

## **Trends and Tasks in Research on Writing Pauses**

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## **I . Introduction**

The purpose of this study is to review the existing study of writing pauses, and to explore important implications. “Writing pauses” is defined as the phenomenon that writers (without physical and psychological disability) experience when they pause or hesitate temporarily due to a complex interaction of many different variables (writer, reader, text, and context) despite their attempt to write text (Kang, 2016). Many writers have experienced the pausing phenomenon at least one time while writing. It occurs frequently and sometimes it also lasts a long time. It also appears when writers are in the beginning, middle, or ending stages of writing. In addition, it usually occurs regardless of skill level, age, gender, and grade-level, although there are differences in degree.

For these reasons, researchers have taken note of writing pauses. In addition, it contains important information for understanding the writing process. Accordingly, Flower & Hayes (1981) use the expression “pregnant pause,” recognizing writing pauses are useful in looking at the thought process of writers. And Matsuhashi (1981) states that writing pauses are “clues” in understanding the writing process. For a similar

reason, researchers of speech and reading education have focused on pauses in speaking and reading.

Writing pauses are a very important issue. Chomsky (1971) and Murray (1980) state that everyone has a basic desire to write well and fluently. Articulate writing enables clear thought, and clear thought enables articulate writing (Park, 2012). Nonetheless, we still hardly know anything about writing pauses and the research is at a standstill. Therefore, the present study reviews the current state of writing pause research and considers directions for moving forward.

## **II. Trends in research of writing pauses**

In this section, I review the current state of writing pause research. Looking back at past studies is the cornerstone for viewing future research. By the way, it is important to point out that prior research has used various terms to describe the same phenomenon, such as block, delay, and pause. Previous researchers had different perspectives according to the following questions: Are writing pauses the process or the result of writing? Do writing pauses construct or constrain meaning? Based on the questions described above, the present study classifies trends in writing pauses studies as follows. Overall, writing pauses can be classified into three perspectives: the deficient perspective considers writing pauses as constraints on meaning and a result of writing, the constructive perspective considers writing pauses as constructs of meaning and a process of writing, and the neutral perspective focuses on the informational value of writing pauses. Thus, the present study review the existing studies based on these three perspectives.

## **1. The deficient perspective on writing pauses**

Researchers focusing on the deficient perspective call the pausing phenomenon a writing block. They have usually considered the writing pause as representing a writer's psychological and cognitive difficulties. These perceptions can be seen in terms of the expression of pause as defeat (Bergler, 1950) and failure (Mark & Skjei, 1979), focusing on the resultant aspects. Researchers from the deficient perspective include Bergler (1950), Mark & Skjei (1979), Rose (1984, 1985, 2009), Boice (1993), Hjortshøj (2001), Birk (2013), Ko (2008), Shin (2013), Park (2014), and Lee (2016). The features of these studies are as follows.

Bergler (1950) first used the term writing block in *The Writer and Psycho-analysis*. He described various writing pauses such as inner conflict, neurosis, embarrassment, and frustration. i. e., he focused on difficulties that writers experienced. The Freudian school looked at the issue mainly from the point of view of psychoanalysis. Although there are limitations specific to focusing on writing through a psychological lens, the present study recognizes that we must note the writer's psychological difficulties.

Mark & Skjei (1979) also focused on the psychological state of writers, describing writing pauses such as paralysis, extreme fear, terror, and a vacuous state. Writing pauses show the extreme difficulty of the writing process, causing writers to constrain or limit their expression. These researchers have suggested that the causes of writing pauses are to avoid self-exposure, highly critical internal criticism, or misunderstanding of the writing process. Like Bergler (1950), the present study sees that these researchers are focusing on the psychological difficulties writers experience.

Rose (1984, 1985, 2009) has studied this subject for several years. He

explored the various characters of writers who experience writing pauses by synthesizing related research. Although he developed the area of research on pauses, he focused primarily on the cognitive aspect of writing behavior, and left out the study of the psychoanalysis of writing education.

Boice (1993) explored the causes of writing pauses. As a result, he determined that writing pauses were influenced by the order of the internal monitor, fear of evaluation, perfectionism, the initial experience of writing, procrastination habits, and mental health. He also identified the characteristics of writers who experienced writing pauses: The writer experienced the burden of rigid rule, impulsivity, and aversion to writing. He mainly focused on the affective aspect of writers.

Hjortshøj (2001) explored a conceptual understanding of writing pauses. He explained that the term writing pauses derived from a psychoanalytical term, “mental block.” But he claimed that it was basically a wrong term because it oversimplified what we can’t explain. Due to confusion about these concepts, he believed that researchers misinterpret problems related to writing pauses. So he claimed that we need to distinguish what we mean and do not mean by the term, writing pauses. He defined the writing pause phenomenon as “capable, motivated writers who seem incapable of completing certain kinds of writing projects.”

Birk (2013) studied writing pauses from a social-cultural perspective. He pointed out the need to recognize the social context of the writers such as gender, class, and race in order to understand the nature and origins of writing pauses. He recognized pauses as “the condition in which motivated, otherwise intellectually capable individuals experience frustration because they cannot put or cannot keep words on the page to complete certain writing projects in a timely manner.” And he suggested the causes of pauses is dissonance between one’s idealized writing goal and one’s actual output.

Ko (2008) explored the causes of pauses through a literature review. His study is significant, as an introductory study exploring writing pauses in schools in the Republic of Korea. However, he only conducted one research study related to the writing process of tenth graders, involving a total of just three people. Consequently his study was very limited for the following reasons: 1) all participants were only skilled writers, 2) only one grade level was targeted, 3) the results drew on only one writing task and a handful of writers.

Shin (2013) explored the occurrence patterns of writing pauses according to writing ability. Her study observed the writing pauses in computer-based writing of 9th graders, a total of twenty people. In addition, she was attempting to classify both internal and external causes of writing pauses according to writing ability. But most causes were biased towards internal causes. Moreover the research method to measure the pausing time, counting the blinking cursor on a computer was difficult to analyze, and consisted of many errors. However, Shin's study implied that a scientific research method should be utilized, and that there was a need to systematically organize the exploration of the causes of writing pauses.

Park (2014) studied writing pauses according to writing abilities and genres. She sampled elementary school writers in fifth grade by targeting three skilled and three unskilled writers, and took into account two genres (essay and expository writing). Park's observations made a positive contribution in the study of writing pauses because her work took into account considering the steps involved in the writing process. But her analysis criteria obscured how writing pauses should be classified. In addition, the causes of writing pauses were excessively simply presented. Also, she overlooked the errors that can occur when measuring the pausing time of associated with handwriting.

Lee (2016) widely explored the concepts, causes, and research categories of writing blocks. She stated that it is hard to distinguish writing pauses from writing blocks and that other terms needed to be compared, such as stop, pause, disability, and underachievement. She summarized the causes of writing block to internal and external through literature reviews. She argued that studies on research-related pauses should actively proceed.

## **2. The constructive perspective on writing pauses**

Researchers focusing on the constructive perspective call the pausing phenomenon a writing delay. They have usually considered the writing pause as constructing meaning. These perceptions can be seen in terms of the expression of pause as creative endeavor (Graves, 2003), essential delay (Murray, 1980), focusing on process. Researchers from the constructive perspective include Murray (1980), Graves (1985, 2003), and Rose (2009). The features of these studies are as follows.

Murray (1980) claimed that writers actively construct meaning when they experience writing pausing. So he defined writing pauses as essentially involving delay. Through this, we can know that the writing pauses are important aspects of the construction of meaning. But Murray observed only an expert author's writing processes, all writers' writing pauses in general can not be so interpreted.

Graves (1985, 2003) viewed pauses as part of the writing process. He criticized the many existing studies because they recognized pauses only as a negative experience. He argued that writing pauses are a natural event appearing in the process of growing to become skilled writers; pauses are necessary for creative endeavor. Namely, the pausing phenomenon is an essential process for producing well written text.

Meanwhile, in a study by Rose (2009), a constructive perspective can be seen. As I mentioned above, Rose viewed pauses as representing deficiencies in the process of becoming a more experienced writer. But he repeated the study, finding that pauses are an inevitable aspect of developing writing skills, and that they can provide practical assistance, rather than hindering the process. In this context, he suggested the subject “The Relation of Blocking and Writing Experience” as a follow-up study. His study strongly contributed to the expansion of our perspective on the pausing phenomenon.

### **3. The neutral perspective on writing pauses**

Researchers who have a neutral perspective refer to the times when writers temporarily stop writing as “writing pauses.” They usually focus on the writer’s thought processes, and informational values of writing pauses. These perceptions can be seen in terms of the expression of pause as “cue” (Matsuhashi, 1981) and “windows” revealing a writer’s thought process (Schilperoord, 2002), investigating the structural features of writing. Related to this perspective are researchers such as Matsuhashi (1981, 1982), Flower & Hayes (1981), Kowal & O’Connell (1987), Schilperoord & Sanders (1997), Schilperoord (2002), Olive et al. (2009), Maggio et al. (2012), and Kang (2016). The features of these studies are as follows.

Matsuhashi (1981) presented three styles of writing tasks (report, persuasive, expository) to analyze the effect of textual style to writing. As a result, this study identified that writers experienced more pausing when writing persuasive and expository text than when writing report. Another influence causing more pauses occurs as writers consider what they will write about in a succeeding paragraph. Through this, we see that



the object of the text and paragraph composition influence writing pauses.

Flower & Hayes (1981) studied writing pauses based on the question of “why do writers pause while writing?” They set two alternative hypotheses of linguistic and rhetorical planning related to the roles of writing pauses, and then worked to verify these hypotheses. They identified two types of planning behaviors actively interact during writing. Through this study, we see that the writers make plans dynamically while experiencing writing pauses.

Kowal & O’Connell (1987) studied the role of writing pauses. They criticized research which overlooked hesitations and errors in speech research, calling for them to be included in writing research. In other words, usually when we consider pauses as a part of the process, then pauses are seen as indicators of improvement, but when we consider pauses as a result then pauses are seen as a deficiency. This study implies that reconsider how evaluate writing pauses.

Schilperoord & Sanders (1997) studied the writing process empirically. They stated that writing pauses are cues for observing and measuring the writing process. They explained that we can capture the dynamic process of writing by analyzing location and duration. Meanwhile, they described the writing pause in association with a stimulus–response paradigm. In other words, the writing pauses are response time to external stimuli, and we can’t separate pauses and hesitation phenomenon in the writing process. Thus, studies on pauses are as important as those on writing fluency.

Olive et al. (2009) measured the pausing time according to writing processes (planning–translating–revising). As a result, they identified that writers experience more pausing time when planning and revising than during a translating step. So they argued that the writers pause more times when they feel a high stake cognitive burden. In other words, the

writer feels more burden when planning and revising than when translating.

Maggio et al. (2012) studied the effects on words in writing pauses. They question the idea that a writer is influenced only by the next part of a text in terms of a sentence or paragraph. Through empirical research, they found that writers are influenced even by the next word and the influence of previous words, thus resulting in pauses caused by delayed or anticipatory effects based on word choices. Thus, it was found that the writer experienced pauses due to considering the relationship of responses between a current word, forward or backward word, and context.

Finally, Kang (2016) identified the causes of writing pauses and occurrences. He explored a variety of variables (such as the writer, reader, text, and context) in order to expand the understanding of phenomena that existing studies had overlooked. As a result, he statistically verified the factors of writing pauses, a total of forty-six, through confirmatory factor analysis. Meanwhile, he used scientific analysis such as eye tracking and key stroke logging in order to observe the occurrences of writing pauses. He analyzed it according to grade levels, genres, and writing abilities, and explored the educational implications.

The present study have reviewed current trends concerning research on writing pauses. As we have shown above, the present study identified three perspectives concerning writing pauses. In short, the deficient perspective views pauses as difficulties and failures writers experience while writing. On the other hand, the constructive perspective views pauses as the active construction of meaning. Finally, the neutral perspective focuses on informational values of pauses, including observations based on the previous two perspectives.

The deficient perspective made decisive contributions focusing on difficulties experienced by writers. Through this, the research on exploring the causes of writing pauses proceeded in important ways. But

most of the studies were shown to have limitations based on the exploration of causes focusing merely on writer variables. They overlooked other variables such as the reader, the text, and context, thus implying that expand our research by addressing more variables helping to understand the pausing phenomenon.

The constructive perspective made a decisive contribution towards recognizing pauses as a natural event in the writing process. It stands against the existing idea related to the deficient perspective by identifying that pauses are very important in the production of text. But constructivist research claims were based primarily on expert writer experiences, and it is difficult to generalize that all pauses occur because of a meaning construction process. It implies that study the pauses of common writers in order to fully understand the pausing phenomenon.

The neutral perspective made decisive contributions by focusing on the informational value of the writing pauses and how they relate to a writer's thought processes in more detail. The neutral perspective includes the other two perspectives. The features of pauses are not just a one-off, but occur frequently and dynamically during the writing process. So merely looking at one viewpoint is not appropriate. It implies that pauses must be recognized syntagmatically.

### **III. Tasks and prospects of writing pause research**

Research on writing pauses is an important area of writing research. As I mentioned earlier, most writers use more time pausing than actually writing. Unfortunately, existing studies have mainly investigated the act of writing, overlooking the great importance of writing pauses. As a result, many of these underlying aspects of the process of writing

remain unknown area.

Consequently, there is a great need for further research about writing pauses. Kowal & O'Connell (1987) have argued that it is possible to explore the process of writing in new ways through research on writing pauses. Because writing pauses are signals of the cognitive and psychological burdens faced by writers, it is possible to create new educational designs which enable writers to handle pauses in effective ways.

In addition, research on writing pauses can help to correct past misunderstandings and distortions concerning how the writing process has been inadequately perceived. For instance, Matsushashi (1982) found that writers are stalled more by larger sentence level problems rather than the existing perception that writers pause in order to search for specific words. In addition, by studying the behavioral characteristics of writers while pausing, researchers are able to deduce the thought processes and psychological states of writers. As a result, writing pause studies can reveal underlying structures of writing phenomena.

Therefore, the present study set up three research tasks to reveal underlying aspects of the writing process based on the findings of research on writing pauses. First, research is needed to diagnose the causes of writing pauses. As we saw in the deficient perspective, sometimes writing pauses indicate a condition of psychological and cognitive overload experienced by a writer. Excessive pauses lead to inhibition of writing fluency, which can lead to many problems. Accordingly, these problems need to be diagnosed as an approach to providing writers helpful follow-up instruction. Second, research is needed to study how we can help writers to continue writing and not give up when confronted by the frequent challenges that occur cognitively and psychologically while writing. As we saw in the

constructive perspective, sometimes writing pauses indicate a writer's active process in constructing meaning. This process of constructing meaning is a process that needs to be continuously promoted, and writers need to gain the ability to respond more flexibly to unintentional pauses. Third, research is needed in identifying and explaining the variety of occurrences of writing pauses according to each writer's unique characteristics. As we saw in the neutral perspective, it is able to obtain much information concerning a writer's thought processes from research on writing pauses.

## **1. Research issue one: developing a diagnostic instrument for causes of writing pauses**

Appropriate education for writers who experience excessive pauses is a very important issue; consequently, research is needed to diagnose the causes of writing pauses. In other words, that is the starting point for research. Accordingly, the present study offers two suggested approaches.

First, how can we diagnose the causes of writing pauses? Related to this subject, Rose (2009) developed a questionnaire consisting of twenty-four items. However there were only a few items chosen in order to diagnose the causes of pauses. In addition, the items mainly focused on the writer, so we should be improve this.

Second, how can we observe occurrence patterns of writing pauses? We need a scientific method for observing writing pauses systematically. Current research has ceased using rudimentary methods such as a stopwatch or counting the cursor blinks on a computer. Instead, researchers have attempted to solve this problem using scientific methods. For instance, Lee & Kang (2015), Park (2015), Kang (2016) have emphasized using scientific methods such as key stroke and Eye tracker,

fMRI. Thus, researchers have begun to explore the causes and patterns of writing pauses systematically by using scientific and new technologies.

## **2. Research issue two: promoting the writer's resilience**

Writing pauses are a natural event occurring anytime during the writing process. But if difficulties are not solved, writers may dislike or abandon writing. Also, temporary pausing may change to chronic. This phenomenon may become stronger when writing pauses occur more frequently. Occurrences of writing pauses are natural, but solutions are not natural (Kang, 2016). Thus, we need to study ways for promoting writer resilience so that writers are not overcome by the frustrations involved in the writing process.

Resilience can be defined as the ability to cope with a situation (Choi, 2014). According to Liggy Webb (Im, 2013), resilience derives from the Latin word “resilio,” meaning “to rebound or rise again.” Also Webb explains that it means the capacity of bending instead of breaking from pressure, perseverance and to adapt when faced with challenges, to develop maturity in terms of adjusting to a writing task.

Based on the discussion of these important factors, the definition of “writer resilience” can be roughly understood as a writer learning how to respond appropriately when experiencing writing pauses. Related to this, Boice (1994) explored the characteristics of resilient writer and presented the following important characteristics:<sup>1</sup> finding new ways to

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1 The six characteristics of the resilient writer proposed by Boice (1994: 245) are as follows. (1) regular, constant practice of adaptive habits connected with writing; (2) clear and realistic plans combined with repeated feedback about progress toward goals; (3) anticipation of blocking point by way of noticing problems, tracing them back to origins; (4) inventing new behaviors to prevent their recurrence; (5) seeing connections for writerly rules to other, broader activities; and (6) occasional flexibility in bending or breaking this and all other rules state here.

avoid recurrence of unintentional pause, gaining flexibility in the application of conventions and rules, and transforming pauses as catalysts to enable true meaning construction. As a result, the resilient writer will be able to actively and productively cope with the inevitable pauses occurring in the writing process. By the way, it is true that the concept of resilience is very unfamiliar in language education, and it is difficult to find research related it. However, it is a key competence for moving away from excessive pauses in order to facilitate meaning construction. Thus, further study is needed on ways to efficiently promote the concept of writer resilience as a key factor to enable writers to stay on task and construct their intended meanings creatively.

### **3. Research issue three: occurrence patterns based on writer characteristics**

The study of writer characteristics is very important in writing education. Education should vary depending on it. Although researchers have been interested in this subject for a long time, much more study is still needed. Accordingly, two important recommendations are as follows.

First, how do the occurrences of writing pauses differ depending on grade-level? Writing pauses are a common phenomenon from young writer to old. But its patterns will vary depending on grade-level. Thus, exploring such characteristics based on grade-level should be a basic consideration of appropriate education.

Second, how is the occurrences of writing pauses different depending on writing ability? Pauses are common regardless of writing ability. Even so, they may differ depending on writing ability. Thus, more study is needed about the relevant characteristics of writers based on their varying degrees of writing abilities.

In summary, it can be seen that the following important factors must be the focus of continued study: the frequency and duration of writing patterns influenced by disposition, gender, genre, and the writing process stage. Such considerations will provide a theoretical foundation for understanding the nature of writing and how writers focus on their writing tasks.

## IV. Conclusion

A book that has become a bestseller in the Republic of Korea is entitled *Things only seen when paused*. As we can read from the title, the author mentions that we can see things about ourselves only when we meditate and refine our breaths rather than keeping so busy. Looking at the pause in a similar viewpoint, we can understand better how meaningful it can be in terms of the writing process

Writing pauses are a common phenomenon that most people experience every day. Nonetheless, we have unfortunately succeeded in overlooking them for too long. The present study has reviewed prior studies in order to better grasp what we know about this important phenomenon in writing behavior. Obviously continued research is needed to develop our understanding about writing pauses.

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## **ABSTRACT**

### **Trends and tasks in research on writing pauses**

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The present study have reviewed current trends concerning research on writing pauses, and identified three perspectives concerning writing pauses. In short, the deficient perspective views pauses as difficulties and failures writers experience while writing. On the other hand, the constructive perspective views pauses as the active construction of meaning. Finally, the neutral perspective focuses on informational values of pauses, including observations based on the previous two perspectives.

In addition, the present study offer three important research issues will be evaluated. First, we need to study how we can diagnose the causes of writing pauses. As we saw in the deficient perspective, sometimes writing pauses indicate a condition of psychological and cognitive overload experienced by a writer. Accordingly, we need to consider how to quickly diagnose causes for subsequent action. Second, we need to study how we can promote the resilience of writers. As we saw in the constructive perspective, sometimes writing pauses indicate a writer's active process in constructing meaning. Accordingly, we need to study ways to promote construction of meaning during the writing process. Third, we need to study a variety of occurrences of writing pauses according to writer characteristics. As we saw in the neutral perspective, we can obtain much information of a writer's thought processes from research on writing pauses.

The present study has reviewed prior studies in order to better grasp what we know about this important phenomenon in writing

behavior. Obviously continued research is needed to develop our understanding about writing pauses.

**KEYWORDS** writing pauses, causes of writing pauses, occurrence patterns of writing pauses, deficient perception, constructive perception, neutral perception