

Integrating Feedback in a Rich Digital Writing Environment with Padlet

Ralf Giebler & Jana Maria Olejniczak

Abstract *In this chapter, it is argued that Padlet can be used to set up a rich digital writing environment which has the potential to increase the quality of the writing processes through feedback. The functionalities of Padlet enable the provision and reception of feedback about content-based as well as language-related issues while students work on an essay-writing task. Content information about the topic of their essay as well as criteria for assessing the quality of texts are provided via various individual pads (i.e. the posts on the canvas) on Padlet. The online notice board of Padlet is used to foster computer-mediated writing and create a feedback ecology that allows for multi-directional and multi-faceted feedback, including peer and teacher feedback.*

Keywords *Padlet; online collaborative feedback; digital feedback; EFL writing; advance organizer*

1. Introduction

In this contribution, we suggest using Padlet as a tool for planning, feedback and formative assessment in the pre-writing or drafting stage of a composition task. Padlet can be characterized as an “online notice board” (Schluer, 2022, p. 93) that supports learners in the brainstorming phase where ideas need to be grouped and categorized thematically. In addition, “different multimedia elements and other websites can be posted as well and can be utilized for feed-forward suggestions” (Schluer, 2022, p. 93) – both by peers and the teacher (cf. Aubrey, 2014).

Research tells us that students tend to be more expressive in modes that facilitate the collaborative construction of knowledge (Li, 2021, p. 14). When L2 learners work in pairs and draw on technological tools, they negotiate meaning, make joint decisions throughout the writing process, and produce a single text with shared responsibility and co-ownership (Li, 2018; Storch, 2002). Writing has always been considered as a complex activity. Since in the digital age it has been “reconceptualized as multimodal composing, which enables writers to deploy multiple semiotic resources (e.g., linguistic, visual, audio, gestural, spatial) to construct meaning and engage audience” (Li, 2021, p. 8), the complex-

ity has increased. The “process of meaning making and knowledge transformation” in a digital environment can be regarded “as dynamic, non-linear, and recursive rather than a product-oriented activity” (Li, 2021, p. 15).

Cloud editors or cloud-based editing applications, such as Google Docs or Padlet, allow for interactive and collaborative online feedback, both synchronously and asynchronously (Schluer, 2022, p. 92). Collaborative online editors support learners in the process of planning, editing, and revising a text-based production task. Computer-mediated writing allows students to engage in text-based communication and prompt interaction. Furthermore, in asynchronous phases of writing, students may also take the time to pause, reflect, and think carefully during writing and in-between their interactive moves. Teachers may still wonder whether there are also ways to realize formative assessment and provide adequate and timely feedback to L2 writers. In fact, Padlet allows for an easy organization of comments and resources in different multimedia formats. It is useful for feedback on brainstorming and categorization tasks in the pre-writing stage. Teachers and peers can reply to the text in pads by ranking, rating, coloring or commenting. Those comments appear in a chat-like format and may thus initiate further dialogues about the text among the students. Even first-time users find Padlet easy to operate (Sari, 2019).

Another advantage in this respect is that learners can respond to the feedback from various sources quickly afterwards. Fuccio (2014, p. 209) points out that localizing comments is easier for learners as they are attached to specific topic-related pads in the Padlet. Easy localization of comments may also lead to several feedback cycles (Wood, 2019) and stimulate an asynchronous drafting and editing mode among peers and their instructor. More extended discussions about topic-, language- and genre-related aspects of the writing task can arise, which makes Padlet an effective tool in the digitally enhanced EFL writing class.

Schluer (2022, p. 96) summarizes research from studies on online collaborative feedback tools that demonstrate the effectiveness of online collaborative feedback regarding writing performance and the development of EFL learners' academic writing skills. Feedback through comments on clearly localized text passages seems to encourage self-correction overall and thus strengthens self-regulated learning (Shintani, 2016, pp. 527–528, cited in Schluer, 2022, p. 96).

2. How to Use Padlet for Feedback and Formative Assessment in EFL Writing

In our teaching suggestion, a Padlet is created that consists of prompts, topic-related information and multimodal content. It is offered to learners at the onset of the writing task. As such, it comes to the learner as an advance organizer – an idea that is connected to concepts of self-regulated learning. Ausubel (1960) originally proposed the concept of the advance organizer, a conceptual model used for activating prior knowledge and organizing contents prior to receiving new information. Overall, the advance organizer can be seen as a repertoire of information, relevant to accomplish the writing task. Learning is enhanced when learners can link information to their existing cognitive structures,

thereby enabling them to organize and interpret new information. In that sense advance organizers can either present salient prerequisite knowledge not known to the learner or help the learner establish connections between relevant dimensions of existing knowledge and new pieces of information. In the context of *digital EFL* writing, advance organizers appear to be of high relevance, since writing in a digital environment tends to be non-linear and more cyclical. Padlet is a digital notice board which allows for the integration of multimedia content. As an enhanced digital space, it can be used to share and make public education-specific content. Padlet as a commonly used tool is flexible enough to provide, e.g., a topic-related word bank, background information about the specific topic, or genre-specific writing instructions, to name but a few. However, the focus will be on topic-related information that is relevant for the writing task at stake. As learners use Padlet to give each other feedback, it turns into a rich writing and feedback environment in which Computer-Mediated Communication (CMC) and Computer-Mediated Teacher and Peer Feedback (CMTF, CMPF) are realized.

2.1. Structure of our Padlet

Our idea of creating a rich digital writing environment with the help of Padlet supports individual as well as collaborative writing processes. The Padlet does not prescribe a specific linear order of text composing, since the learners are to work at their own pace, making use of and contributing themselves to the evolving digital learning environment. As learners see how the Padlet is filled with additional information, they are also invited to evaluate the usefulness of the information.

For this purpose, the Padlet provides a template for giving feedback on the comments of their peers. Furthermore, Padlet opens up a digital space for negotiating open questions and receiving feedback from the teacher and from fellow students. With the help of Padlet, multi-directional and multi-faceted feedback can be staged. Through its non-linear structure and various interactive options, “feed back” as well as “feed up” and “feed forward” can be realized. These terms are used to describe different aspects of feedback in instructional design and play a distinct role in the learning process (cf. Hattie, Beywl, & Zierer, 2013, p. 209):

- (1) Feed Up: The concept of “feed up” in feedback refers to providing students with a clear understanding of the learning goals or objectives. It helps students understand what is expected of them and what they are trying to achieve. This type of feedback is forward-looking and focuses on the desired outcomes of the writing task.
- (2) Feed Forward: “Feed forward” feedback, on the other hand, is about providing guidance and suggestions for improvement before a student submits a final assignment or assessment. It is proactive and helps students improve their texts before grading. Feed forward is often seen as more formative, with the aim of supporting learning and skill development rather than simply assessing performance.
- (3) Feed Back: This type of feedback is about monitoring the writing process and assessing how much progress has been made. Progress concerns the amount of information and the level of organizing pieces of information into coherent paragraphs. It

is also about reflecting on the amount of information, e.g. about the topic *American Dream*, that learners have already found and selected.

Each feedback type can operate at four levels (Hattie & Timperley, 2007, p. 87):

- (1) Task
- (2) Process
- (3) Self-regulation
- (4) Self

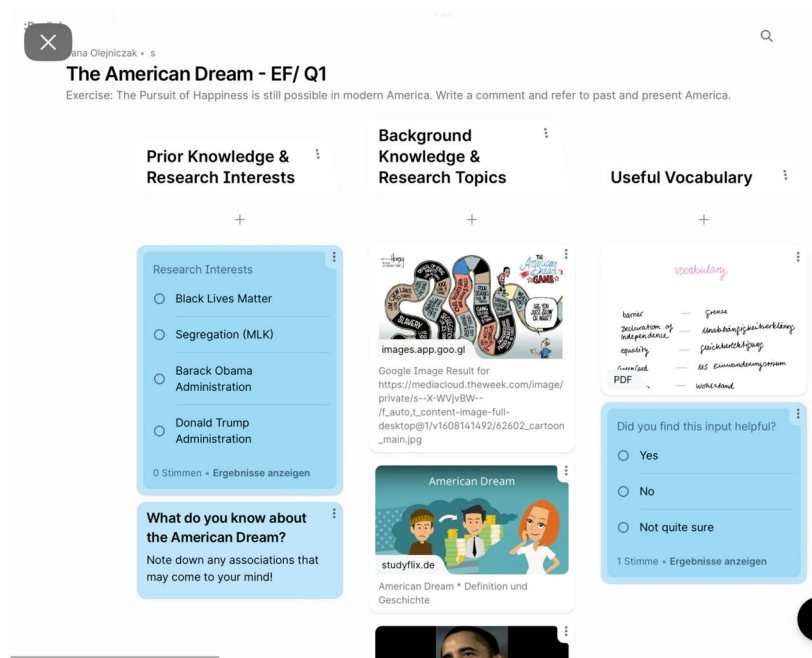
Feedback related to the task aims at ensuring that learners know what to do and understand what the task involves. Feedback related to the process focusses on the steps that need to be taken during the writing process, e.g. planning, researching, drafting, editing. The third level of feedback addresses learners' level of self-regulation, i.e. in how far they manage to exploit the various sources of input and adapt them to their own line of argument. Feedback might also operate on the individual learner's personality when they provide and receive feedback by their peers. Here, mitigation strategies and criteria for providing peer feedback are essential.

2.2. Example: A Padlet about the American Dream

The exemplary Padlet presented in this paper deals with the topic of the American Dream: its origins and its development up to the present day. The American Dream is one of the obligatory topics for the German high school diploma, which is administered as a statewide mandatory test (MSB, 2023, pp. 26, 34). The instruction for the essay-writing task is as follows: "The pursuit of happiness is still possible in modern America. Write a comment and refer to past and present America."

Seven different sections of the Padlet (pads) provide students with a broad range of topic-related input materials. Besides one section that evokes prior knowledge and asks for research interests, learners also have the opportunity to watch various YouTube videos that offer historical, factual information about the concepts underlying the *American Dream*. Furthermore, to prepare the ground for the comment, also critical voices and YouTube videos are provided. Depending on their individual field of interest, learners search for and add videos, poems, pictures, or any other digital resources relevant to the topic. For the evaluation of these resources, the peers come into play.

Figure 1: Building Blocks of the Exemplary Padlet



3. Conceptualizing Different Functions of Feedback in Padlet

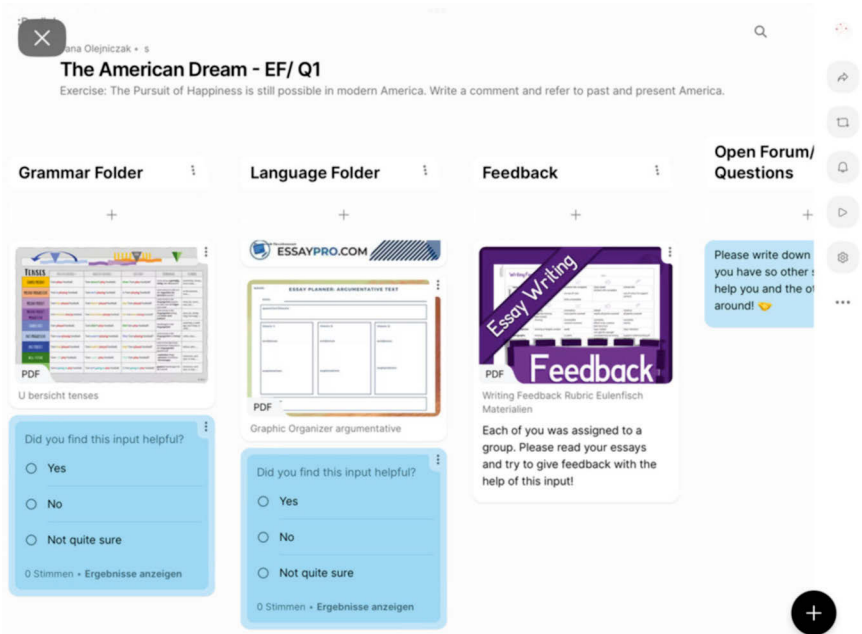
In this passage, we describe how the various functions of the single pads and their direction for providing feedback can be realized. The description is general enough to help clarify the underlying principle and options for feedback in each section so that our teaching idea could also be applied to other topic fields currently addressed in TEFL (Teaching English as a Foreign Language).

3.1. Feed-up by Activating Prior Knowledge and Supporting Learners in Identifying Their Own Research Interests in the Topic

Two sections intend to activate learners' possible background knowledge and cater for different research interests, which can be chosen individually. Moreover, the pads could be used as a timeline that provides orientation for discussing the current topic. Although the structure of the Padlet is intertwined, students can read through and work on the different pads from left to right. For reaping the didactic benefits of our Padlet, we suggest specific Padlet settings so that the writing and feedback processes are supported as effectively as possible with plenty of possibilities for interaction between the teacher and the students themselves. The setting option 'Engagement' can be used to decide how everyone will interact with the Padlet. We allow students to like posts, rate them with stars or even evaluate the content with the help of a grading system. Thus, the Padlet creates space for differentiation, considering the variability among learners: While some stu-

dents might skip certain steps to come up with their final essay, others may want to check their language and consult the pad that contains the grammar folder. Additionally, the rich repertoire of YouTube videos allows for an individual focus within the writing process. However, the student is not overwhelmed by various topics but has enough creative space to ask him- or herself: Where am I going? What do I need? What do I want to find out about a particular aspect of the given topic?

Figure 2: Pad with Feedback Options



3.2. Feed-forward by Providing Useful Vocabulary in a Language Folder

Students have access to useful phrases and multi-word units that support them during the writing process. The language folder contains a repertoire of possible sentence beginnings as well as essential topic- and genre-related vocabulary, such as linguistic means for arguing or expressing an opinion. Both pads can strengthen students' motivation as they plan the next steps and see that the target task is within reach.

3.3. Feedback on the Essay Draft

Students are supposed to give feedback about the structure and content of the Padlet as realized by the various pads. For example, in one pad students are asked to evaluate whether they find specific input helpful. There are also pads which encourage peer feedback (cf. Figure 2). On the basis of their peers' feedback, students revise their draft before handing in the final essay to their teacher. Peer feedback allows for a dynamic and

meaningful discourse about the text between learners, which is both concerned with negotiation of meaning and of form. To support peer feedback, the pad is linked to a feedback sheet that draws learners' attention to various aspects of their writing. In detail, the feedback sheet is included in the pad 'feedback'. It contains four levels of language and content-related proficiency and helps students and teachers to identify well-written parts, as well as some parts that need to be improved. Additionally, the feedback sheet helps students to reflect on whether they can deal with complex texts on their own or whether they need more support in mastering a particular genre.

It is essential that in this round of feedback, positive as well as negative aspects will be addressed. Thus, peer feedback can provide a fairly detailed and balanced form of feedback, which also gives students a first impression of how their essay might be received by a diverse readership. In an attempt to improve their essays, students are supposed to, e.g., rewrite specific phrases or rethink their line of argument or their flow of ideas. Subsequently, i.e. after the peer feedback, the teacher has the chance to gain more insights about the individual revision and editing processes than s/he would normally get in an ordinary, paper-and-pencil-based writing class. In the final section of this paper, we will also turn to additional technical settings in Padlet.

4. Conclusion

This chapter has presented a teaching idea that facilitates students' pre-writing processes through advance organizers and collaborative feedback exchanges on Padlet. On an exemplary basis, it has outlined different settings and sample pads to support the students in an essay-writing task. Beyond that, teachers can easily adjust the settings of a Padlet in further ways. For example, in 'Posts', you control the rules for new and existing posts on your Padlet. If you click 'Show' for the 'Author and Timestamp' option, posts by users who are logged into their accounts will contain the author's name and timestamp. In order to retrace every comment made by their students and track potentially rude or offensive comments in the pads, we recommend that teachers activate this 'Author and Timestamp' option in the Padlet settings. Moreover, we would encourage teachers to choose the option 'Manual Approval', which means that the teacher needs to check every new post before it turns visible. In case a particular group of learners gives the impression of being mature enough, the setting option 'Automatic Approval' could be chosen. This would also reduce potential time delays and thus enhance student interactions on the Padlet. Adapting the Padlet to different topics is also easy, since the feedback options and language-related resources can be kept for writing tasks on different topics which are demanded by the curricula, such as dystopian and utopian worlds and globalization (MSB, 2023, p. 35).

Nevertheless, the idea of the Padlet must be viewed critically in terms of the technical requirements. As it is an online tool, a stable internet connection is a prerequisite. Constant access to the internet can also be a problem for learners since the risk of distraction is given. Furthermore, teachers cannot know for sure whether the learners produced the text all by themselves and to what extent they made use of internet resources. However,

Padlet offers a tracking function which helps teachers to observe and track their learners' step-by-step progress.

In the future, we hope to recruit student teachers and in-service teachers who are willing to try out Padlet as an advance organizer as well as a means for realizing online collaborative feedback. Padlet has a clear potential to change the writing process in the digital world. Reading and writing will be meshed as learners process feedback, review pads with topic-related resources and edit their text in the various pads. Concerning teacher education and training, we hope to be able to stir reflection among practicing teachers regarding the non-linear, reflexive and collaborative nature of writing in the digitally enhanced EFL classroom.

In fact, writing in the digital age goes far beyond the ability to read and write. Digital literacies are fluid and dynamic as they highlight the agency of writers in all the stages of a process-oriented writing curriculum. Padlet supports writers while engaging in meaning-making through deploying multimedia resources. The use of a Padlet in the EFL classroom places literacy practices in a digitally enhanced social context, which is characterized by "shared understandings, ideologies and social identities as well as the social rules that regulate the access and distribution of texts" (Li, 2021, p. 26). As the digital writing environment of the Padlet is non-linear, dynamic and allows for flexible usage, it helps to realize self-regulated learning. Padlet allows for open questions which stimulate reflective thinking and meta-linguistic awareness about writing and topic-related language use. The threshold "to critically evaluate online information, create multimodal texts, remix online texts, and interact with others in the online learning community" (Li, 2021, p. 26) is thus lowered.

References

- Aubrey, S. (2014). Students' attitudes towards the use of an online editing program in an EAP course. *Kwansei Gakuin University Repository*, 17, 45–55.
- Ausubel, D. P. (1960). The use of advance organizers in the learning and retention of meaningful verbal material. *Journal of Educational Psychology*, 51(5), 267–272. <https://doi.org/10.1037/h0046669>
- Ausubel, D. P., Novak, J. D., & Hanesian, H. (1978). *Educational psychology: A cognitive view*. Holt, Rinehart and Winston.
- Fuccio, D. S. (2014). Cloud power: Shifting L2 writing feedback paradigms via Google Docs. *Journal of Global Literacies, Technologies, and Emerging Pedagogies*, 2(4), 202–233.
- Hattie, J., Beywl, W., & Zierer, K. (2013). *Lernen sichtbar machen*. Schneider-Verlag.
- Hattie, J., & Timperley, H. (2007). The power of feedback. *Review of Educational Research*, 77(1), 81–112.
- Li, M. (2021). *Researching and teaching second language writing in the digital age*. Palgrave Macmillan.
- Ministerium für Schule und Bildung des Landes Nordrhein-Westfalen (MSB) (2023). *Kernlehrplan für die Sekundarstufe II Gymnasium/Gesamtschule in Nordrhein-Westfalen. Englisch*. [Online: <https://www.schulentwicklung.nrw.de/lehrplaene/lehrplannavigator-s-ii/gymnasiale-oberstufe/englisch/englisch-klp-/index.html>, 28.3.2024].

- Sari, A. B. P. (2019). EFL peer feedback through the chatroom in Padlet. *Language and Language Teaching Journal*, 22(1), 46–57. doi:10.24071/llt.2019.220105
- Schluer, J. (2022). *Digital Feedback Methods*. Narr Francke Attempto.
- Shintani, N. (2016). The effects of computer-mediated synchronous and asynchronous direct corrective feedback on writing: A case study. *Computer Assisted Language Learning*, 29(3), 517–538. doi:10.1080/09588221.2014.993400
- Storch, N. (2002). Patterns of interaction in ESL pair work. *Language Learning*, 52(1), 119–158.

Acknowledgments

The first author would like to thank Jana Maria Olejniczak for her suggestion to use Padlet in the way described here.

