MINI SAGA AS A TOOL TO IMPROVE STUDENTS’ ABILITY IN WRITING AND EDITING

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Abstract: Mini saga is a short writing consisting fifty words, no more, no less. Forty-nine words is wrong, fifty-one words is not right. Writing in higher education is assumed to be a competence which, once acquired, enables students to communicate their knowledge and understanding in virtually any context (Lee, 2009). Besides students’ limited skill to apply grammar accurately in writing, they tend to write too long with too many words and phrases. In editing, they must apply their knowledge in grammar, spelling, and formatting. However, although teachers provide students with all skills, students often still stare at the intimidating blank page and teaching writing is still a challenge (Oczkus, 2004). Therefore, to make a mini saga, students should find a short article, review, or short news. Then, they edit a passage which is grammatically correct. Not only make it shorter, but the article should be more concise without sacrificing the meaning. The last step, students write their own short composition and edit it by themselves. This research will focus on a. How to guide students to write efficiently (self-editing) b. How to make students pay attention to word choice, verb tense, preposition, articles, subject verb agreement, spelling, and punctuation.

Keywords: edit, mini saga, write

Introduction
A mini saga is a piece of writing which has exactly fifty words, not including the title, which can have up to fifteen words. A mini saga has to tell a story and have a beginning, middle, and end. It cannot just be a description of something (onestopenglish, 2002). Contraction counts as two words and we do not count the title. The first mini sagas appeared in 1982 in the Daily Telegraph, an English newspaper. They announced the idea of the mini saga and held a competition for the best ones (Dóczi, 2008).

There are students who have rich ideas about anything. Among this kind of students, there are ones who are able to describe their ideas in a very structured way. However, other students are not that blessed. They cannot generate ideas, or if they have an idea, they do not know how to develop the ideas into a composition. These happen for some reasons:

1. Students do not have a chance to read, or even worse, they do not like reading. This causes their lack of ideas. They lack information and they are not aware about anything in particular. Novels, magazines, and newspaper
2. Students do not get used to ask questions to enrich their ideas. They just accept any material given without being curious about what is happening, why things happen, where incidents occur, and after they get a topic, they never discuss it. As a consequence, students stuck on a page and are not able to continue to next page.
3. When teachers asked students to do free writing, they only get a piece of paper from the teachers. After that, they write with no guidance. The teachers decide how many sentences or how many words students have to write, and sometimes, topics are provided. Students do not have any experience of making a spider web to develop the topics, they will not discuss their ideas with their peers, and their experience to read English or even Indonesian texts is very poor.

Correction Takes Teachers’ Time
The red ink will work harder when a teacher is marking written tasks. A teacher could find grammatical error such as:

If the dentist pulls out your tooth, you should throw in the roof.

This sentence is easy to correct. It must be:

you should throw it to the roof.

But how about this one,

A long time ago in a dense forest lies the are very much.

These words do not form a grammatical-correct sentence. The only solution for this kind of sentence is to rewrite it. Other sentences are acceptable, however, the vocabulary and structure are plain. Students tend to use similar grammar pattern and vocabulary to describe their ideas. These sentences are produced by a student in the writer’s institution. He loves writing, and he is working on his first short story in English.

a. Original: He stood and going to lavatory to take a bath.
   Revised: He stood up and went to the bathroom to take a bath.
Lavatory is not commonly used in daily conversation. British and American people usually use bathroom or toilet for morning routines, such as taking a bath, brushing their teeth, or combing their hair. The use of verbs is also wrong. We need phrasal verb ‘stood up’ instead of ‘stood’ to describe a change of position. The verb ‘going to’ does not follow the parallelism rule. According to Oxford Online Dictionary, parallelism suggests a connection of meaning through an echo of form. So, we have to follow ‘stood’, which is in past tense. For that reason, we have to substitute ‘going’ into ‘went’.

b. Original: I also hope that God creates you as my fade.
Revised: I also hope that God creates you as my fate.
There is nothing wrong with its grammar, but the choice of vocabulary is weird. And believe it this is not typo, because the student used it repeatedly in his writing. ‘Oh my man, you are not my fade’ is the other sentence with ‘fade’. This writer is not sure with the spelling and did not consult the dictionary. ‘Fade’ means the process of becoming less bright. From the context, it is likely that the word must be ‘fate’.

c. Original: The rose leaf is very beautiful to be seen, but the stalk is untouchable because it is full of thrones.
Revised: The rose leaf is very beautiful, but the stalk is untouchable because it is full of thorns.
The original sentence followed Indonesian style. ‘Daun mawar itu indah dilihat, ...’ and by recognizing the context, perhaps the writer is trying to write ‘thorn’ instead of thrones. The original version is lengthy. By editing useless words, the sentence is simpler and therefore, it becomes easier to understand.

d. Original: The man stood and turned away with a heart was full of thrones.
Revised: He stood and turned away with a heart full of thorns.
And this student keeps repeating his errors because he has not consulted the dictionary.

e. Original: After brush his body using the towel, the man sneezed for a once and changed his clothes.
Revised: After rubbing his body with a towel, the man sneezed once and put on his clothes.
Again, this student is confused to translate ‘menggosok’ in Bahasa Indonesia. Of course, in some cases, he may use ‘brush’. For example, brushing his teeth, brushing the bathroom floor, etc.

e. Original: The man wore feathers – made clothing.
Revised: The man wore a fur coat.
This student is persevering in writing his short story, yet, he still needs to focus on to the quality of his work. Grammatical errors happen repeatedly and this causes confusion, especially if the reader’s English is poor. Moreover, his style is plain. Even though the sentences are quite long, the words are useless. This needs editing. Students must realize that quality is more important than quantity. Short and brief sentences do not mean meaningless. Inappropriate vocabulary is used, since he never sees the application of these words in sentences and he still thinks in Bahasa Indonesia then switches it into English while writing. Spelling is not really a problem, thanks to MS word which could help us with the spelling. If the vocabulary is boring and limited, the teacher could help students to improve it by encouraging students to find synonyms, ask them to text in English, writing status in any social media in English, and speak in English.

If we have a look at students’ work, they did make the sentences shorter, but the grammar is not used properly. It sometimes does not have a verb, it sometimes has double subjects, and it often just a series of words which is not related to each other.

Steps In Creating a Mini Saga
1. Editing a text

Editing a text is a good start to practice writing a mini saga. The text could be a short story, a review, a film review or a book review, a brochure, an advertisement, etc. Students should find those text from newspaper, magazines, books, or simply download it from the internet. And then they should drop some words without reducing meaning.

This is an example of a 60-word text:

*It was a hot afternoon. (2) Ponni was thirsty. (3) She sat watching the parrot. (4) It kept fluttering its wings as it hopped about in the cage. (5) Ponni quietly tiptoed to the cage, and peered in. (6) There were a few pieces of fruit and red chillies and a small water bowl. (7) It was dry. (8) ‘Poor little parrot,’ thought Ponni. (9) ‘It is thirsty.’ (CBT, 1982, p.64)*

Edited text:

*Ponni was thirsty in that hot afternoon. She sat watching the parrot which kept fluttering its wings, hopped about in the cage. Tiptoed to the cage, Ponni peered in. There were a few pieces of fruit, red chillies, and a dry small water bowl. ‘Poor little thirsty parrot,’ thought Ponni.*

Sentence Analysis:
There are 9 sentences. We could combine the first and second sentence. The use of ‘it’ and ‘there’ in a sentence could be avoided to shorten a sentence. The first sentence could be reduced into an adverb of time ‘in that hot afternoon’. The third and fourth sentence was also reduced by omitting ‘it’ and we could also use relative pronoun to describe what the subject was doing. The adverb of manner ‘quietly’ in the fifth sentence is omitted, because ‘tiptoe’ has already explained an action which is done carefully and silently. The adjective in the seventh sentence is simply inserted in the sixth sentence. The same thing happens in the eighth and ninth sentence. Omit ‘it’ and insert the adjective in the ninth sentence into the eighth sentence.

Even though this activity is guided, the students have a lot of practice in omitting redundant words and sentences. This first step is a guided activity. Students must analyse which sentence is not necessary, how to make a ‘rich’ paragraph but not too wordy. This editing session could be done in group, so that students who learn faster could lead their peers. Therefore, it is the teacher who should decide the group work. This session also gives students opportunity to ask questions about grammar. And the teacher must emphasize that editing not only means make the sentences shorter, but also creates an effective and clear description. Students should pay attention to the context and message of the text.

2. From that guided writing, the next step is to do freer exercise. Students will create their own composition without paying attention to the number of words. After they finish their composition, they should show it to the teacher for grammar correction. The next step is they edit their grammatically correct composition into mini saga. They can even combine some mini sagas to make a longer composition.

3. An already finished mini saga could be presented on a student bulletin, on a wall magazine in their campus, or even to make a brochure which requires a limited number of words but contains a lot of information.

Samples of Students’ Works
This is an example of students’ work. They edited a film review of 113 words.

And the next, the movie continued to Arial’s house. They met with Arial’s parents and Arial’s sister, her name is Arinda she usually called Dinda. Zafran fell in love with Zafran at the first sight. They usually gathered in the Arial’s garden house. There Genta told to his friend about his idea, he asked his friends to go out from the box for three months. And then they dealt for three months without any communication between them until Genta give an information about where they will suppose to meet again and Genta promised to invite his friends to do something in some place so they can get unforgettable experience that they ever had (Sebastian, 2014).

And they could make it into a 50-word mini saga:
Genta told his friend about his idea, he asked to dealt for three months without any communication between them until Genta give an information about where they will suppose to meet and Genta promised to invite his friends to do something in some place so they can get unforgettable experience.

Sentence analysis:
Their mini saga has an acceptable structure although it still contains some minor error.

In the second example, these two students took the original text from a blog. A fabel which unfortunately, has a lot of inaccuracies in grammar. Therefore, the edited version is not Students write without paying attention to the number of words they create. Two students who worked in a group found this short story in 71 words.

A long time ago, in a dense forest lies the are very much. Among the animals, which live there is a cat arrogant very clean, hairy and smooth white. So many animals who liked it, but she was too proud and arrogant to excess. One day the cat wants to live alone without family cat, because she felt it was great to rend for themselves without the help of her family (Muja, 2013).

The 50-word mini saga:
A long time ago, in a dense forest lies the are very much. Among the animals, which live there is a cat arrogant very clean, hairy and smooth white. So many animals who liked it, but she was too proud and arrogant to excess. The cat wants to live alone.

Sentence analysis:
Since the original text does not have accurate grammar, the edited version also has many errors. It seemed that the fabel writer’s mother tongue is not English.

Conclusion and Suggestion
Teachers should pay attention to the students’ choice of articles. If the articles is written by writers whose English is not their mother language, the risk of error is quite high. This could lead to more inaccuracies in editing.

When students start to write their own story, teachers should read and guide students to correct their grammatical errors in the original story before letting students to shorten it into paragraphs of mini sagas.
Reference


Biodata

Maria Zakia Rahmawati had been an English teacher for ten years in an English course before she started to work as a permanent lecturer at UNRIYO about fourteen months ago. Her articles are in three proceedings in 2013. The first one is at TEFLIN Conference UI Jakarta, then at ELTLT Conference Unnes Semarang, and the last one is at COLALITE Unsoed Purwokerto. Her research interest is in the area of teacher education, material development, and the implementation of TEFL. She can be contacted at mariazaki74@gmail.com.