

# The Role of Problematizing Tutoring in the Development of EFL Students' Writing Skills<sup>1</sup>

Yomaira Angélica Herreño Contreras<sup>2</sup> & Sandra Rocío Vargas Ayala<sup>3</sup>, Universidad Santo Tomás, Villavicencio, Meta, Colombia

## Abstract

After analyzing and reflecting upon the errors students made when facing English writing activities, it was proposed to implement problematizing tutoring sessions as a strategy to assist them in overcoming their hurdles when writing. The participants of the study were 37 third-semester Law students from Universidad Santo Tomás (Villavicencio-Colombia). The main theoretical constructs that supported this research were problematizing tutoring and writing as a process. The study was developed under the framework of the qualitative research approach and implemented under the action research cycle. Hence, the instruments to collect data were the tutor's journal, students' artifacts, and a survey. On campus, this conducted research has contributed to inciting more inquiry about students' writing skills and transforming the habitual tutoring approach as a teaching and counseling process into a problematizing learning scenario. The results suggest that among law students, problematizing tutoring sessions are prone to being conceived as a legal English environment, a creative space, and a problem-solving context.

## Resumen

Como resultado del análisis y la reflexión en torno a los errores que los estudiantes usualmente cometen al realizar actividades de escritura en inglés, se propuso la implementación de sesiones de tutoría problematizadora como estrategia de acompañamiento en la superación de dificultades al escribir. En el estudio participaron 37 estudiantes de tercer semestre adscritos al programa de derecho de la Universidad Santo Tomás (Villavicencio-Colombia). Los principales constructos teóricos que fundamentaron esta investigación fueron la tutoría problematizadora y la escritura como proceso. El estudio fue desarrollado bajo los parámetros de la investigación cualitativa, y se implementó el ciclo de investigación acción. Por lo tanto, los instrumentos utilizados para recopilar los datos fueron el diario del tutor, los artefactos de los estudiantes, y una encuesta. En la Universidad Santo Tomás, la investigación realizada ha contribuido a una mayor indagación sobre la habilidad de escritura de los estudiantes, y a la transformación de la tutoría académica convencional como proceso de acompañamiento y enseñanza, en una tutoría problematizadora. Los resultados sugieren que, para los estudiantes de derecho, las sesiones de tutorías problematizadoras son susceptibles de ser concebidas como ambientes de inglés legal, espacios creativos y contextos para la resolución de problemas.

## Introduction

At Universidad Santo Tomás in Villavicencio (Colombia), academic tutoring aims to acquire self-learning strategies and the development of autonomy in the learning process. Thus, English tutoring is conceived as a voluntary and academic alternative that students have in order to clear up doubts concerning different language aspects, such as pronunciation, reading comprehension, grammar, and writing, among others, under the guidance of a tutor-teacher. As a consequence, when students attend English tutoring sessions at the university, they are free to express their needs and find ways to overcome their language learning difficulties.

Among the wide array of issues pertaining to language learning, tutoring -and specifically problematizing tutoring as conceived in the framework of this research- is a learning strategy which deserves to be studied more deeply in order to become acquainted with its potential benefits to the students' performance. Nieto, Cortés, and Cárdenas (2013) assert that tutoring is a primal scenario to foster students' cognitive and social skills required in school situations inherent to foreign languages. Thus, it is expected that the collaborative work conducted by tutors and tutees favors motivation and hinders dropping out. In this sense, this research intended to provide complementary insights into the role of tutoring in the development of writing skills in English, bearing in mind the precepts of problematizing pedagogy, which determines the pedagogical practices at Universidad Santo Tomás.

This article focuses on the impact of problematizing tutoring sessions on some students' writing skills while they were practicing legal English vocabulary. It presents the context and participants as well as the research approach and methodology. Furthermore, it gives account of the data analysis conducted under the principles of Grounded Theory, the subsequent conclusions, and the pedagogical implications which arose from this project.

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<sup>2</sup> [yomis@outlook.com](mailto:yomis@outlook.com)

<sup>3</sup> [sandravar23@gmail.com](mailto:sandravar23@gmail.com)

## Problem Statement

Language learning implies the progressive enhancement of key skills and sub-skills which ultimately prompt the development of an overall communicative competence. This research deals with fostering EFL writing skills at a tertiary level of education. Gardner and Johnson (1997, as cited in Hasan & Akhand, 2010, p. 78), argue that “writing is a fluid process created by writers as they work.... In actuality, the writing process is not a highly organized linear process, but rather a continual movement between different steps of the writing model”. As there are various perspectives to approach writing and understand its inner nature, this project intended to support the flow of ideas which is proper to writing and assist students in coping successfully with writing tasks they are requested to fulfill.

The participants of this study were 37 Law students from third English level at Universidad Santo Tomás in Villavicencio-Colombia. This study arose from the teachers' observation and reflection on the students' performance in the classroom. Despite their high competence in reading skills, their writing performance did not align to the CEFR (Common European Framework Reference) descriptors for A2 writing, which should have been their current language proficiency level according to the university's language policy. One of the most serious problems that Colombian EFL students face in their academic life is their inability to communicate effectively in English after graduating from university (British Council Colombia, 2015). The weakness in this vital skill impacts adversely on their academic success and within this scenario, writing constitutes a stumbling block to overcome.

The analysis of students' written production evinced weaknesses in terms of vocabulary, use of connectors, use of pronouns and linking ideas in a text. In order to closely study the students' writing performance and their eventual enhancement, various samples of their writing were collected and analyzed (Appendix 1). To revise the information gathered in this diagnostic stage, it was necessary to use a marking code chart adapted from Hedge (1988, p.152), to help the researchers categorize the most common mistakes made by students when they were facing writing tasks assigned in their English classes.

As a result, the following errors were found in the students' written compositions: subject omission, use of the verb *to be* (students got confused using the verb *to be* in third person), connectors (especially the use of linking adverbs and transitional words), possessives, gender agreement, and basic structure in sentences and paragraphs. The difficulties gathered from the diagnostic stage guided the researchers to propose strategies to help students overcome their weaknesses in writing. As is known, writing skills are indispensable for interaction. In this regard, Kellogg and Raulerson (2007, p. 237) assert that “effective writing skills are central both in higher education and the world of work that follows”. They point out that writing may serve as an indicator of success both in academic and working life.

## Preliminary research

As this research project intended to foster better writing practices among EFL students and help them surmount their difficulties concerning this skill, it is important to provide a review of some key findings on this issue. Hyland and Hyland (2006, p. 83) declare that

*Feedback has long been regarded as essential for the development of second language (L2) writing skills, both for its potential for learning and for student motivation. In process-based, learner-centered classrooms, for instance, it is seen as an important developmental tool moving learners through multiple drafts towards the capability for effective self-expression.*

Feedback may become a trigger to incite a better approach to writing, since gaining command of the different convergent variables into the writing process presupposes trial and error. Nonetheless, tackling intrinsic difficulties of EFL writing also implies a distinctive accompaniment. In this regard, there has been extensive research mainly conducted by Ellis (2010), Hyland (2010) and Nassaji (2011). As a result of their studies, a typology of written corrective feedback types has been defined, along with revision analysis categories (Ferris, 2006) and a classification of common errors.

Despite the fact that writing may be conceived as a solitary venture in EFL and ESL scenarios, and even in mother tongue contexts, this perception has been eroded by alternative approaches, which emphasize the role of negotiation when facing writing tasks. Nassaji (2011) states that “when the feedback involved negotiation, it resulted in more successful correction of the same error by the learners than feedback that involved no, or limited negotiation” (p. 320). Therefore, a paradigm shift is signaled, as a former “solitary task” becomes a collaborative work, which underpins learning how to write and handle one's own writing errors.

This notion of writing as collaborative work is equally transferable to ESL settings where students also have issues with formulating their ideas and expressing them correctly. In this concern, Myers (2004)

asserts that “the greatest problem many ESL writers have is in controlling the syntax and lexis of the English language” (p. 55). Similarly, Belkhir and Benyelles (2017) emphasize the selection of the appropriate vocabulary and the coherent arrangement of sentences as the main drawbacks in EFL writing. In both settings (ESL and EFL), tutoring has emerged as an alternative to assist students in overcoming obstacles that hinder them from writing.

Therefore, extensive research has been conducted to support its relevance for enhancing writing skills. Celis (2012) asserts that tutoring may generate a positive impact on emotional aspects, and it will help students to feel confident to ask questions, clarify doubts, construct knowledge collaboratively, and be aware of their own learning. However, tutors should tackle certain constraints that inhibit the attainment of the learning goals associated with tutoring. Mack (2012) mentions aspects such as the lack of a clear starting point, timing, and the lack of tutor knowledge about the assignment, and some communication issues. As for the latter, he highlights that “The tutor is responsible for providing a friendly and encouraging environment” (p. 180) which ultimately will foster communication.

Apart from enhancing writing skills, tutoring has proven to be a suitable scenario to address adjoining factors which may impede the development of written production. In this sense, Alrajhi and Aldhafri (2015) declare that tutoring substantially influences tutees’ English self-concept. Thus, tutoring constitutes a trigger to promote a shift in students’ self-perception as language learners and users.

### Literature Review

The theoretical framework of this study is supported by three constructs: problematizing pedagogy, tutoring, and writing process. Relevant literature about each construct will be presented in order to portray its relation to this work.

#### Problematizing Pedagogy

The education at Universidad Santo Tomás in Colombia is based on problematizing pedagogy. Freire (1970) referred to this educative process as a liberating action or praxis (p.136). Additionally, Freire (as cited in Breuing, 2011, p.127) argued that people need to engage in a praxis that incorporates theory, action, and reflection as a means to work towards social change and justice. When students are immersed in environments which include problematizing pedagogy, they can develop their ability to reflect deeply upon the activities they carried out. In this perspective, Shor (1992) asserts that teachers and students are conceived as agents who are required not only to participate actively in the classroom, but also to research the new knowledge they are exposed to, and to provide responses to current issues.

In other words, education, under the perspective of problematizing pedagogy, is perceived as a democratic manner to access to knowledge and overcome the rudiments of traditional approaches. Therefore, problematizing pedagogy stands as a cornerstone to foster critical thinking among teachers and students. In this regard, it demands high levels of reflection upon learning and teaching processes, as well as meaningful implications and contributions outside the class setting.

#### Tutoring

In the context of the target university, tutoring stands as an alternative pedagogical strategy to complement and enhance students’ academic performance, and it is assumed as a service whose aim is to help students overcome their academic difficulties, review previous knowledge, and develop their communicative skills. According to Bell (2007):

*For students, the tutoring learning environment is a place where they can apply theory, practice skills, interact with and learn from other students, develop relationships with peers that support learning beyond tutorials and receive individual attention in relation to their progress. (p. 2)*

Thus, tutoring can be considered as a way to support the learning and teaching processes developed inside the classroom, because on one hand, it aims at providing effective responses to students’ doubts and queries, and on the other hand, it serves as a pedagogical setting to complement and go beyond the learning taking place in a language lesson.

#### Writing

As this study intended to develop writing skills, students were involved in a series of activities whose main aim was to make them create texts based on their own experiences as law students and language users. This way, every activity, workshop, and tutoring session implied the inner conception of writing as a process rather than as a product. With respect to this, Hedge (2000, p. 302) also focuses on the perspective of writing as the process of “thinking” and “discovery”.

To highlight the importance of developing writing skills, Madrid and McLaren (1995, p. 120) state that a reasonable level of proficiency in any language implies a level of competence both in oral and written communication. Furthermore, written practice reinforces oral proficiency. In their professional lives, students will need proficiency in writing; therefore, when learners develop writing skills, they are capable of transcending in language and they may become more interested in language learning. In this sense, this study intended to provide more confidence and more tools for students to learn how to write correctly and suggested to them a way to practice writing using legal vocabulary.

## Methodology

### Participants

This project was conducted at Universidad Santo Tomás in Villavicencio (Colombia). Third semester Law students (second year) were part of this study. It is important to mention that students from this program take nine semesters of English over the course of their university career. These are sequenced and should be completed with a passing grade as a requisite for graduation.

The participants selected for this study were 37 students aged between 18 and 20 years old. The group consisted of 19 females and 18 males, and they were from Villavicencio and nearby towns in the department of Meta. They declared they had had little experience in learning English before starting their university studies.

### Research method

The approach used for this study was qualitative research. Taking into account that in qualitative research, the topic must be understood "holistically" (McKay, 2006, p. 6), this study was seeking the role of problematizing tutoring in the writing process of the participants, and followed the constructs of action research, which involves the design of a research cycle.

The implementation of tutoring sessions focused on legal English practice and reinforcement. First, it is necessary to indicate the importance of every stage in the action research cycle. According to Cohen and Manion (as cited in Nunan, 1992, p. 16) "action research is concerned with the identification and solution of problems in a specific context"; in other words, action research is implemented when researchers try to make some changes in their context reality.

This research method includes the following steps:

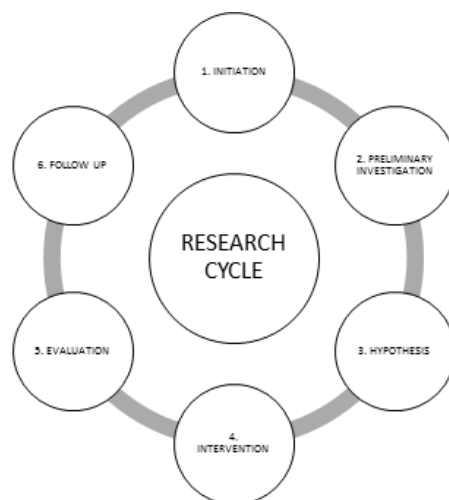


Figure 1. Action research cycle (adapted from Nunan, 1992, p. 17)

### Initiation

In step 1, researchers reflected upon the students' writing performance when they were asked to make a written composition, which was a narrative that dealt with specific communicative situations, such as: the best experience in their life, things they would do if they won the lottery, and changes they had had in their life over time.

### Preliminary investigation

Initially, researchers read the students' writing assignments, and analyzed their errors in writing. Following that procedure, their errors were socialized in the group, and students were asked to correct their mistakes in the first writing task. However, in the next writing activity, students kept making mistakes in the use of connectors, vocabulary, and punctuation. Thus, the second phase of the investigation procedure started when students identified and classified the errors they made at writing.

To do that, as mentioned before, the research team implemented a marking code chart adapted from Hedge (1988, p. 152), which was helpful to identify and analyze the most common errors made by students in writing. Furthermore, it was valuable to find different strategies to help students overcome their problems in writing.

### Hypothesis

Taking into account the analysis carried out in terms of the most common errors committed by students, the following hypothesis emerged: problematizing tutoring sessions contribute to develop students' writing performance while they are involved in law vocabulary activities. Consequently, a pedagogical intervention was designed within the tutoring sessions, which aimed at solving the problem found.

### Pedagogical intervention

Students were immersed in ten problematizing tutoring sessions. Each session lasted two hours. In each space, students had the opportunity to expose their needs in relation to general English. After working on the specific needs of each student, the tutors socialized with the group material designed to foster writing skills. Students interacted with the suggested material, and completed the activities designed for each session. At the end of each meeting, the tutors and students presented the various alternatives to solve the writing workshops. After that, the tutors collected the material applied in the tutoring sessions. Consequently, the pedagogical intervention carried out in this research project was divided into seven steps based on the pedagogical model of Saint Thomas Aquinas. The phases are explained as follows:

#### *Problematizing Tutoring Sessions*

The methodology used in the tutoring sessions was problematizing pedagogy, which is included in the pedagogical model at Universidad Santo Tomás. It is adjusted to the insights on teaching and learning given by Saint Thomas Aquinas. He stated two processes to acquire knowledge: by discovery (*inventio*) and by learning (*disciplina*) (Ozoliņš, 2013). Both are based on the See, Judge, and Act Method. This method is underpinned by the observation of reality, in other words, the problematic situations, with the purpose of establishing or fostering the generation of perceptions, standing points, and viewpoints that can derive into solutions or the intervention of that problematizing situation. Thus, the graduates from Universidad Santo Tomás are required to be experts in defining problems among the usual necessities and the current affairs (Universidad Santo Tomás, 2004). Besides, they should be able and willing to create and broaden perceptions beyond their current reality by means of the permanent questioning of theories and facts, as the educational process founded on problematizing pedagogy is precisely aimed at educating so that society can be transformed.

In the problematizing tutoring sessions, the following sequence was used.



Figure 2. Cycle of problematizing tutoring sessions proposed by the researchers.

### Observation

This phase in the tutoring process was implemented at the beginning of each session. Tutors observed students' performance in English and their attitude toward learning specific vocabulary. This phase took five minutes.

### Reflection

After the observation stage, reflection emerged as a consequence of observation. In this step, the students took time to talk to their tutors about the questions they had in learning English as a foreign language, and they together discussed possible solutions to overcome their difficulties in writing. This phase took 15 minutes.

### Question

This is a pivotal stage in the problematizing tutoring sessions as it not only helped determine the pedagogical route to follow in each session, but it also allowed students to reflect on their performance and provide answers to their own doubts. In this section, students asked the tutors questions to find ways to foster their learning process in writing. It took 30 minutes.

### Guidance

In this phase, the tutors focused on providing students with enough tools for them to improve their language learning experience. The phase also included suggesting possible answers to the questions posed in the previous stage; however, the guidance would not have been as valuable to the research process if it had not been supported by relevant aspects within the pedagogical model at Universidad Santo Tomás. According to it

*individuals know and comprehend the reality by means of constant study, criticism and creativity. To do so, it is a must to observe and ruminate over the reality in order to judge it and transform it to the possible extent.* (Universidad Santo Tomás, 2015, p. 30)

In this sense, within the framework of this research the English learning experience was pervaded by the See, Judge and Act Method, which allowed learners to reflect on their own writing process, the tools implemented and the strategies to improve their performance. This phase took 20 minutes

### Discovery

This stage gave tutees the possibility to negotiate meaning with their context and also with their tutors. In addition, they found the answers to their questions. This phase took 15 minutes.

### Interaction

In this part of the problematizing tutoring session students formed groups with their tutoring mates, in order to socialize the performance, they had in the session. Furthermore, students completed and answered the material suggested for the tutoring session, and exchanged their answers related to the workshop. This phase took 15 minutes.

### Production

As the focus of this intervention was to foster the students' writing skills, the production stage aimed to accomplish writing tasks assigned by the tutor with the goal of analyzing the impact of the material on the students' writing performance. The researchers observed that, after the workshops, students overcame some of the main difficulties in grammar and vocabulary, which have been previously presented in the problem statement. However, in relation to coherence and cohesion, they needed more practice regarding skills to connect ideas. Students expressed that they enjoyed working with material specifically designed for their field of studies.

The pedagogical intervention also comprised the design of materials for writing workshops (Appendix 4). They were based on Hedge's theory. Each workshop included steps that adjusted to students' learning needs in relation to the EFL writing process, which have been previously outlined in the problem statement.

Writing is a "complex, cognitive process that requires sustained intellectual effort over a considerable period of time" (Nunan, 2009, p. 273); in other words, students who are immersed in learning to write, take time and determination to be successful in that skill. Hedge (2005) provides the following pieces of writing advice in order to guarantee the development of ideas or information. First, ambiguity in meaning must be avoided through accuracy. Second, the writer should choose complex grammatical devices for emphasis or focus. Finally, learners should be careful with the vocabulary, grammatical patterns and sentence structures to create a reasonable meaning and an appropriate style to the subject matter and reader.

In agreement with Hedge (2005, p. 51), "process writing may be a more effective method of teaching writing as it helps students to focus on the process of creating text through the various stages of generating ideas, drafting, revising, and editing". Hedge clarifies that students can further develop their writing skills through a number of activities as represented in Figure 3.

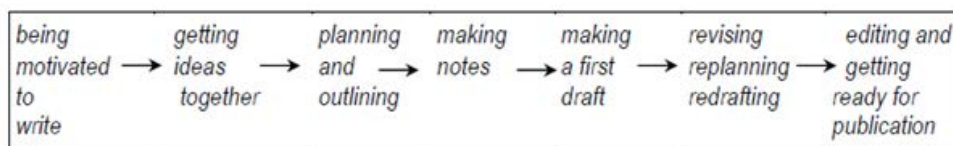


Figure 3. Writing process by Hedge, 2005, p.28.

Each workshop was designed with the following sections: prewriting, drafting, redrafting, and editing. In the prewriting section, warm-up activities were included to get the students involved in the workshop, to learn about the workshop's expectations, to plan the activities they would develop, and finally, to take notes related to the topic they were studying. Following those introductory activities, the drafting section showed activities to create their preliminary version, taking into account the students' motivation to write. Afterward, while students were reflecting upon their first draft, they were able to find their mistakes and suggest solutions to write a second draft. In the next step called editing, students had the opportunity to receive the tutor's feedback, and suggest amendments in their written compositions. Finally, students were ready to socialize their final written paper.

#### Evaluation and follow-up

This final stage in the research cycle included activities suggested for the students to practice what they learned in the problematizing tutoring sessions. In this stage, a survey was implemented in which students could express their opinions in relation to the methodology used in the problematizing tutoring sessions. Consequently, the pre-intervention stages allowed tutors to help students solve their weaknesses regarding learning English as a foreign language, and their performance in writing. The research cycle displayed a tacit correspondence with the pedagogic guidelines, which are the foundations for the teaching practices at the university. In other words, the See, Judge, and Act Method is also immersed in the research cycle itself, but it is necessary to establish more specific time intervals for each stage in the problematizing tutoring to guarantee better outcomes and promote a meaningful learning space.

#### Research instruments

As this study adjusted to the parameters of an action research project, the following instruments were used to collect data which contributed to responses regarding the role of problematizing tutoring sessions in the development of writing skills in English as a foreign language. Researchers selected and implemented three data collection instruments that are displayed as the following:

#### Tutor's journals

Over the course of this study, the tutor teacher kept a journal, which was used to register facts related to the problematizing tutoring sessions. In this manner, the tutor's journal gave account of the students' performance while conducting writing tasks under the framework of the problematizing tutoring sessions mediated by the problematizing pedagogy. The tutor recorded her insights and observations bearing in mind what students were expected to do during the different stages of the tutoring sessions, which were referred to as reflection, question, guidance, discovery, interaction and production.

Furthermore, the tutor's journal elicited information on the impact problematizing tutoring may have had on students' writing development in legal English practice, as well as her considerations about the cycle implemented. In this regard, Hinds (2010) states that the use of journals as research instruments should be aligned with the research questions, as they state the specific issue to be tackled. In this case, this study intended to delve into to what extent problematizing tutoring may contribute to the development of EFL students' writing skills. Thus, the tutor's journal was oriented to provide a wealth of information regarding the influence of problematizing tutoring sessions on students' writing performance. Insights arising from the teacher journal shed light on the findings derived from the other data collection instruments: the survey and students' artifacts.

#### Students' artifacts

According to Chism (2018) "educators are always seeking artifacts that might paint a more detailed picture of their students' learning. What students do, say, and produce are important artifacts in determining the impact of instruction" (n.p). In this case, these are the students' written productions which allowed the researchers to observe and analyze students' progress over the course of the problematizing tutoring sessions. They represented students' writing performance and served to analyze the progress they had made referring to organizing their ideas on paper, the use of connectors, and the sequences they followed while creating a paragraph.

At the beginning of this study, the students' writing samples were revised, and an error categorization arose. The evidence displayed a misuse of vocabulary, connectors, pronouns, linking words, verb patterns and gender agreement. Consequently, problematizing tutoring sessions were designed to respond to the students' needs.

Writing exercises produced by third semester Law students constituted another data source, and the exercises were developed in three different stages referred to as diagnosis, writing task, and a final writing task. Every stage focused on finding students' weaknesses in their writing and designing interventions to help them overcome specific errors discovered while they were enrolled in problematizing tutoring sessions (Appendix 1).

The first writing task consisted of writing a letter to a friend following a given structure. Subsequently, the writing samples were assessed and analyzed based on a writing rubric (Appendix 2) used at the university, which provided a standard scoring and task description. The second writing task consisted of interpreting a message fragment and writing a reply to it using at least 30 to 50 words. The final writing task involved writing a text of four paragraphs as a response to a previous email in a legal case.

### Survey

At the end of the study, a survey was conducted to collect students' insights regarding problematizing tutoring sessions (Appendix 3). Cohen, Manion, and Morrison (2007) assert that

*Typically, surveys gather data at a particular point in time with the intention of describing the nature of existing conditions, or identifying standards against which existing conditions can be compared, or determining the relationships that exist between specific events. (p. 205)*

Accordingly, the survey in this study required students to answer questions about aspects such as the requirements and purposes to conduct tutoring sessions at the university. Then, the students provided their opinions on topics as the schedule, the availability of rooms and teachers. Finally, they commented on why they were prompted to attend tutoring sessions.

The data collection instruments previously mentioned provided information to study the effectiveness of problematizing tutoring in students' written compositions. The survey helped the researchers detect the perceptions students had in relation to the process carried out in the problematizing tutoring sessions. It was composed of open and closed questions and conducted at the end of the tutoring sessions. Tutees had the opportunity to make suggestions on how to improve the activities developed in the pedagogical intervention. Open-ended questions supplied information about students' insights regarding the cycle of problematizing tutoring sessions proposed by the researchers, as well as suggestions to further implement them. As for closed-ended questions, they rendered data concerning the students' level of satisfaction with the tutoring provided and their academic achievements in relation to their writing skills in English.

### Data analysis

Data analysis was conducted under the principles of Grounded Theory as it allows the researchers to systematize and categorize information in order to be analyzed and interpreted. Lawrence and Tar (2013) state that Grounded Theory "encourages researchers to steer their thinking out of the confines of technical literature and avoid standard ways of thinking about the data" (p. 31). The information was gathered from the three instruments previously described to study a process: students' writing performance over the course of problematizing tutoring sessions. In this regard, Creswell and Maietta (2002) assert that "at the heart of Grounded Theory there is a process that you would like to explain" (p. 157). Hence, data were collected and coded in order to determine commonalities and variations, which subsequently gave rise to categories aimed at providing insights about the research problem and the research question.

As a result of the data analysis, three categories emerged, which gave account of the problematizing tutoring as a legal English environment, a creative space and a problem-solving context.

### Findings

The three emerging categories are illustrated as follows.

Problematizing tutoring as a legal English environment. Concerning this category, it is important to note that when students were involved in this problematizing tutoring sessions, they overcame some deterring situations, such as peer pressure or lack of confidence. Furthermore, the evidence revealed that students perceived this space as a moment to practice English for Specific Purposes, in this case legal English. However, students realized they needed more time to practice the material in the



problematizing tutoring session and a specific topic to develop deeply: *"I like legal English cases, but I have to use my dictionary more in the tutoring session"* (Survey, student 1, 16-05-16).

In this regard, Al-Jumaily (2015) highlights the correlation between length of time and the writing improvement, as students' performance displays a positive tendency if they are allowed sufficient time. In both EFL and ESL settings, writing is refined over time and constant practice. Due to its complexity, it also demands a variety of methodologies (Mermelstein, 2015) adapted to the students' needs. In this case, tutoring transcends the traditional model characterized by mere accompaniment to compel learners to reflect on their own learning processes beyond the scope of their concrete difficulties.

The tutor reported her insights on this aspect: *"time was not enough to foster writing activities because students focused on speaking about neighbor's conflicts"* (Tutor's journal, 21-04-16). When the students' artifacts were checked, it was noticed that they practiced using the correct pronouns focused on a comic. Hedge's theory (2005), suggests that writing can emerge more easily if students are given a comic to motivate the writing process. It was inferred that in this case, despite the fact that most of the students did not write all the pronouns, they could demonstrate they managed the topic better than before as they committed fewer errors. In this sense, Dickinson (2014) noted that *"texts written on self-selected topics in a series of timed writing activities exhibited significantly higher fluency than those written on teacher-assigned topics"* (p. 23). In this study, selected topics tended to meet students' needs and interests as they correlated with their field of studies: law.

Problematizing tutoring as a creative space. It was found that the allotted time for these sessions helped students become acquainted with the vocabulary that was practiced and suggested in the material. Most of the students argued that more time was necessary to finish the suggested activities, but they could respond to the activities presented in the session: *"tutoring needs to be longer so I can express my ideas more"* (Survey, student 2, 16-05-16). In relation to this category, the tutor's journal contributed some information, which evidenced that when students faced problematizing tutoring sessions after developing activities suggested in the workshops, they asked for more exercises to practice. Tutor expressed that *"in this session, students internalized better the suggested activities, they showed more interest, and they created amazing cases using the proposed structure"* (Tutor's journal, 14-03-16)

The results of this study support the notion that tutoring sessions are prone to becoming a learning scenario to foster students' creativity as they are confronting their own learning difficulties. In this concern, Marashi and Dadari (2012) highlight the range of writing tasks, the amount of input and the lesson procedures as vital aspects to encourage learners to be more creative. In this case, problematizing tutoring sessions adjusted to a cycle intended to render students with opportunities to interact, express their queries along with reflecting on their own learning process, and devise suitable strategies to tackle their difficulties at writing. Thus, students were guided to surpass their current level as they attended problematizing tutoring sessions.

Problematizing tutoring as problem-solving context. Upon review, the collected information revealed by students, attending problematizing tutoring sessions was a worthwhile experience to increase their legal vocabulary through some simple, short legal cases, in which they faced specific situations and established possible solutions. Concerning the setting and time, most of the students stated it was necessary for them to be in a space exclusively assigned to tutoring, where they have easier access to technological devices: *"The tutoring classrooms are not big and are not equipped with Internet access and computers"* (Survey, student 4, 16-05-16).

As for problematizing tutoring, it is intended to call students to action regarding their own learning difficulties as a result of prior reflection and guidance. In other words, problematizing tutoring assisted students in becoming more aware of their own learning as they engaged in activities oriented to promote essential processes ranging from observation to production. According to Xiao (2007), self-regulation is of great importance since it allows the learners to inquire into their cognitive activities and devise strategies to improve their performance.

## Conclusions

Considering the objectives of this study, the researchers concluded that tutoring sessions can become problematizing learning scenarios, provided that students reflect on their own learning difficulties or gaps in knowledge and devise suitable strategies to overcome them. In this sense, problematizing tutoring sessions are conceived as a legal English environment, a creative space, and a problem-solving context.

Despite the fact that in some cases problematizing tutoring effectively assisted students in improving their writing skills in English, it is essential to broaden its scope and generate pedagogical interventions as tools to help them improve specific issues related to writing in English.

Concerning the material designed, the researchers discovered that materials focused on specific purposes tend to be more effective than the typical assessment done in a common tutoring session. Participants in this study were immersed in a cycle of problematizing tutoring sessions proposed by the researchers (Figure 2). Additionally, it took into account law issues in order to contribute to a better writing performance in English.

### Pedagogical Implications

The most salient outcome of this study is that it has shown that problematizing tutoring as a pedagogical intervention allowed students to develop significant activities which served three-fold learning purposes, namely, discovery of own weaknesses, reflection on own performance, and strategies design. In this regard, it is worthwhile to highlight that problematizing tutoring is not limited to EFL contexts, but its scope also comprises ESL settings as it is oriented to supporting students so that they become capable of improving their communicative performance.

EFL and ESL students confront difficulties in order to maximize their writing linguistic accuracy. Both contexts should provide them with opportunities to hone their communication skills, and tutoring constitutes a shared strategy to ensure better practices regarding writing. In this case, based on the results obtained from the analysis, it can be stated that students overcame some of their weaknesses related to specific topics in writing. Nevertheless, they continued to present some weaknesses associated with supporting and connecting their ideas in the text, so it is necessary to develop further sessions.

Comparing the students' artifacts before and after the pedagogical intervention, it was observed that most of the students involved in this study overcame some of their weaknesses in relation to the use of pronouns, the verb "to be", and legal vocabulary. Nonetheless, it is required to create a writing route starting from very basic topics to more complex issues.

This route would favor the approach to writing as a process, which comprises four primary stages named as planning, drafting, revising and editing. In this regard, Seow (2002) also refers to three extra stages which are "externally imposed on students by the teacher, namely, responding (sharing), evaluating and post-writing" (p. 316). According to Brown (2007), process writing encourages students to reflect on the procedures and actions they conduct while they are composing. Furthermore, process writing allows them to develop a sense of commitment towards their own writings, as they are expected to plan, draft, revise and rewrite.

In fact, the cycle of problematizing tutoring essentially adheres to the writing process approach, which may be implemented, adapted and enriched within EFL and ESL contexts due to the fact that it is aimed at nurturing not only writing practices, but also self-reflection on writing processes and strategies.

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## Appendix 1

Sample of tutor's comments in relation to tutees' writing tasks

	Writing task 1	Writing task 2	Writing task 3
Student F	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ No cohesive ideas.</li> <li>✓ Connectors are not used to link sentences and paragraphs.</li> <li>✓ Problems in the proper use of personal pronouns, the IT pronoun is usually omitted.</li> <li>✓ Most of the sentences adjust to a basic structure.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ A narrow range of vocabulary is evident.</li> <li>✓ Excessive and careless use of the definite article THE.</li> <li>✓ The ideas expressed are comprehensible, however, some of them remain ambiguous.</li> </ul>	<p>Some errors regarding aspects such as:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ Tenses.</li> <li>✓ Cohesion and coherence.</li> </ul>
Student H	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ No understanding of the proper use and differentiation between adjectives and adverbs.</li> <li>✓ Spelling mistakes.</li> <li>✓ Difficulty to link the sentences and select the appropriate words according to the idea to be expressed.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ Difficulty to use basic tenses.</li> <li>✓ Short answers are provided and there is no room for new vocabulary.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ Inappropriate use of certain vocabulary.</li> <li>✓ Repetitive spelling errors.</li> <li>✓ Little follow-up of the instructions given.</li> </ul>

## Appendix 2

### Writing Rubric



#### WRITING RUBRIC

STUDENT'S NAME: \_\_\_\_\_

ACADEMIC PROGRAM: \_\_\_\_\_ SEMESTER: \_\_\_\_\_

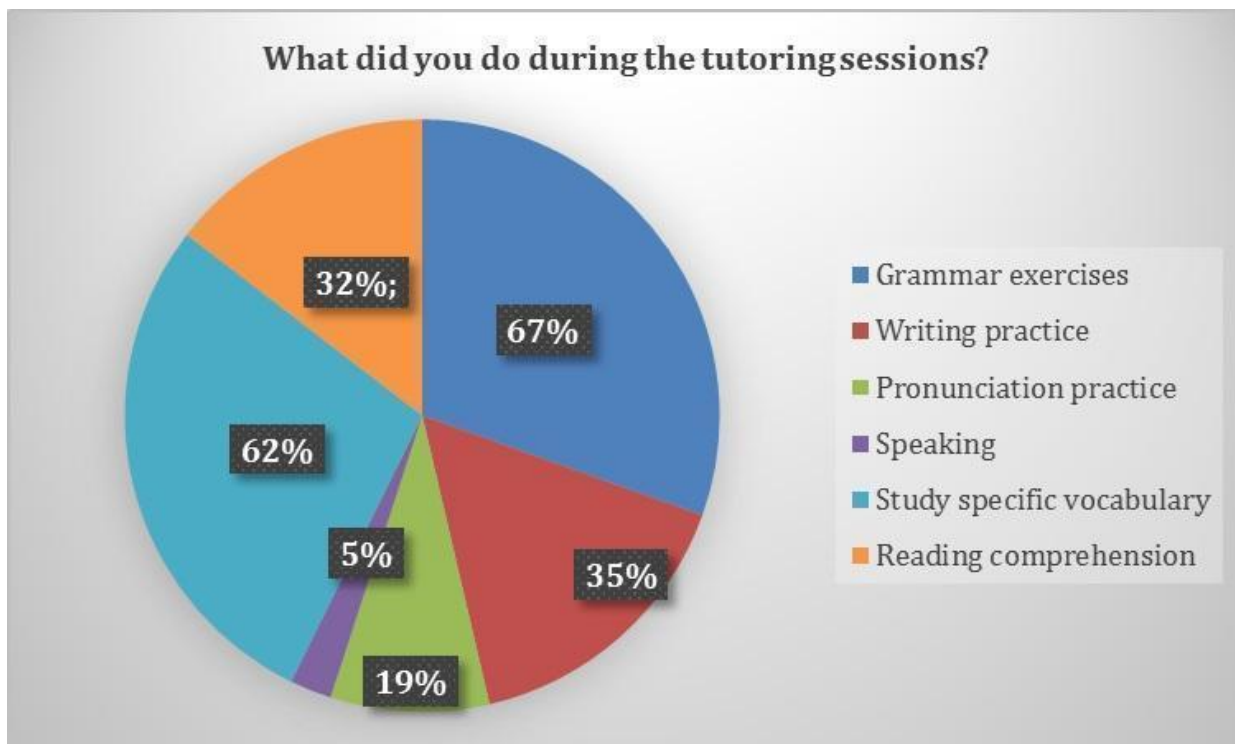
SCALE	1	2	3	4	5	Total
<b>FEATURES</b>	<b>Inadequate</b>	<b>Minimal</b>	<b>Adequate</b>	<b>Effective</b>	<b>Exemplary</b>	
<b>Content</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>There is no clear central idea.</li> <li>Details are sparse and/or confusing.</li> <li>Makes no sense.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Central idea is unclear.</li> <li>Details need elaboration to clarify the central idea.</li> <li>Focus is lost causing confusion for the reader.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Presents a central idea about the topic.</li> <li>Develops the central idea but details are general, or the elaboration uneven.</li> <li>Focus shift slightly, but is generally sustained.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Presents a clear central idea about the topic.</li> <li>Develops the central idea and relevant details without being specific.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Presents an elaborate central idea</li> <li>Fully develops the central idea with specific, relevant details.</li> <li>Sustains focus on central idea throughout the writing.</li> </ul>	
<b>Organization</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Doesn't have an introduction, body, and conclusion.</li> <li>Presents a limited use of vocabulary.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Attempts an introduction, body, and conclusion; however, one or more of these components are confusing.</li> <li>Presents information in an illogical order throughout the writing.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Attempts an introduction, body, and conclusion; however, one or more of these components are weak or ineffective.</li> <li>Provides a simplistic, repetitious, or hesitant progression of ideas throughout the writing.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Has an introduction, body, and conclusion</li> <li>Provides a logical progression of ideas throughout the writing.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Has an effective introduction, body and conclusion.</li> <li>Provides a smooth progression of ideas by using transitional devices throughout the writing.</li> </ul>	
<b>Mechanics</b>	<b>Minimal Mechanics/Minimal Response</b> <b>Serious and consistent errors</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Punctuation</li> <li>Capitalization</li> <li>Spelling</li> </ul> Impedes readability	<b>Limited Mechanics</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Begins to impede readability</li> <li>Frequent errors                             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Punctuation</li> <li>Capitalization</li> <li>Spelling</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	<b>Adequate Mechanics</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Some errors                             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Punctuation</li> <li>Capitalization</li> <li>Spelling</li> </ul> </li> <li>Needs editing but doesn't impede readability</li> </ul>	<b>Effective Mechanics</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Needs some editing</li> <li>Few errors                             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Punctuation</li> <li>Capitalization</li> <li>Spelling</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	<b>Exemplary Mechanics</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Needs little or no editing</li> <li>May have minor errors                             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Punctuation</li> <li>Capitalization</li> <li>Spelling</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	
<b>Word choice /Grammar usage</b>	<b>Minimal Word Choice/ Grammar Usage/Minimal Response</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Inadequate, imprecise, repetitive.</li> <li>Frequent inconsistencies in grammar usage.</li> </ul>	<b>Limited Word Choice/ Grammar Usage</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Vague, redundant, simplistic.</li> <li>Several inconsistencies in grammar usage.</li> </ul>	<b>Adequate Word Choice/ Grammar Usage</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Appropriate, specific.</li> <li>Somewhat consistent grammar usage.</li> </ul>	<b>Effective Word Choice/ Grammar Usage</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Appropriate, precise/concise, clear.</li> <li>Mostly consistent grammar usage.</li> </ul>	<b>Exemplary Word Choice/ Grammar Usage</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Vivid, precise, /concise, relevant.</li> <li>Consistent grammar usage.</li> </ul>	
<b>Final score:</b>						



Designed by the FLI Teaching Committee-2016

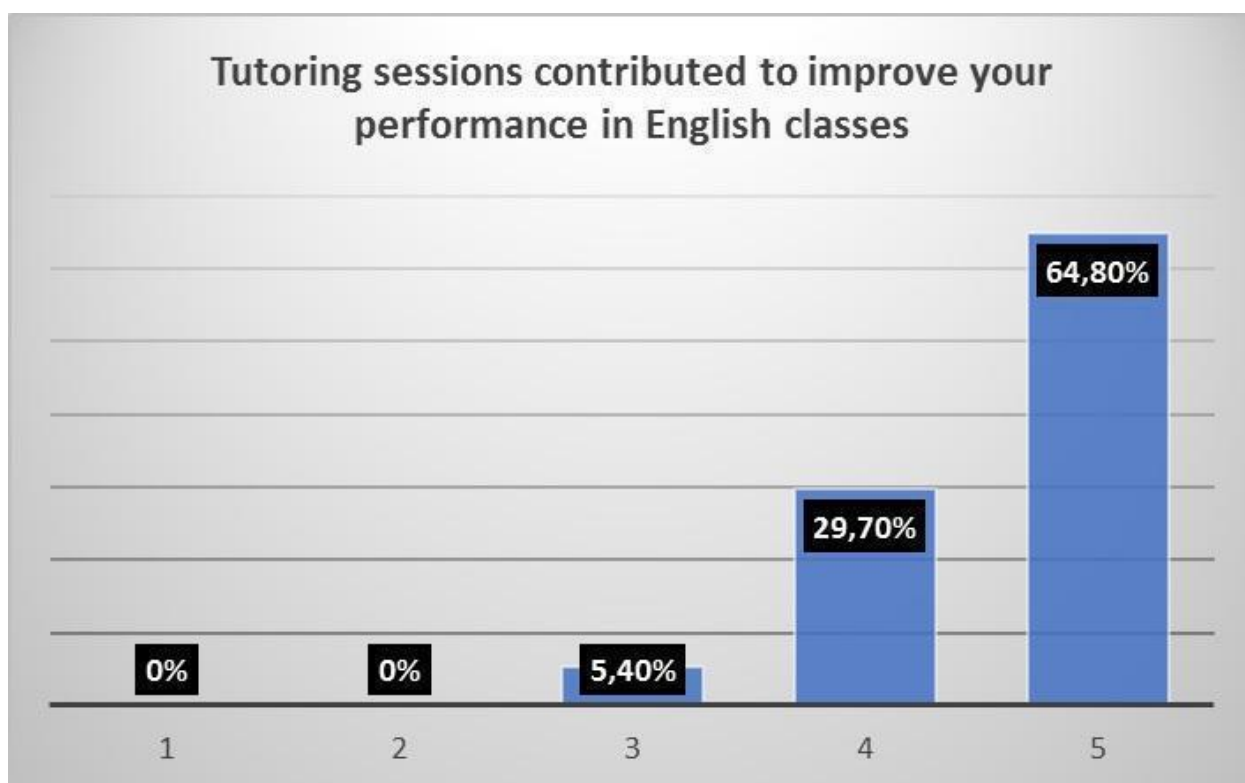
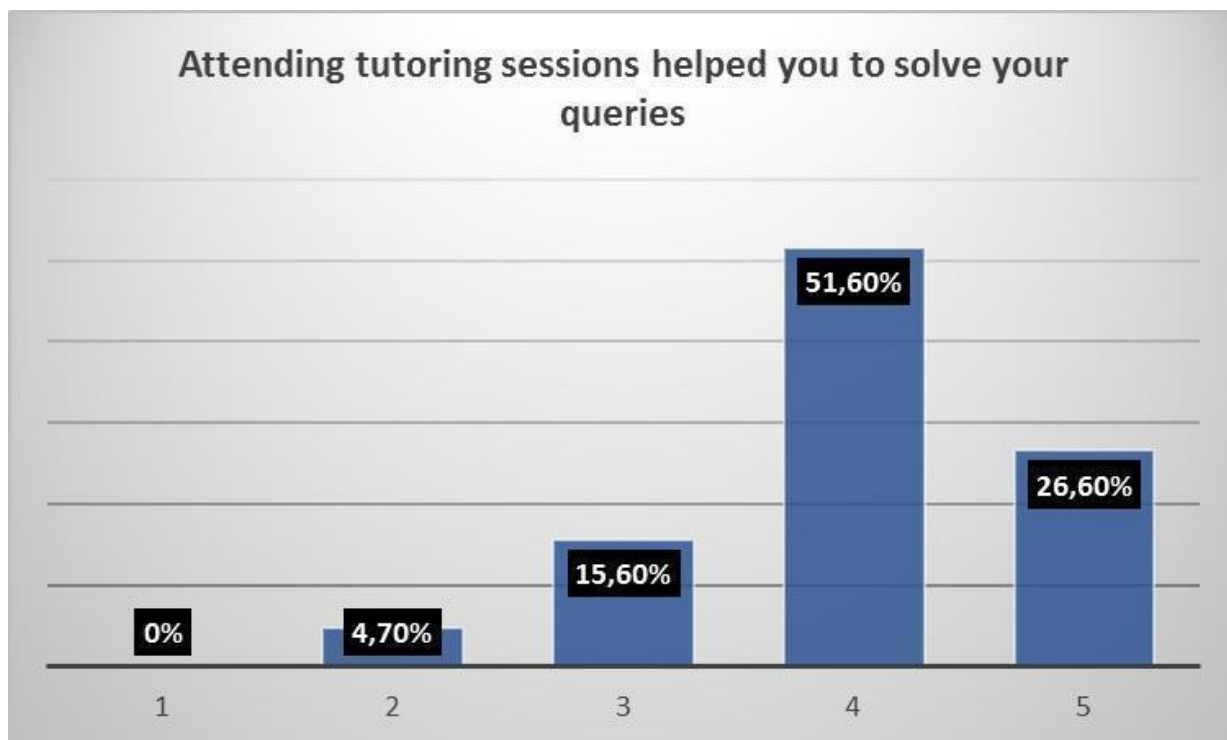
### Appendix 3

#### Survey Insights (sample)



Write down the number you consider according to each statement taking into account the scale below.

5 Strongly Agree	4 Agree	3 Undecided	2 Disagree	1 Strongly Disagree
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Appendix 4

Workshop

**TOWARD THE LEGAL WORLD**  
**SENTENCE STRUCTURE**  
**HOW TO IDENTIFY THE BASIC STRUCTURE TO WRITE A TEXT**  
**WORKSHOP 2**

**GRAMMAR PILL**

When you are going to write a text, you will need to write sentences in a logical order. Use conjunctions and connecting words to enrich your text. Remember that the good use of punctuation is essential.

In the table below, you will find the function of conjunctions and connecting words to use in your writing. In the writing pill, you will read some examples.

<b>To talk about the present</b>	<b>To talk about the past</b>	<b>To give a reason or an example</b>	<b>To say the truth</b>
<p><b>Hoy en día:</b> Nowadays</p> <p><b>Actualmente:</b> Currently, at present, at the present time, now, these days</p>	<p><b>Hace mucho tiempo:</b> A long time ago</p> <p><b>En la antigüedad:</b> In ancient times</p> <p><b>Hace poco tiempo:</b> Not long ago</p>	<p><b>Además:</b> In addition, what's more, besides, furthermore, moreover</p> <p><b>También:</b> Also, besides</p> <p><b>Es más:</b> Moreover</p>	<p><b>Para decir la verdad, para ser sincero:</b> To tell the truth</p> <p><b>En realidad, a decir verdad:</b> In fact</p> <p><b>Realmente, en realidad:</b> Actually, suele confundirse con "actualmente"</p>
<b>To show contrast</b>	<b>To show positive or negative aspects</b>	<b>To show difference and similarity</b>	<b>To conclude</b>
<p><b>Sin embargo, no obstante:</b> However, nevertheless, all the same, still</p> <p><b>Aún así:</b> Even</p>	<p><b>Afortunadamente, por fortuna:</b> Fortunately, happily</p> <p><b>Felizmente, alegremente:</b> Happily</p> <p><b>Desafortunadamente,</b></p>	<p><b>Igualmente:</b> Likewise</p> <p><b>Del mismo modo:</b> In the same way, similarly</p>	<p><b>Por lo tanto, por consiguiente:</b> Therefore</p> <p><b>Consecuentemente, por consiguiente:</b> Consequently</p> <p><b>En consecuencia,</b></p>



<p>so</p> <p><b>A pesar de que, a pesar de todo:</b> notwithstanding, all the same, still, regardless</p>	<p><b>desgraciadamente:</b> Unfortunately, sadly</p> <p><b>Tristemente:</b> Sadly</p>	<p><b>Por otra parte, por otro lado:</b> On the other hand, in contrast</p> <p><b>De todos modos:</b> Anyway</p>	<p><b>así:</b> Thus, as a result</p>
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**WRITING PILL**

**Connectors:** Connectors are words or phrases that connect your ideas. They are used to add pauses and transitions in sentences. They can be particularly useful for sentences that may appear too long.

- **At the present time,** the law protects women's rights.
- The lawyer presented all the evidence; **nevertheless,** it is not conclusive.
- **A long time ago,** women could not exercise the right to vote.
- When a person is injured, he or she suffers physical injuries, **along with** psychological injuries.
- **In addition to** being a great person, the judge is an excellent professional
- The trial was difficult; **fortunately,** most of the jury was honest.
- The fugitive was captured; **therefore,** she will be imprisoned.

**Conjunctions:** Conjunctions are parts of speech that connect words, phrases, clauses, or sentences.

- And: I like tea and coffee.
- Because: She goes to the tennis club because she likes to play tennis.
- But: He reads magazines, but he doesn't like to read books.
- In spite of: He looks very fit in spite of his age.
- Or: Do you like tea or coffee?

**PRE-WRITING**

**VOCABULARY**

Here are some legal words which can help you to understand the following reading activity you also can use them in this workshop.

**Defendant:** A person, company, etc., against whom a claim or charge is brought in a court.

**Victim:** A person who suffers from a destructive or injurious action.

**Lawyer:** A person whose profession is to represent clients in a court of law or to advice or act for clients in other legal matters.

**Eyewitness:** A person who actually sees some act, occurrence or thing and can give a firsthand account of it.

**Jury:** A group of people sworn to render a verdict or answer a set of questions officially made to them.

**Judge:** A public officer authorized to hear and decide cases in a court of law.

### DRAFTING

#### Sequence Writing

Read the following sentences and organize them according to the picture's description.



- \_\_\_ Mr. Brown had an accident with his neighbor's iron.
- \_\_\_ The iron was in the socket, but was apparently off.
- \_\_\_ The victim has the right to blame the defendant for being careless.
- \_\_\_ The judge declared the defendant guilty.
- \_\_\_ Mr. Larson was watching TV when Mr. Brown knocked at her door.
- \_\_\_ Mr. Brown burned his forearm when he tried to unlock the iron cord from the socket.
- \_\_\_ The jury listened to the lawyer as he was describing the victim's testimony.

### REDRAFTING

Re-write the sentences from the drafting section in the correct order, and make a short text based on the picture and the previous vocabulary. Include the connectors from this workshop.

<hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/>
---

### WRITING A PARAGRAPH

A paragraph is consisted of three different parts. These parts are: ~~s~~ Topic sentence

- ➔ Supporting detail
- ➔ Closing sentence.

- **Topic sentence:** The topic sentence is the first sentence in the paragraph. It introduces the main idea.
- **Supporting sentences:** Supporting sentences come directly after the topic sentence, and form the body of the paragraph. They give details to develop and support the paragraph's main idea.
- **Closing sentence:** The closing sentence is the last sentence in the paragraph. It restates the paragraph's main idea.

### EDITING

Based on this picture, report what happens in each of the following pictures. Write sentences in an organized manner. Include the connectors from the the previous section.



Noisy Neighbour