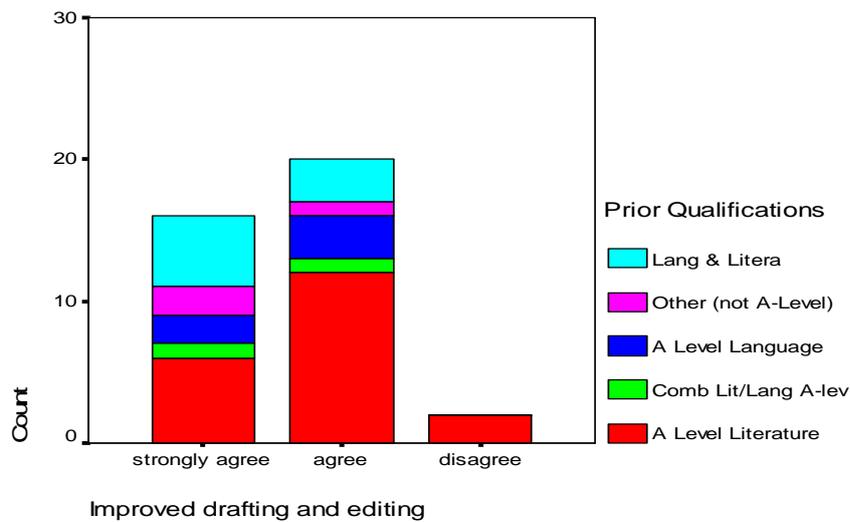


Figure 3: Creative writing improved editing skills according to prior qualifications.

What are the most valuable skills you have learned from creative writing?

Responses: Drafting and Editing:

“Drafting and editing process/ receiving feedback, then working in other projects incorporating the feedback given, which is very helpful indeed.”

“Expression and editing. Being able to listen to critical feedback.”

“I have learnt to express my ideas more clearly and feel more confident writing and exploring different forms of writing.”

“The ability to share my work and understand the editing process.”

“I have found that I have more knowledge on what key features to look for when analysing certain types of work.”

“To use certain skills and techniques when writing prose. When drafting and editing, being able to spot and remove unneeded sentences. To keep re-drafting until a piece of work is done.”

“Constructive criticism – accepting and giving it. The ability to edit redraft more effectively.”

“Changed my way of looking at writing in every sphere.”

“Editing, punctuation, feedback, honesty, be positive when editing. How to look at how other published writers have written what they wrote about and their views – how to find my own voice, learning that I can do it. And how to look at other literature. Essay skills have improved”

“Seeing the thought processes behind writing, and not just focusing on the finished product as tho’ they come out of the ether. Tighter writing.”

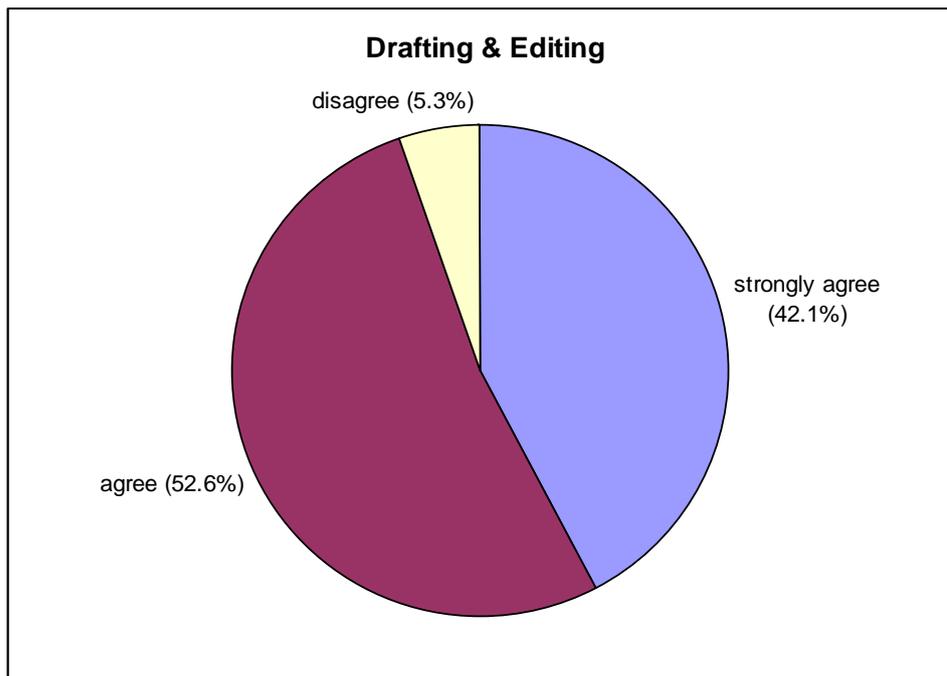


Figure 4: Creative writing improved drafting and editing skills

It is clear that students appreciated the opportunities for drafting and editing and in viewing other writers' drafts and development of their writing. The full dimension of this aspect can be seen later in the way students perceived these skills could be used in other parts of their courses. It is also linked to student comments on confidence building and expectations, which are explored further below.

A second-year student interviewed, who had completed the creative writing module the previous year, commented on the ongoing benefits of having learned to edit and redraft. In particular, one mature part-time student with a strong background in journalism and marketing remarked that at the outset of the course she had been "confident" of her editing skills, but that this had been an "altogether different type of editing and re-drafting", which she subsequently found invaluable in her work. Another second-year student commented that only later had he realised the full value of the skills he had acquired.

Another second-year student said that she had assumed that she knew how to edit and redraft in her professional work, but that she found unfamiliar elements when editing creative writing:

"It plays a different role. Prior to taking the course I believed creative writing to be concerned with writing personal feelings and that the work would always be correct artistically, not needing to be revised etc. It was completely different to how I expected it; I think it should be included in literature degrees as a matter of course. It opens your eyes to something you would not have thought of. I also see that it is useful career wise."

3.1.2 Grammar and punctuation

Improvement in grammar and punctuation was highlighted by a substantial majority of students, although almost a quarter of students believed that creative writing did not have an impact on these skills.

One student commented that 'feedback given enabled me to express myself better grammatically'. Some students felt that their grammar and punctuation became an issue in developing their writing. Several suggested that more formal grammar sessions might be helpful, since it was difficult to improve while working independently in response to feedback.

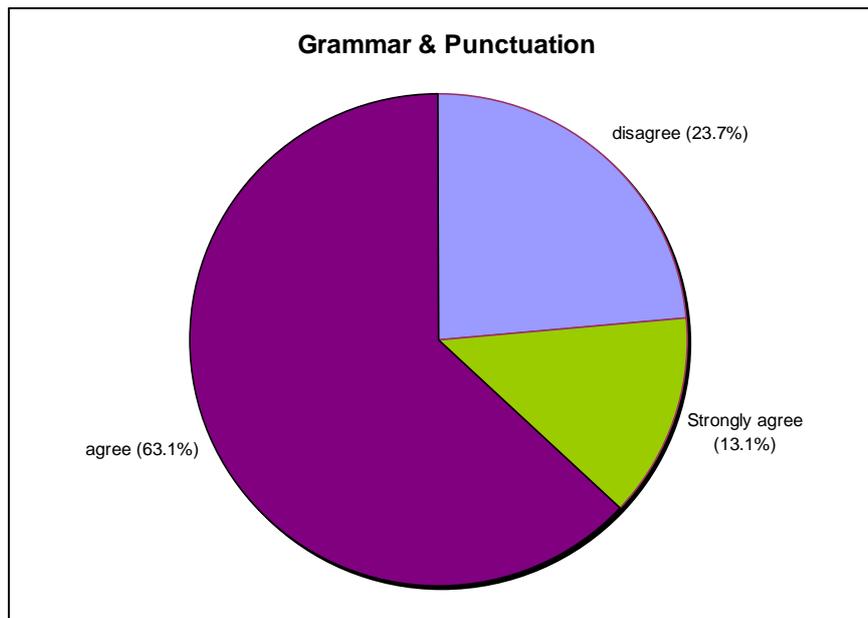


Figure 5: Improved Grammar & Punctuation

3.1.3 Vocabulary, form and expression

Most students (almost 84%) agreed or strongly agreed that their use of vocabulary and form had improved. In particular, all of the students who had both language and literature (or combined) agreed with this. The students also stated, with almost 90% indicating positively, that they thought the expressiveness of their writing had improved as a result of the experience of creative writing. This also came across evident in interviews, as can be seen in the comments.

“Yes, like doing it in different genres of poetry that was quite good. Obviously I knew there were different genres and forms of poetry but I didn't realise it in quite so much depth.”

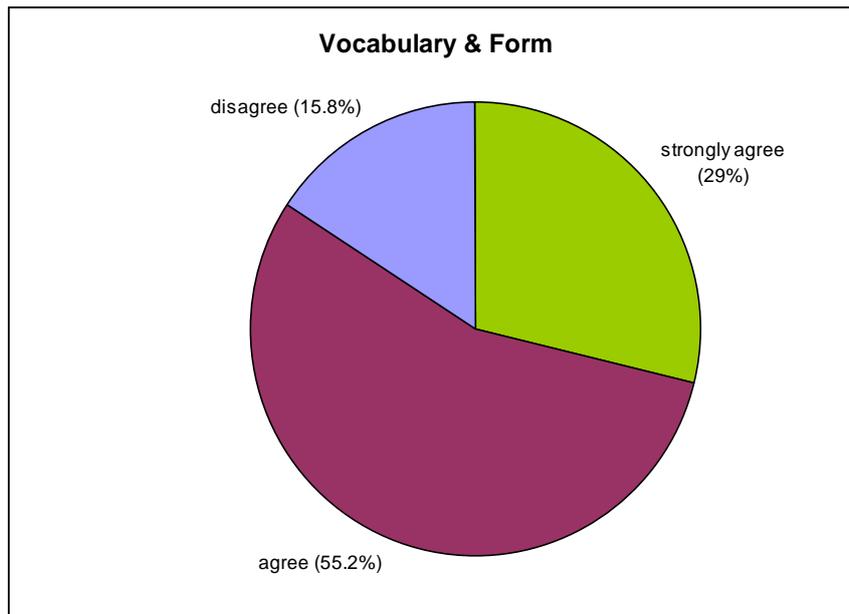


Figure 7: Improved Vocabulary and Form

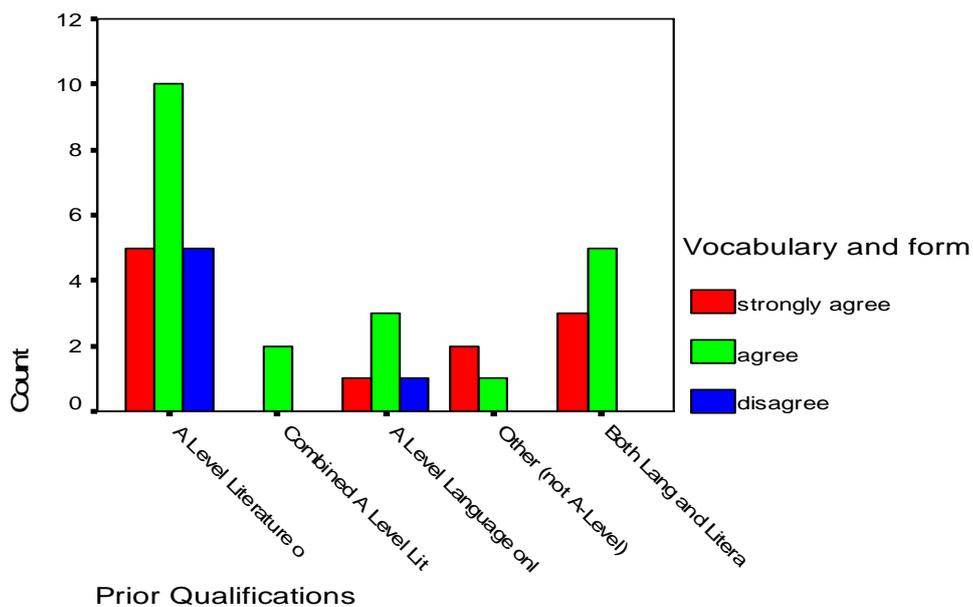


Figure 6: 'Improved vocabulary and Form' by prior qualification

As with the other skills investigated, students did not always associate Improvement in these areas with formal essay-writing skills. However, in interviews most remarked that the vocabulary, form and expressiveness of their writing had improved. They perceived this as helpful to their reading of literature in general and poetry in particular.

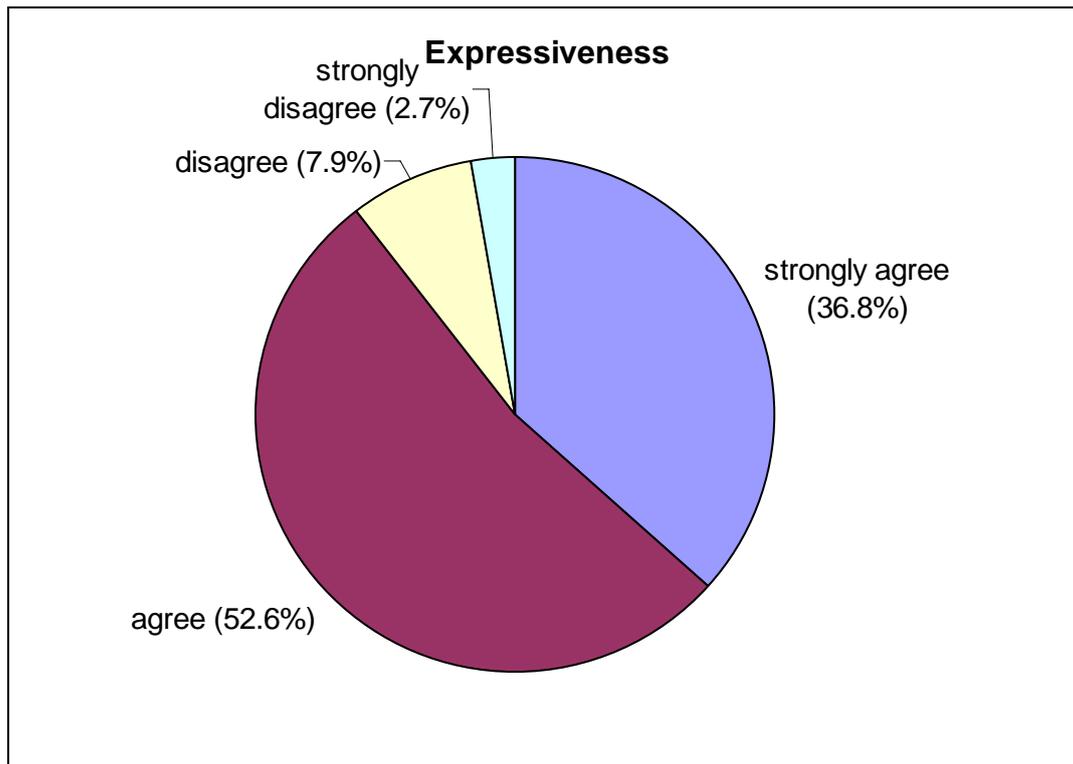


Figure 8: More expressive writing

3.1.4 Formal essay-writing skills

Questionnaire responses suggested that the majority of students saw few connections between skills practised in creative writing and formal essay-writing skills. Only 3% of the students strongly agreed that they had improved their formal essay writing skills – this is the only skill to which there was a predominately negative response. In interviews, however, most acknowledged that editing and revising skills and ability to use a wider range of vocabulary were applicable to formal essay writing. The increased confidence students commented on – including their increased confidence in receiving, assessing and acting on feedback - could also benefit essay writing.

From interview:

“Yes, another thing is the importance of accepting criticism. No matter how bad or constructive it is, if you sit down and redo the essay or something... I think creative writing really gives you the confidence to write an essay from scratch and you can tell me it’s really crap and I can go away with it.”

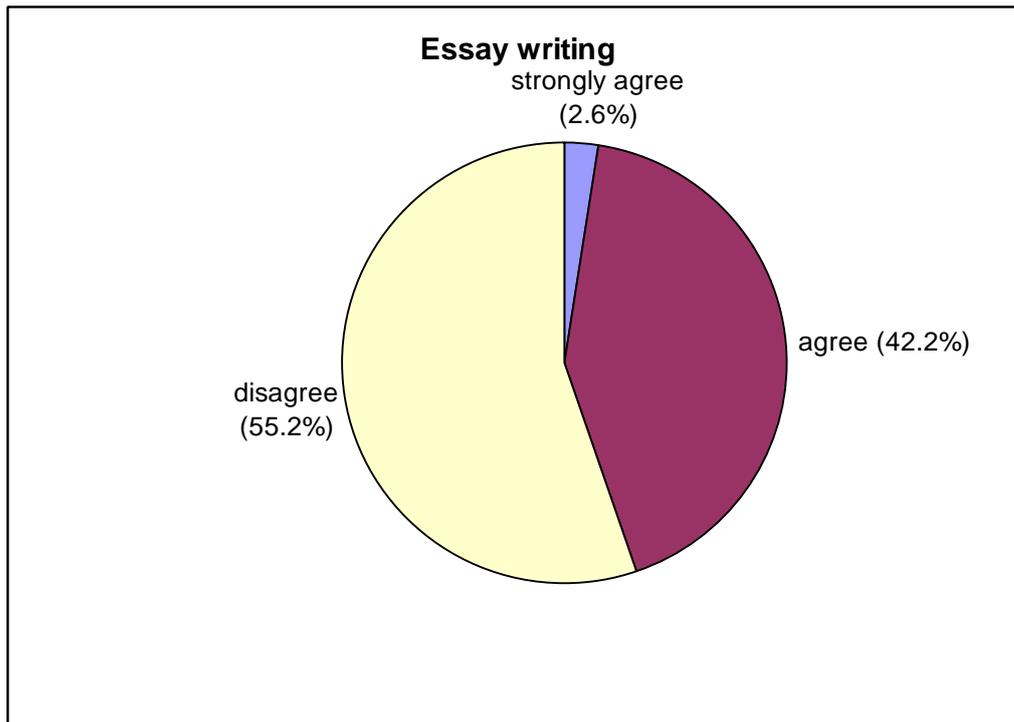


Figure 9: Improved Formal essay-writing skills

As with the other skills, there were no identifiable differences linked to age or background. However, those who strongly agreed that their essay writing skills would benefit were all students with both language and literature A level.

Second year student comment:

”I’m not sure how it links to formal essay writing, but I really felt that it helped me in many areas of writing. In poetry, for example, you develop the use of language. I found the journal writing we had to do initially really helpful. It taught me about the drafting and editing process and that you need to practice and develop – the more you practise, the more you develop.”

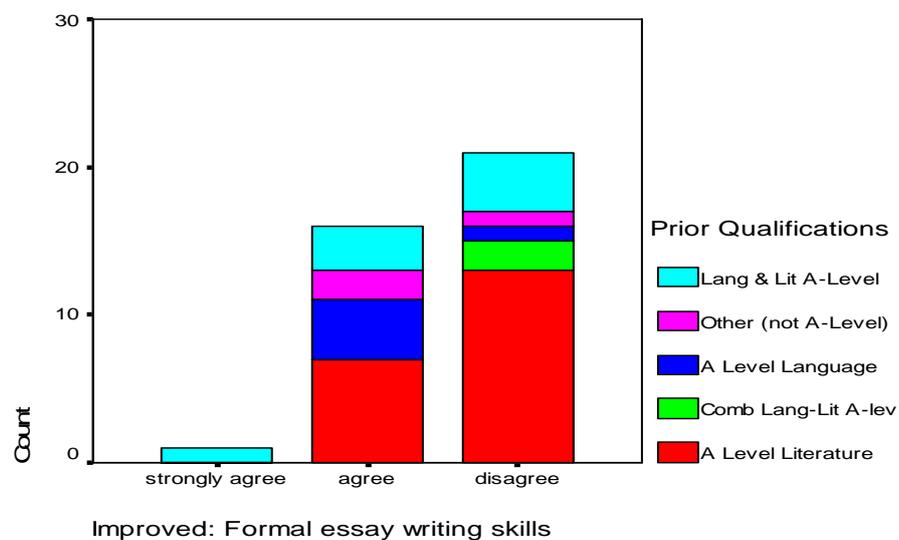


Figure 10: Improved Essay writing skills according to prior qualifications

3.1.5 Confidence in writing

One particular unexpected benefit of the creative writing component of this course was the confidence boost that many of the new students gained. In particular, interviews established that mature students and those who had been out of education for some time felt that the creative writing course had somehow eased them into writing. Some remarked on the fact that everyone seemed to be on an equal footing. This seemed to provide some common ground between students. Many considered creative writing as an excellent way of getting into university writing. Maybe this was partly related to the atmosphere and camaraderie built up by the students on this course, but most students felt that the nature of creative writing workshops and collaborative work differed from other subjects and this had a positive effect on how they integrated into academic life; this applied regardless of various prior experiences.

They also learnt from the work of their peers, which they found confidence-boosting, and this enabled them to reflect on their own technique. In addition, several students mentioned feeling empowered when they realised that published authors had less than successful first drafts.

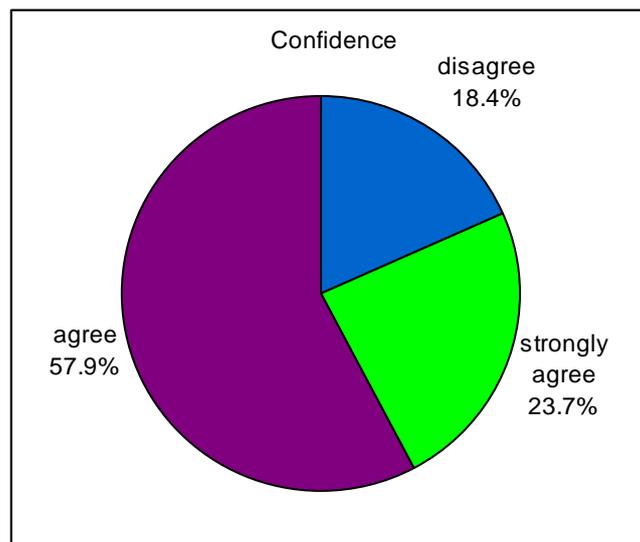


Figure12: More confident in Writing Abilities

The main factors and themes contributing to increased confidence *that* emerged from interviews were:

- The impact of viewing other writers' drafts and revisions
- The fact of 'having' to write
- Learning to give and receive criticism on writing
- Getting back into writing

As the comments below demonstrate, students appreciated the experience of 'having' to write and found it beneficial. This parallels the conclusions of Graeme Harper's project [*Reading to Write, Reading to be Read*, ESC, 2003]

Viewing other writers' work

"When we were doing things like progression of a written piece you can really see that at the beginning some of them were really rubbish and they end up being brilliant. It's the way that you go back to things and you rewrite them and it really does take the pressure of you. The first ones I did, I felt it helped."

"You know when we go around the class, there's not going to be an outstandingly good bit. Well there might be... but there's not actually any pressure."

"Having" to write

"I think if you try and write poetry, which is something I would never do – I can't do it. If you're forced to do it, you think about it differently."

"I do think it did – it wasn't really obvious. For the journal for example, you have to write every single day – at first this is daunting, but really useful when it comes to your assessment."

"Yes, this is great, I've learnt a lot on this year... I think it's getting you doing some writing really. I think the main thing is the classes [the teacher] is giving you... You've had the lecture which has given you some great ideas about writing for say children, writing for the voice or how to do it first and how to approach it. Then in the workshops she always makes sure you're writing something.....you're forced to write something "

"I mean it's painful sometimes...it's not what you want to do..."

"You feel it's sort of necessary to do it, to experience it."

"I really enjoyed it... as I said it was daunting at first and difficult to get into. But once you do get into you really enjoy it. .

Getting Back into Writing

"Well I've had a couple of years out, so I found it really useful - it takes a little while to get back into writing and being disciplined about it"

"Yes – I think this is probably very useful for people who have just come back to education – if you come straight from college or school for example; you are in the habit of writing."

"Yes, it sort of gives you that really wide base. Every day you go away and you've done something that you never thought of doing before and yet, it just takes that 2 hour workshop... and you can go back and start doing it yourself and ... well, you think I wouldn't have had that.. It's very difficult.... You never would be able to do that yourself."

" but I think it's really good because it makes you do it. And because you're doing it in the workshop you know it can't be any good because you've got 3 minutes to do this...2 minutes to do that."

"// yeah and if you do that a couple of times it helps. I did something [again] myself that I did n class. And I thought I'll have a go at writing this... I felt quite good about it..

Giving and receiving critical feedback

“But I think what it really taught us is that you can take criticism I appreciate it for getting me into writing again. I’ve been out of education for 3years.”

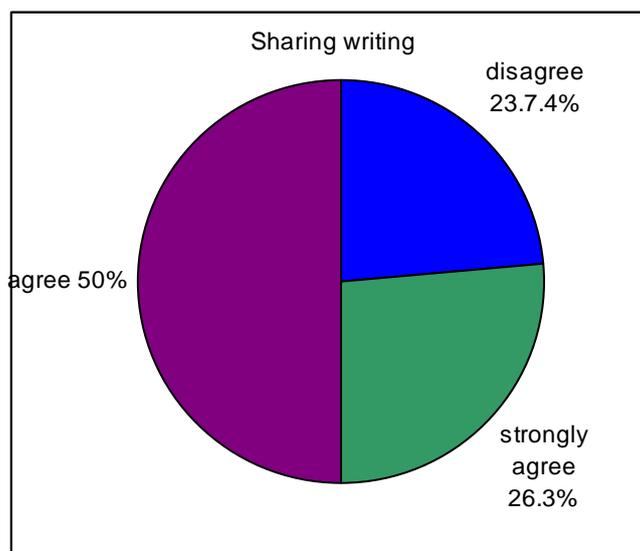


Figure 11: More comfortable with others viewing own writing.

For many students, receiving feedback from their peers, as well as their tutor, was a central part of their learning that could be transferred to other modules. Three-quarters of students replies indicated that in general they felt satisfied that the feedback they had received was helpful to them. A quarter of the students, however, felt that, at times, the feedback could have been more constructive. Nevertheless, about three-quarters of students reported feeling more conformable with allowing their peers to share their writing.

Although not directly part of the survey, many students remarked that they were able to benefit from the way in which the electronic discussion board could be used to ‘test out’ their writing and get feedback. This was the main milieu for out-of-class contact and sharing and critiquing of each other’s writing. Participation in the discussion board for this purpose was relatively high compared with other courses. Many students commented on the benefits of viewing other people’s writing as particularly useful, along with the unique opportunity of interrogating the actual ‘authors’ directly. As one student commented, “It can give you a big confidence boost and is great if you can get feedback... it takes a bit of nerve though at the beginning.”

3.2 Relevance of creative writing to the study of literature

Students were asked how they thought their creative writing work related to other academic work. All full-time students were concurrently taking three genre courses on Poetry, the Novel and Drama. As figure 14 shows, almost three-quarters of students agreed or strongly agreed that creative writing had improved their critical reading of literature. Yet, the remainder of students said they did not see any improvement.

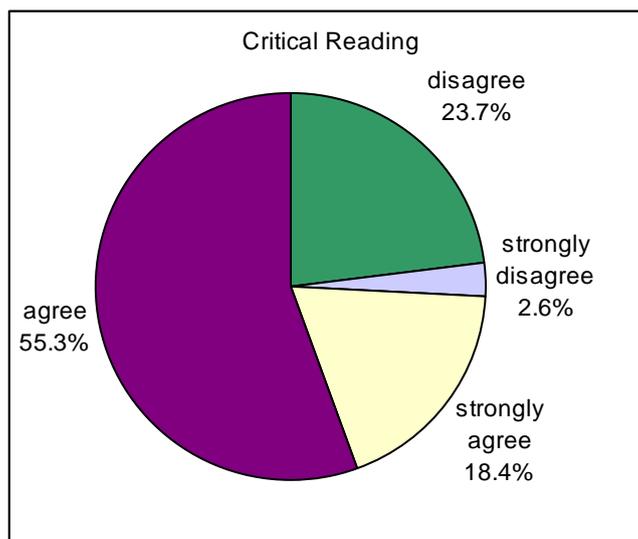


Figure 14: Improved Critical Reading of Literature

Students were also asked to respond to the open-ended question, 'In what way are creative writing skills related to other modules you are studying? Although some answers were too general to be classified easily, for instance 'improvements in personal writing', and 'got me to think outside the box', the remainder could be categorised into three broad areas: usefulness to specific courses and areas of literature, relevance to writing ability in general, and transferable editing and drafting skills. Indicative quotations demonstrate a wide range of benefits found by the majority of students.

Indicative quotations

3.2.1 Links to specific courses and areas of literature

"Basic language skills are always useful – understanding the writing (e.g. for Poetry) The process helps with the analysis of [poetry]."

"Writing poetry in strict form gives insight when analysing other works (poetry module)."

"Poetry – learning how to write in set form"

"It has helped to analyse poetry in terms of form and helped me with my ability to write poetry."

"Poetry linked to the course because we tried to write our own."

"Poetry and Society – It has helped me to write more expressively. Therefore, I can read into underlying factors in poetry."

"The work on poetic forms in this module has helped my knowledge of forms studied in the poetry module."

"Poetry and Society – It has helped me to recognise different forms that poems are written in."

"Poetry and creative writing link well because creative writing enables me to produce and get feedback on forms studied in poetry."

"Poetry – writing is easier, useful tips for analysing poems."

"More analysis of poem format."

"Form and technique – Poetry and Society. General confidence in written work – Intro to the Novel."

"Understanding the process of writing poetry helps to analyse it (poetry module) more effectively. And also for prose (module on novel)"

"Poetry Meter/rhythm, drafting and editing."

"Drama – writing for voice, personal pitch, rhythm, and pace."

"Looking at drama, poetry and literature, understanding it better. Drama – has really opened my eyes – in poetry I can see different angles – and looking at how I can be more critical and not take it at face value."

3.2.2. Writing ability in general

"You are a lot more aware of how to change your writing to make the point you want".

"Helped me express my points clearly and fluently"

"Has helped me form a base for my subjects, so my work is of a higher standard."

"Useful for essay writing, more confident in my written work. Group work and sharing creative writing with others made me more confident".

"I find I can structure my essays for other subjects with more clarity."

"The drafting and editing process learnt in creative writing, I have been able to apply to my other essays and this has helped, improved the overall standard."

"Many ways, including punctuation, reason behind aspects of work etc etc etc"

3.2.3. Editing and drafting skills

"The drafting process mainly; allows you to re-write the piece completely different. Perhaps even re-working some ideas from scratch which weren't written in the first draft."

"Re-drafting in all of them."

"Allows for better drafting and editing of work."

3.3 Relevance of Language and Literature Experience

The students who attended focus groups had a variety of academic backgrounds. Although opinions were mixed on whether language or literature was most akin to and beneficial to creative writing, there was a tendency to view a knowledge of literature, especially poetry, as most relevant. Of course, this could be connected with the focus on writing poetry at the beginning of the course. Similarly, there were opportunities to build on a literature background during other aspects of the course. However, several students did remark that creative writing demonstrated the importance of grammar to the study of literature and several remarked that they would appreciate more formal grammar sessions.

Is literature or language background more useful?

"I have English Literature A level and didn't have language. but I think that there is overlap, and creative writing actually helps with the language side of things. In any literature degree grammar and writing styles should be a main focus."

"I did literature at A level and I found creative writing the most challenging one. I found literature easier. I was more accustomed to reading and then talking about it."

I think literature, because it gives you a basis on what you've read. And then when you go to read what you've done writing and you can see what the writing could be doing, ... that you've done"

"You know, I think literature does help.... I didn't take language, I took literature. I think writing and literature go more hand in hand than what my impression of language would have done."

"having English language at A level I found creative writing much easier. I found the literature side much more difficult than the creative writing side of things. – much easier to adapt to. Even though they cover a lot of the subjects you cover in the literature side."

[interviewer clarifies: "that was like a bridge really for you?"]. "Yes, definitely. I've taken a gap year also. It was much easier to get into the writing. I hadn't done literature – so it was quite difficult to get into the literature side."

"mm.. I think [language] just helps you to write. I think language goes with Poetry a lot more. It would help you get so much more into the poem"-

"On vocabulary --- I've heard words I'd never heard before." "I think you need the literary terms dictionary..."

"I've language and literature – I don't think it matters"

3.4 Expectations and experience of creative writing

Many students perceived a gap between their initial expectations and subsequent experience of creative writing. Several students did not anticipate that creative writing would be part of their degree and others said they had not fully appreciated what creative writing was about at the outset. Two students had previously attended a creative writing class, but both thought this 1st year class superior in terms of learning and experience.

Reflecting on their initial reservations about a module on creative writing, without exception all of the students interviewed commented that that they had enjoyed it and learned many skills. Nearly all agreed that though they had been hesitant to approach some types of writing or activities they had learned a great deal about writing in general. Several students commented that (following the experience) they might have considered a single honours creative writing degree; one student said that one term was sufficient. Although some were more positive than others, all participants were glad they had been 'made' to write in different ways.

Not all students were confident in creative writing. One felt concerned that she lacked a clear view. In part she felt this stemmed from her own initial misinterpretation about the nature of creative writing as an academic subject. She compared her writing with that of her peers and felt that their work was often good and possibly better than her own poems. The main issue seemed to be in grasping what was expected and not having clear criteria for what the product should be.

On the whole however, once they began to understand better what was involved, creative writing provided students with unexpected benefits and links with other modules, most of which they had not anticipated.

Initial feelings about creative writing

"I didn't want to do creative writing at all. It particularly overlaps with poetry. Perhaps some people want to be writers. In a way, I wish I'd been quicker off the block in grasping that there was so much reading. I just suddenly realised that we need to write so many poems for the portfolio....I planned one day reading and one day verse etcetera - too many assumptions."

"You need imagination; the first poem was a real struggle for me. The feedback I got, meant that it was 'bland' – they didn't say that, but that's what I took it as. They want something spiky and alert, but if you want to do something more pedantic, well isn't that good too? Shouldn't they tell us what creative writing skills should be? Is the object to amuse?"

"I didn't really see the rationale for creative writing --- it was implicit and became more obvious towards the end."

"I'm not sure how it fits in with the other literature modules, but I enjoy it. - didn't know we would be doing it – but was pleased"

"Creative writing definitely helped me with literature, particularly with poetry. Also in critically reading literature, I found that I was better able to appreciate different styles of writing. I think the two work really well together and it's important that they go together. You can't really understand literature fully and critically until you learn about your own style and how that impacts writing. I learned skills I didn't even know of and didn't know I had. There is such a diversity and particular to have that grounding in the first year. It linked into the films and writing for the screen, which we also covered."

"I didn't know I'd be doing creative writing... but it's good. It's closely related to poetry and I suppose it helps with poetry. Yes you can appreciate poetry better in the poetry module...poetry is harder. I think more than anything we should do things from other courses in the creative writing classes – instead of moving into other groups – keeping it here. "

Students mentioned different aspects of the course that distinguished creative writing from other subjects they were taking: for example, the collaborative aspects of workshops. Some also felt that the tapping into the creative side gives them a viewpoint on texts that others do not have and are able to gain insights into the construction and process of writing, which they can use in their critical study. Others found greater confidence and deeper insights which helped with their other courses.

Indicative comments:

"I think it helps you, when you try write in someone else's style. It helps you understand how they've written it. – do you know what I mean? You know the Arthur Conan Doyle stuff; I thought that was quite interesting."

"Yes I do think it has helped, when we do the novels, right, you can look at the breakdown of the structure and when we do Poetry – so I tend to think it's the other way around – rather than creative writing helping us – it's the stuff we can get from the other modules that are useful to creative writing."

"It made me appreciate the authorial process and see this in a different way – I found it beneficial and enjoyed it a lot."

"If you just read other people's writing and just keep saying what you think, it can get a bit dry. If you actually try yourself, it gives you a different perspective."

"It was different from many other modules in that you do a different type of collaborative work – work is ongoing and practical, rather than waiting to the end as in many subjects and then writing an essay."

"Yes, I think it helps with Drama and poetry, because that really stressed me out, because I've never done that that."

Students saw distinct benefits of the course as a whole. Some, who were more interested in the creative writing aspects of their study, remarked that they would have liked more creative writing in the course, or even a joint or single honours degree. (The part-time student switched to the new joint honours in English and Creative Writing in the following year.)

4. Creative writing exercises

It was decided at the outset of the project that three creative writing exercises would be made widely available through the English subject centre. When students were asked about the course, they were asked to talk about the exercises they had done and to select their favourites. The three most popular exercises are now available.

Students undertook a wide range of exercises. At the beginning of the course, there would be two or three tasks in a workshop. Later there might be a single task broken down into components (e.g. preparation, drafting, critical response, editing, etc.) Each student had distinct preferences and personal favourites. While some students already wrote, there was also a strong sense that students liked moving into unfamiliar areas and finding new ways in which to work.

Interview:

“I liked the way there was lots of different small writing tasks because you get to try out writing in different styles, otherwise you just wouldn’t get to do these. I think if there was just one piece of work, then I think people would just stick to what they know... you know, I’m only going to write poetry because I like poetry.”

“I would never have tried a Villanelle.”

The following three exercises were most popular: Children’s story, writing for the voice and writing a Journal. Indicative quotations from student questionnaires indicate what students perceived they had gained from each. Four other exercises were mentioned by small numbers of students; these are also listed with indicative comments. There is some overlap of categories, for instance “poetry” is nominated as are “free verse” and “speed sestinas”.

Several students said that all exercises had been helpful. One declined to nominate a particular exercise, instead nominating “All of them” and adding, “I learnt something new and exciting in all exercises, such as using techniques to make writing exciting and being critical.”

A summary of the outcomes of the study in relation to the questions that were set out initially is provided in a separate document. Although much of the feedback and comments provided by students is specific to this particular context, there are some interesting findings. At the outset, many students did not have a clear idea of what they would achieve or experience. However, the study has shown the many ways in which these students perceived differences between creative writing and other academic subjects; yet, they were also sensitive to the relationship between their creative writing work and their study in English Literature and other subjects.

Writing exercise	Indicative comments
4.1 Children’s story (nominated by 16 students)	
<p><i>“Not something I had primarily tried or worked upon – the task that taught me the most”</i></p> <p><i>“Helped to understand the form and structure.”</i></p> <p><i>“Because I thought it would be very simple, but it is actually quite challenging and trying to improve versions encouraged me to think widely.”</i></p> <p><i>“Improved my ability to improvise and to target a specific audience. You can be very creative.”</i></p> <p><i>“It makes you aware of the language, your audience – allows you to be critical about your work, not self indulgent, but as work that can always be worked on.”</i></p> <p><i>“Because it helped me to write for a different age group, which I wasn’t really comfortable doing before”.</i></p>	
4.2 Writing for the Voice (nominated by 9 students)	
<p><i>“I had not previously tried to create a unique voice in my writing.”</i></p> <p><i>“It was challenging to get in the mindset of a different voice. This made me think and go much deeper into developing a character.”</i></p> <p><i>“This helped me to better analyse the way my work is read. The editing is a useful exercise.”</i></p> <p><i>“Because of the consideration taken when writing about personal meter and pace within your own voice and its effects. Also, keeping your audience entertained and attentive whilst listening to you.”</i></p> <p><i>“This wasn’t something I’d been taught before, therefore it wasn’t something I realised or thought about.”</i></p> <p><i>“It made me seriously consider my characterisation and audience, making my work/outlook on it more effective.”</i></p>	
4.3 Keeping a Journal (nominated by 8 students)	
<p><i>“I can try different forms of writing within it and allows a lot of scope for subject matter.”</i></p> <p><i>“Edited journal is an exercise in self discipline; it turned up some interesting ideas.”</i></p> <p><i>“It made me focus on my writing everyday, made me more aware of how to write.”</i></p> <p><i>“I have found the journal entries to be most beneficial. They allow me to write freely and also analyse my own day whilst improving on English skills.”</i></p>	

4.4 Other writing exercises

Free verse (nominated by 3 students)

"Free verse opened up my creative urges! This was a pleasant surprise."

Speed sestina (nominated by 3 students)

"I enjoyed the speed exercises as they force you to write something, however rubbish."

Poetry (nominated by 2 students)

"Because I never attempted poetry before – its strict form. I didn't know how to write properly before- but have gained confidence – and am eager to get better."

Writing parody (nominated by 1 student)

"Parody - awareness of a new style to write in."

Prose and story: 1

"Prose and stories are my favourite exercises and I enjoy them."