



## **FROM RECOUNT TO NARRATIVE: DEVELOPING WRITING SKILLS AND GAINING CONFIDENCE**

### **DARI TEKS *RECOUNT* KE NARATIF: MENGEMBANGKAN KETERAMPILAN MENULIS DAN MENINGKATKAN KEPERCAYAAN DIRI**

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#### **Abstract**

This article seeks to explain the use of recount text to help students develop their narrative text. The idea was induced by students' common problems in writing a narrative and teachers' difficulties in scaffolding their students to write that genre. As recount and narrative genres share similar features, it is argued that using a recount as a basis, students will be able to produce a narrative more easily. Three main topics addressed here include a brief theoretical synthesis of narrative and recount, the procedures of teaching to write narrative from recount, and a brief report of a classroom-based study using the strategy. The result of the study shows that the strategy could help the students produce their narratives well. In fact, they could produce stories of various themes, interesting conflicts, and ending. In addition, their language became more descriptive which made their description more vivid. Step by step teaching procedure is explained in details and is coupled with examples. It is expected that steps can be easily understood and applied by teachers.

**Keywords:** Recount, Narrative, Writing, Confidence

#### **Abstrak**

Artikel ini menjelaskan penggunaan teks *recount* untuk membantu siswa dalam mengembangkan teks naratif mereka. Gagasan itu diinduksi oleh masalah umum siswa dalam menulis sebuah narasi dan kesulitan guru dalam perancah siswa mereka untuk menulis genre tersebut. Karena genre *recount* dan naratif memiliki fitur serupa, sehingga dapat dipahami bahwa menggunakan teks *recount* memungkinkan sebagai dasar bagi siswa untuk menghasilkan teks narasi dengan lebih mudah. Tiga topik utama yang dibahas di sini mencakup sintesis teoretis narasi dan teks *recount*, prosedur pengajaran untuk menulis narasi dari teks *recount*, dan laporan singkat sebuah studi berbasis kelas dengan menggunakan strategi tersebut. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa strategi tersebut dapat membantu siswa

menghasilkan narasi mereka dengan baik. Buktinya, mereka bisa menghasilkan cerita dari berbagai tema, konflik menarik, dan penutup. Selain itu, bahasa mereka menjadi lebih deskriptif yang membuat deskripsi mereka lebih jelas. Langkah demi langkah prosedur mengajar dijelaskan secara rinci dan digabungkan dengan contoh. Diharapkan langkah-langkah tersebut dapat dengan mudah dipahami dan diterapkan oleh guru.

**Kata Kunci:** *Recount, Narrative, Writing, Confidence*

## A. INTRODUCTION

Writing has been widely known as a distressing activity for many EFL learners. They often claim that they have ideas in mind but find it difficult to express the ideas into writing; they feel nervous about their grammar, diction, and the structure of a text. Let alone writing a narrative. As many perceive, the stylish and beautiful language as features of narrative genre can only be produced by professional authors. For students, this view seems to affect their motivation and confidence to write a narrative text.

A great number of studies addressing various issues about writing have yielded findings useful for developing writing instruction. The studies conducted by Hinkel (1997) and Scholon (in Hinkel, 2008), for example, reveal that EFL learners' writings at discourse and text-level structures are different from those written by native speakers. In fact, speakers of Chinese, Korean, and Japanese have appeared to more indirect (Hinkel, 1997). These features of discourse and text structure are also found in the EFL learners' narrative investigated by Soter (cited in Hinkel, 2008). Differences between the language, the discourse and the text structure of the native language and the foreign/second language have brought about difficulties in learning to write by EFL learners. Based on his substantial study, Kaplan (cited in Hinkel 2008:23) states that the difficulties can be classified into what he calls as "culture-bound and language bound". Kaplan claims that phenomena that are culture bound may not be complicated because it can be explained quite easily. Phenomena that is language-bound is usually difficult such as using ideational cohesion to maintain rhetorical topic.

Another interesting writing research area that unveils the cause of writing problems is writing anxiety. It was found that college students had high writing anxiety ((Pimsarn, 2013; Dacwang, 2014; Anwar & Wahyuni, 2016). They were anxious of being judged by teachers and peers. The feeling of anxiety appeared to influence the learners when they wrote as what Cheng (2002) found in his study. Anxiety is not only felt by learners, but also teachers sometimes. Dealing with writing narrative, for instance, the teachers of some workshops I ever led often ask a question that sounds simple but quite intricate; that is, "what is a good strategy to teach writing a narrative to our students who have low motivation, low confidence, limited language vocabulary and grammar?" They state that they have done their best by providing their students with text models, analyzing the models (i.e. the generic structure and the dominant language features of a certain text), and helping them produce their own texts. What most of them usually do is guiding students to reproduce a legend or fairytale. It seems

there has been a presumption among some teachers that it is impossible for the students to produce a narrative. They argued that writing a narrative needs both skill and talent which only a few people can do.

These teachers' statements are congruent with what my students' responses when I teach writing at an English Department of a University in Indonesia and explain the syllabus and the objectives in the first meeting. Once when I told them that one of the genres that they would produce was narrative (i.e. a short story), some said: "Is it possible? Isn't it difficult? Despite that, a few said: "It must be interesting". This challenged me to find strategies to teach and guide the students, so that they could produce their stories. I am positive that they can write a narrative.

Basically most people regardless age and profession like narratives. Students in particular like to listen and read fairy tales, legends and even fables. They like reading short stories, comics, and novels. Yet, an intriguing question is why many of them do not like writing a narrative. This issue is also raised by Graves in his book *Writing with Children* (1983). He observed how children actually like to write. He pointed out the fact that children like to write even before they go to school. In fact, they mark up walls and newspapers with crayon, pens, or pencils. We also know that children are most likely creative as indicated by their made-up stories that are often beyond imagination of adults. This means that students have potential to create a narrative. To develop that potential, teachers should scaffold students.

Using recount as a point of departure for writing a narrative as applied in a project of a writing course that will be described below is evident to be effective. A premise behind this is that recount and narrative have many things in common. Since each student has her/his own past experiences, s/he has ideas to develop into narratives. Even so, to manipulate and develop the ideas of recount on hand and improve their limited language and vocabulary repertoire at the same time, students need guidance. This article provides a review of related literature, outlines the procedures to apply the strategy, and presents the results of a small project in a writing class using the strategy.

## **B. NARRATIVE AND RECOUNT**

Narrative belongs to story genre. They deal with "problems constructed in the Complication stage of the text (Rothery and Stanglin, 1997: 233)." Rothery and Stanglin state that narrative has powerful cultural influence. It entertains and instructs the reader about valued ways of behaving as well. Bruner (in Figueiredo, 2009:257) suggests, "narrative imitates life ...", thus they are socio-cognitive human construction. An author constructing a narrative is most likely influenced by social phenomenon- events happening around him/her and in other places of their knowledge, and even his/her personal experience.

Narrative has its own characteristics- the social function, the generic structure, and the dominant lexicogrammar features. The social function is to entertain. Narrative is constructed in "a pattern of events with a problematic and/or unexpected outcome that entertains and instructs the reader or listener (Butt, 2000: 217)." The generic structure

consists of orientation, conflict, and resolution. Conflict and resolution, however, are obligatory in narrative. Rothery and Stenglin (1997) explain that orientation sets up a context for understanding the events in the subsequent stages of a narrative. Complication is achieved through an activity sequence that creates a problem between participants or an internal problem on a participant. The concluding part or the resolution presents the solution of the complication in various ways. It also has dominant language features which include, among others, the use of simple past tense, specific participants, and the use of material processes (Butt et al., 2000). The use of interpersonal linguistic resources makes the events in a narrative exciting or terrifying (Rothery and Stenglin 1997).

The features of a narrative are fairly similar to those of a recount. In fact, they are classified into the same genre group (Butt, 2000). Both tell events that involve characters foregrounding and giving significance of the events. Recount is aimed to tell what factual events in the past (Macken-Horarik, 2002), whereas narrative is telling 'imaginary' past. Unlike a narrative, a recount does not necessarily have a conflict. For a number of similarities, a writer can use his/her personal recount or someone's recount a basis of the construction of narrative.

In relation to this, Devitt (2004:203) states that when writers write "...they draw on the genres they know, their own context of genres, to help construct their rhetorical action. If they encounter a situation new to them, it is the genres they have required in the past that they can use to shape their new action." This means that students that most likely have background knowledge and experience of telling and writing recounts should be able to use the knowledge in telling and writing narratives. As Clabough (2014) says, all writing is autobiographical. In effect, everyone can share his wonderful life experience with others, and he can write from his unique knowledge of his own experience.

### **C. THE TEACHING AND LEARNING PROCEDURES**

The procedures of teaching to write a narrative (i.e. a short story) through recount explained below had been implemented as a project in a writing class. They are not only aimed to help students produce narrative, but also raise their confidence. The procedures are as follows.

#### ***Step 1: Setting the Target and the Context***

The students are informed the goal and the targeted outcome, producing their own short stories. Besides, the students are encouraged to articulate their expectation about the course in order to raise their motivation.

Students' background knowledge about narrative is activated through question and answer activity. Some examples of the questions may include:

- Why do you most people like narrative?
- Are you familiar with the terms 'setting', 'characters', and 'conflict'? What are they?

- What makes a narrative interesting?
- How does a narrative differ from a recount?
- How do you think an author creates a narrative?

These questions are aimed to elicit the answers which provide a general idea about what a narrative is, and thus help students to get basic understanding about the social context, the purpose, and the features of a narrative. The answers can also develop self-assurance in the students that they are able to write a narrative.

**Step 2: Telling Experience**

Students are divided into four big groups. They are asked to choose one of their past experiences to be told to their colleagues; each is given 5 minutes to tell it. Each member tells his/her experience to his/her group. The students are encouraged to ask questions to the recount teller if they think something missing in the story or something unclear. Thus, the teller will be aware of the problems of his/her stories, which also indirectly shows what to improve. Then, each group nominates a member who will tell his/her story to the class. The two layer presentation (i.e. begin with small group before class presentation) is aimed to help the students feel confident. While the students tell their recount, the teacher should notice any major problems emerging in their recount such as organization of the text and grammar problems. At the end of this step, if necessary, a brief review and exercises for the noted problems are given.

**Step 3: Back Outlining**

Students write the experience they have told to their friends in form of outline; this is used as the basis for writing the narrative. An example is presented in the following table.

Table 1 Back- Outlining of a Recount

Orientation	Last holiday I visited my uncle in Bali.
Series of events	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• On the first day I did not go anywhere. I spent the day having a long chat with my uncle and aunt.</li> <li>• On the second day I went to Kuta beach, Kintamani, and Monkey Forest with my cousin.</li> <li>• On the third day I went to the market and did some shopping.</li> <li>• On the next two days I didn't go anywhere.</li> <li>• The last day in Bali I went to Sukowati market where we can buy various souvenirs from Bali.</li> <li>• On the seventh day I went back to my hometown.</li> </ul>

The teacher also should show a model of an outline of her/his recount which s/he later develops into a short story. There are some purposes of providing a model. First, it describes how an outline looks. Second, it can be used as a source of reviewing grammatical features of recount and narrative. Besides, giving the model is a way to

raise students' motivation and confidence- showing them how they can create a narrative from a simple recount.

**Step 4: Adding and Changing**

Students are guided to create their narrative based on the outline of the recount they have made. They have to create a major conflict with or without minor conflicts. They are also asked to decide the ending, a sad or happy one. They can add the characters and some details based on the planned conflict and ending. The teacher gives an example how to do it by using a prepared outline of her recount showed in the previous stage. It can look like the following table.

Table 2 Expanding a Recount to Form a Story

Components	Recount	Planned Narrative
Character	I, a friend of mine	I, a friend of mine, an old close friend and his girl friend
Setting	Bali, last holiday	Bali, last holiday
Conflict	-	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• met a close friend accidentally</li> <li>• invited to have dinner</li> <li>• hoped to be together again</li> <li>• he came with his girl friend</li> </ul>
Ending	Going home on the seventh day.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• going back home with</li> <li>• disappointment</li> </ul>

To make such outline, the teacher tells students how they want the story ends, who they want to be the characters, and how they want the conflict (s) happens. The teacher should write the plan on the board, so that students can see a strategy to develop a narrative based on a recount. This activity gives them a sense of “I believe I can do it”, which raises their confidence and motivation to write.

**Step 5: Using Descriptive Language**

For students who have limited language repertoire (important expressions and vocabulary), guided exercises through which they learn to manipulate their vocabulary to describe a scene or/and a character vividly to create a good narrative are needed. Students are required to imagine some scenes and characters of their stories and use descriptive words to describe them. Clabough (2014) suggests writers to use five senses and a concrete core to give vivid effects on readers. Students are encouraged to be brave to ‘play’ with words to enrich their descriptive language. The following procedures may be used for the purpose.

- Write some words/expressions about certain situations or conditions on the board such as ‘freezing’, ‘crowded’, ‘spacious’, and ‘restless’.
- Ask them to write words/expressions/sentences to describe each word. To describe a scene, tell them to imagine what may be seen, heard, smelt, felt in

such situation. To describe a character, tell them to imagine what the character may be doing, what s/he may wear, and how s/he looks like.

Here are a few examples of the students' work.

- Chilly : cold and windy  
people wore jackets and shawls
- Crowded : packed with people  
it was hard to move
- Comfortable : warm and clean  
the room was nicely decorated
- Hot : people sweat and it is dry  
people just stayed at home
- Very sad : silent and cry  
her tears dropped  
she didn't talk at all

- Encourage them to consult their dictionary if they are not sure with their expressions. It would be very helpful if the teacher supports the students with some common expressions to describe a particular scene or character.
  - Ask students to compare their work with their partner.
  - Pick some students to present their work and require the others to give their comments or additional ideas. When this activity is done, ask the students to describe some parts of their recount and planned narrative.
  - Ask students to select an event.
  - Ask them to close their eyes for a minute or so and imagine the place, the participants, and/or the place of the event.
  - Ask them to describe it as vividly as possible.
- The teacher offers help whenever necessary.

The results can be like the following. The expressions/words in the left column are the ones usually used by the students, and the ones in the right are the description.

Table 3 Examples of Descriptive Language

<b>Common expressions</b>	<b>Descriptive language</b>
It was a beautiful place.	It was a breathtaking view. From one side of the canon I can see the river flowing like a sleeping snake. On the other side, the white wall of the cliff looks so enchanting.
It was very cold in the morning.	On that chilly morning, the wind blew hard. I saw no one passing by.
The room was messy and dirty.	The room was not cared. Things were scattered over the floor. The table and the chairs were dusty, and some stains stuck on the floor.
She is a shy little girl.	She only smiled, and did not say a word. She

often nodded or shook her head instead of saying 'yes' or 'no'.

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As the purpose is to train students to use descriptive language and be expressive in their writing, the teacher should not put pressure on students to produce accurate and native-like expressions.

### ***Step 6: Producing a Draft***

Students write a narrative based on their plan. They are encouraged to express their ideas vividly, and be brave to experiment with new words. The teacher should provide 'point-of-need' scaffolding (Hammond, 2001:36); that is, assisting the students when they get stuck with ideas and language as well. This can be done by probing questions, offering some helping words/clues, or even ideas. Usually, the students cannot finish their first drafts at school, thus they should be allowed to continue it at home.

### ***Step 7: Writing Conference***

At this stage students get feedback from their peers who act as their readers; the comments can be taken as a source of improvement. The teacher facilitates the conference and offers help if needed. In a class with a big number of students, the teacher can divide the students into some groups of five to seven. This means that the conference is held in two stages, group conference and class conference. For the group conference, a member of each group presents his/her narrative orally, while the others listen to the reading, and give comments, suggestions, or ask questions. The time should be limited, so that the class conference can be done in the same meeting. Before the conference, the teacher gives a guideline, and thus the students have a focus when listening to their friends' narrative. Students can use the following questions as a guide.

- Is the story clear?
- Is the setting described vividly?
- Is the characterization good?
- Are the conflicts reasonable and interesting?
- Is the ending interesting?
- Are the language expressions appropriate?

After that, the teacher selects one or two students (depending on the available time), to present their narrative to the class. As in the group conference, students are encouraged to give their comments, suggestions, and to ask questions.

### ***Step 8: Looking at a reader's feedback***



At this stage each student gets feedback from the teacher and their peers. The students are paired and required to exchange their writing, read, give and comments. Prior to this activity the teacher has to give a guideline about what they need to look at and how they should comment their peer's writing on. Here is an example of guideline.

Table 4 Example of Feedback Guideline

No	Components to Look	Comments (give examples)	Suggestions
1	The introduction of the story		
2	The setting of the story		
3	The characters		
4	The events		
5	The language		
6	The ending		

Then, the teacher reads the students' draft as a real reader. Reading is aimed at giving comments and suggestions for the content of the elements of the story. The points to be checked are whether or not:

- the story is interesting
- the plot is clear and interesting
- the conflicts are plausible and engaging
- the characters are well and appropriately described
- the setting is well depicted
- the ending is interesting

The teacher should write his/her genuine comments, highlighting both the strengths and the weaknesses. The students are encouraged to take the 'reader's' critiques. Even so, they should be informed that the decision is left to them. This will give a room for them to be mature and critical writer for their own writing.

### ***Step 9: Focusing on Grammar***

Raising grammar awareness is an important aspect of teaching English to EFL learners. This is one way to empower the students. The teacher has to decide which grammar aspects that will be emphasized (i. e. the dominant features for narrative), for example the use of *simple past tense*. It can be done inductively by taking examples of sentences from the students' texts to explain and exercise their understanding. This way enables the students learn grammar in context. Additional exercises may be given if necessary.

### ***Step 10: Producing the Final Draft***

Taking their peers' and the teacher's comments and suggestions into consideration, students produce their final draft. They are required to read their draft and position themselves as readers, so that they can refine their ideas and language more easily. They should be given a week or two to finish it. It is a good idea if the

students' work is collected, bound, and put in the school library. It is also good if some good stories are selected and published them in school magazines.

#### **D. A BRIEF REPORT ON THE RESULT OF A CLASSROOM-BASED STUDY**

The procedures above were applied in a classroom study of a Writing 2 course at the English Department at a university in Indonesia. The course was aimed at providing the knowledge and training them to write some text types. One of them was Narrative. At the end of the course the students were expected to be able to produce a short narrative (i.e. a short story). It should be noted that majority of the students had various English sentence grammar problems and low confidence in writing. To help them cope with the problems, the strategy explained above was applied.

To state briefly, the students were guided to write short stories from their personal recounts. They used their recounts as the point of departure, and then made some changes by adding and changing particular aspects such as characters and setting. To refresh their mind about the features of a short story, they were provided with models, and they analyzed the models together with the lecturer. The analysis included several aspects: 1) the structure of the text models, 2) the language features, 3) different strategies of how to begin a story, 4) the use of quotations, and 5) different roles of the writer. Some other activities included grammar-focus exercises and feedback provision. Their learning activities were recorded in a field note and their writing were analyzed and assessed by using a predetermined rubric.

The results show that the students were able to produce short stories based their recounts well. The variation of themes (e.g. romance, friendship and horror), interesting plots, and conflicts are among the features of the students' short stories. The students also showed promising improvement in the use of language; they used various sentence patterns, metaphors, and a wide range of vocabulary. Furthermore, their grammar mistakes such as wrong use of tenses and transitions significantly decreased. Their short stories were judged based on the indicators of a narrative, its generic structure and language features.

The students' active involvement in group work such as giving comments on their friends' work and asking for assistance from the lecturer increased their motivation and confidence in writing a narrative. At the end of the study, most of the students said that they were happy with their work, and some stated that they could not believe they could write a short story in English. In short, the strategy was effective enough to promote the students' motivation, confidence, and skill to write a narrative.

#### **E. CONCLUSION**

Writing a narrative can be enjoyable if students are informed and provided with a model how to do it. A simple and effective way is helping them create their narrative by making use their knowledge about recount. Two main reasons to do this: 1) students

must have ever told or written a recount because telling experience has been a part of life, and 2) recount has similar features with narrative.

To write a narrative from recount, students need step by step guidance. The teacher is required not only to tell how to do, but also involves him/herself in the creation of the narrative. Through such practice, students' motivation and confidence can be raised. The most important thing is the students see the craft of writing- the process of converting a recount into a narrative. The process begins with telling a recount, writing a storyline, language-focus exercises, drafting, conferencing, and producing the final draft.

The result of a classroom practice using this strategy has revealed that the students could produce relatively good short stories. They also show promising progress in their ability of using English- accurate language and appropriate diction. In fact, they used various sentence patterns, had fewer grammar mistakes, more descriptive language, and more variation of diction. Based on the observation toward the process of student learning activities, it was evident that the students were enthusiastic and motivated in writing their narrative.

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