

# Review and Prospects of the Multimodal Assessment

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**Abstract:** *The writing assessment plays a pivotal role in enhancing students' writing proficiency, with teacher evaluation being one of the most authoritative and representative methods of assessment. Despite the growing importance of multimodal communication, there is limited research on integrating multimodal approaches with teacher evaluation. Thus, this study aims to investigate the developmental trends and potential value of multimodal assessment in writing instruction. Through a systematic review of pertinent literature and an analysis of current teacher evaluation research, this paper offers insights and recommendations for future research in writing assessment.*

**Keywords:** Assessment methods; Teacher evaluation; Multimodal assessment.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

The rapid development of communication media technologies has brought about profound changes in the way people acquire information. Traditional printed text is no longer the sole means of information retrieval; channels have become increasingly multimodal, incorporating auditory, visual, gestural, and spatial elements [1]. In this context, writing assessment has garnered significant attention as an integral component of writing instruction, particularly within the field of English education. Scholars and practitioners are increasingly focusing on and valuing multimodal assessment practices. They explore how to effectively implement various modalities of assessment in English writing instruction to enhance both writing proficiency and teaching quality. This trend not only drives the advancement of English education theory but also fosters innovation and improvement in teaching practice.

Consequently, it is necessary to conduct an all-round research review on the application of multimodal assessment in English writing teaching. This paper provides a practical and innovative guidance for educators to address the challenges posed by the diversified modes of information retrieval. In addition, it can also promote the comprehensive development of students' literacies, laying a solid foundation for improving their academic achievements and language expression.

## 2. CONCEPTUAL DEFINITIONS OF THE WRITING ASSESSMENT

Given the significance of writing assessment in instruction, extensive theoretical and empirical research has been conducted by experts, scholars, and frontline educators. Against this backdrop, various definitions of writing assessment have been proposed from multiple perspectives. Assessment as a process of information exchange between authors and readers, wherein readers provide personal evaluations, queries, and suggestions to authors upon receiving their information [2]. Some experts regard English writing assessment as the provision of corrective feedback by teachers on initial drafts to rectify language errors [3]. Writing assessment is also construed as a continuation of the writing process [4], facilitating learners to recognize areas for improvement in both form and content of their original work, thereby training their capability of English writing. English writing assessment as the process whereby teachers evaluate and guide English writing works, aiming to help students identify their strengths and weaknesses in writing, and provide recommendations for developing writing skills and quality to improve teaching effectiveness [5]. Furthermore, the Chinese Compulsory Education English Curriculum Standard (2022 edition) underscores the integration of assessment throughout the entire process of English teaching and learning, encouraging students to consciously utilize assessment results to enhance their learning [6]. At the same time, teachers should provide scientific and reasonable feedback based on students' learning performance, and constantly reflect on teaching practices and results to achieve mutual growth between teaching and learning [7]. In essence, writing assessment entails the process whereby teachers evaluate and improve writings from various perspectives, aiming to foster students' writing capabilities and teachers' assessment proficiency.

It is worth mentioning that to meet the personalized writing needs of students, teachers should adopt different writing assessment methods based on individual differences, which improves the effectiveness of English writing assessment teaching. Thus, in-depth research and application of efficient writing assessment methods have significant value for learners, teachers, and the teaching of writing itself. With the continuous development of science and technology, diversified assessment methods continue to emerge in the writing teaching process, including teacher evaluation, self-assessment, peer assessment, machine assessment, and teacher-student collaborative assessment. Among these, high-quality teacher evaluation, with its advantages in accuracy and effectiveness, still occupies a leading position in English writing assessment teaching and remains one of the most trusted evaluation forms by both teachers and students.

### **3. RESEARCH STATUS ON THE TEACHER EVALUATION**

#### **3.1 The positive effects of the teacher evaluation**

Over the past 20 years, scholars have conducted extensive research and exploration on whether teacher evaluation can improve students' writing competences. The majority of experts, scholars, and teachers have recognized the positive effects of teacher evaluation. As an important assessment method in writing education, teacher evaluation serves multiple roles, including guidance, supervision, motivation, diagnosis [8]. This approach promotes teachers' professional growth and improves educational quality.

To begin with, teacher evaluation helps students improve critical thinking abilities. The feedback in second language education reflects four types of speech functions: directive, epistemic, affective, and metalinguistic. Among them, epistemic and affective feedback are more conducive to stimulating students' self-reflection and inquiry awareness, fully harnessing the positive effect of feedback in writing learning [9]. The teacher feedback can guide students to focus on the relationship between language content and meaning, thereby improving their thinking quality [10].

Next to, teacher evaluation mostly focuses on the grasp of discourse and grammatical knowledge, contributing to the fluency in language. The Chinese learners prefer teacher evaluation and tend to prioritize assessments focusing on writing content and grammatical aspects, further confirming the authority and importance of teacher evaluation [11]. The teacher feedback leads to more modifications in content, overall structure, additions, and self-modifications, significantly improving the language fluency of essays [12]. Some experts conducted a longitudinal study investigating the effects of ongoing teacher written feedback on aspects such as accuracy, syntactic complexity, fluency, content, and organization in essays, and found positive influences [13]. The teacher evaluation helps manage the content and structure of compositions, making them more aligned with the requirements of writing tasks, deepening the logicity and authenticity of compositions, and aligning them with English expression and thinking [14].

Furthermore, professional teacher evaluation contributes to the improvement of both teachers' and students' self-efficacy in writing. The trained teacher feedback has a positive impact on the writing abilities and self-efficacy [15]. The rich practical knowledge in writing evaluation helps teachers gain higher self-efficacy, establish an evaluation concept that promotes learning through assessment, and obtain a more accurate understanding of writing constructs [16].

Lastly, teacher evaluation helps teachers improve their evaluation literacy. Drawing on multiple data sources from 27 English writing teachers in Chinese universities, it was found that evaluation is perceived by most teachers as instrumental in gaining insights into writing issues, refining teaching methodologies, and fostering the writing proficiency of college students [17]. Having a high level of evaluation literacy not only supports teachers' professional development but also enables them to accurately assess learning situations of students, ultimately helping them improve their academic achievements [18].

In conclusion, teacher evaluation is crucial for improving writing competences. Teacher evaluation positively influences the critical thinking abilities, language fluency, self-efficacy in writing, and teachers' evaluation literacy. By providing regular feedback and guidance to students, teachers can help them understand their strengths and areas for improvement in writing, thus stimulating their interest and confidence in writing.

#### **3.2 The real problems and countermeasures of the teacher evaluation**

Teacher evaluation positively promotes learners' active participation, yet it also entails significant flaws that cannot be ignored.

Firstly, inappropriate teacher evaluation can lower writing motivation. Teacher comments often suffer from confusion and arbitrariness, with more negative feedback, which students may overlook or misunderstand, resulting in ineffective evaluation and even loss of confidence and interest in writing [19]. Teachers are the sole judges of the writing products, and the lack of teacher-student interaction and affirmation and encouragement of compositions can easily dampen the motivation for learners [20]. Therefore, teachers need to be aware of the importance of evaluation for writing motivation. Teachers should provide students with positive feedback and encouragement, helping them discover their strengths and areas for improvement in writing, rather than solely focusing on errors and shortcomings. Additionally, encouraging peer evaluation and communication is crucial for creating a positive learning atmosphere, stimulating learners' writing motivation, and promoting their progress.

Secondly, various objective factors hinder teachers to effectively evaluate the writing products, consequently causing students to underestimate the importance of evaluation and fall short of achieving the expected outcomes. Teachers contend with objective constraints such as heavy teaching loads and large class sizes, which result in issues like the provision of low-quality and less targeted written feedback [21]. Despite investing significant time and effort in the evaluation process, teachers frequently struggle to offer formative feedback, leaving students with only a singular feedback outcome and a diminished appreciation for both writing and evaluation [20]. Furthermore, students often express dissatisfaction with feedback activities, perceiving them as ineffective and untimely, often attributable to poorly designed feedback mechanisms [22]. So, when evaluating writing products, teachers need to fully recognize the impact of objective factors on evaluation and actively take measures to improve evaluation effectiveness. To address constraints like heavy teaching tasks and a large number of students, teachers can try using effective evaluation strategies and tools to enhance the accuracy and targeting of evaluation. For example, utilizing technological means like online grading tools or language processing software can improve evaluation efficiency and accuracy, while alleviating teachers' workload. Furthermore, teachers can improve evaluation outcomes by providing formative feedback. Formative feedback emphasizes continuous adjustment and improvement during the learning process, rather than merely evaluating the final outcome. Through timely, specific, and personalized formative feedback, teachers can help students understand their strengths and weaknesses in writing and guide them towards further improvement and enhancement. Teachers should value learners' feedback, paying attention to their perceptions and expectations during activities, and constantly adjusting and improving evaluation methods and approaches based on feedback. Through communication and collaboration with students, teachers can better understand their needs and expectations, thus enhancing evaluation effectiveness and student satisfaction.

Thirdly, teachers frequently prioritize the correction of grammar errors over addressing other aspects of writing. This approach to evaluation excessively emphasizes word choice, grammar, and other language-related issues while overlooking the content, ideas, and organization of compositions, which hinders the improvement of students' comprehensive writing capabilities [23]. A case study examining a writing feedback revealed a disproportionate focus on language problems at the expense of content and ideas [24]. Consequently, teachers often concentrate solely on grammatical errors in compositions, fostering the misconception among students that articles devoid of grammar errors are inherently of superior quality [25]. As a result, teachers need to recognize the comprehensiveness and completeness of evaluation, and strike a balance between attention to language issues and content, ideas, etc., in order to help students improve their overall writing level. Additionally, teachers can provide specific suggestions to encourage their students to engage in deep thinking and expression, assisting them in comprehensive writing development.

Fourthly, teachers generally lack professional evaluation literacy training. Although teachers possess certain theoretical knowledge of evaluation, they struggle to apply it in practical classrooms and remain limited to superficially imitating processes and steps. Hence, teachers need more professional training on evaluation literacy to improve the quality and effectiveness of evaluation [26]. In this way, schools and educational institutions should establish comprehensive evaluation training mechanisms, including providing systematic evaluation training courses, organizing expert lectures and seminars, and encouraging teachers to participate in evaluation workshops and share experiences. Such training can help teachers better understand the core principles and methods of evaluation, improving evaluation accuracy and effectiveness. Meanwhile, teachers should continuously reflect on and adjust their evaluation practices. They can develop personalized evaluation strategies in conjunction with some specific situations and learning goals, focusing on exploring and appreciating potential strengths, providing positive evaluation and encouragement, and assisting students in full writing development and improvement.

Additionally, teachers can actively learn from and share with colleagues, establishing platforms for sharing evaluation experiences and resources. Through mutual exchange and learning, teachers can gain more inspiration and strategies from evaluation, support and complement each other, and enhance overall evaluation standards.

#### 4. TRENDS IN THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE MULTIMODAL ASSESSMENT

Currently, research in the field of multimodal teaching is gradually maturing; however, studies applying multimodality to teacher evaluation remain relatively scarce. Given this, strengthening the application of multimodal evaluation in English teaching is particularly important, and researchers are committed to integrating multimodal theory into the field of writing assessment.

The different modalities are divided into six types: linguistic modality, visual modality, auditory modality, gestural modality, tactile modality, and environmental modality [27]. Linguistic modality refers to the ability to communicate and understand through forms such as reading, writing, and speaking, involving tasks such as reading and writing assignments, revising written products, and oral communication in the evaluation process. Visual modality refers to the ability to identify, understand, and express things through visual information, involving tasks such as observing, analyzing, and interpreting images, tables, and charts in the evaluation process. Auditory modality refers to the ability to identify, understand, and express things through auditory information, involving tasks such as listening to teacher explanations and audio recordings in the evaluation process. Gestural modality refers to the ability to express and understand things through body movements and postures, involving tasks such as presenting written products in the evaluation process. Tactile modality refers to the ability to identify, understand, and express things through tactile information, involving tasks such as touching and perceiving real objects related to writing topics in the evaluation process. Environmental modality refers to the ability to identify, understand, and express things through environmental information, involving tasks such as observing and understanding living environments, social environments, and natural environments in the evaluation process. After thorough consideration, the researcher asserts that utilizing primarily visual and linguistic modalities for writing assessment teaching is more practical and effective, as illustrated in Table 1.

**Table 1:** Modal types suitable for assessment

Types of modality	Names	Functions
Visual modality	characters	Teachers employ comments to pinpoint areas of concern for students, facilitating a focused approach to writing issues and refining writing products.
	Images, Colors and Symbols	Utilizing varied colors, symbols, sketches, and charts during the assessment process aids students in comprehension, enriches learning content, and enhances engagement. This approach not only fosters their creativity and expressive abilities but also deepens their understanding and retention of writing content.
Linguistic modality	Spoken English	The versatility of oral communication lies in its immediacy, facilitating instant interaction and feedback, while also enabling detailed descriptions and abstract summarizations. Incorporating language modalities in the evaluation process assists students in applying learned language skills to relatively authentic writing tasks, thus improving their language proficiency and communicative competence.

In the visual modality, evaluation forms can be categorized into two types: textual and pictorial/colorful/symbolic. Text serves as a unimodal evaluation form where teachers directly or indirectly indicate writing issues through written comments. Conversely, pictures, colors, and symbols are perceived as a multimodal evaluation form, allowing teachers to enhance feedback with sketches, various colors, and symbols (such as exclamation marks, arrows, and brackets) to make the evaluation more engaging. Simultaneously, this helps students better understand feedback, facilitating more efficient improvements in their writing. In the linguistic modality, teachers can gain a deeper understanding of issues through face-to-face oral communication. In a positive interactive environment, teachers can promptly address writing problems and provide communication skills for students.

So far, experts have been exploring the integration of multimedia technology and specialized symbols as multimodal resources to enhance the efficacy of teaching evaluations. This exploration aims to delve into the development of students' writing capabilities and to offer fresh perspectives for future research in teacher evaluation. An empirical study has revealed that teachers use specialized symbols to indicate errors in writing assessments, opting for the indirect correction method to promote learners' reflection and bolster their writing

proficiencies [28]. Additionally, a multimodal writing feedback system has been proposed, advocating for a diverse array of feedback formats that include traditional written feedback alongside text, animation, speech, and mobile transmission media [29]. Information graphics are crucial in motivating students and fostering their confidence in communicating with peers, serving as a platform to showcase their language skills and facilitating communication throughout the learning process [30]. Furthermore, the optimization of teacher evaluations through technological advancements, such as leveraging multimedia resources like videos, fosters the creation of authentic teaching scenarios and activities [31].

## 5. CONCLUSION

In summary, multimodal assessment aims to provide more intuitive and vivid feedback while simultaneously fostering the development of language production levels for students. By integrating various forms of assessment such as text, images, and verbal communication, researchers strive to create an engaging and interactive assessment environment to effectively support the enhancement of their writing skills. It is recommended that future teacher evaluations incorporate multimodal symbols to better assist students in addressing writing issues. This not only aids in cultivating their comprehension but also promotes a more flexible development of the writing assessment system. Beyond teacher evaluation, there is significant exploration space for alternative forms of assessment, such as self-feedback, peer feedback, and computer feedback, each of which can be innovatively studied in conjunction with multimodal approaches. Moving forward, researchers and educators need to continuously explore to diversify related studies, enhance their reliability and validity, and propel English writing assessment research to new heights.

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