

STUDENTS' FREE WRITING BY COMPOSING A STORY FROM  
A SCENE OF SELECTED PLACE  
การเขียนเชิงอิสระของนักศึกษาโดยการแต่งเรื่องราวจากภาพสถานที่ที่เลือก

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## Abstract

This article aims to share the author's experience of teaching free writing and to suggest as a guideline for teachers of English for teaching undergraduate students free writing. From the author's experience of teaching free writing in English, it is noted that most students cannot write free writing even though they have knowledge of English grammar. Their inability to write stems from several factors such as the students not only know what to write but also how to write about it. Hence, in order to help the students compose free writing, the teachers of English should teach students a composing process which includes planning, making illustration, relating to social context, organizing idea, etc. In this paper, the author suggests the teaching methodology to teachers of English in order to apply in their language classes. In her teaching assignment, the author asked students to select their real situation or real scene by sitting at one place, one time and write their own story which was concerned with that place.

**Keywords:** Free Writing, Problems of Free Writing, Free Writing Process, Free Writing Assessment, Writing the Story

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## บทคัดย่อ

บทความนี้มีวัตถุประสงค์เพื่อแบ่งปันประสบการณ์การสอนการเขียนเชิงอิสระและเป็นการแนะนำเพื่อเป็นแนวทางแก่อาจารย์สอนภาษาอังกฤษในการเขียนเชิงอิสระแก่นักศึกษาระดับปริญญาตรี จากประสบการณ์การสอนการเขียนเชิงอิสระภาษาอังกฤษของผู้เขียน ผู้เขียนได้เห็นว่านักศึกษาส่วนมากไม่สามารถเขียนเชิงอิสระได้แม้ว่าพวกเขาจะมีความรู้ไวยากรณ์ภาษาอังกฤษ การที่ไม่สามารถเขียนได้มาจากหลายปัจจัยเช่นนักศึกษาไม่เพียงต้องรู้ว่าเขียนอะไรแต่ต้องรู้ว่าเขียนอย่างไรอีกด้วย ปัญหานี้ไม่เพียงแต่หมายถึงนักศึกษารู้ว่าจะเขียนอะไรแต่ยังหมายถึงเขียนอย่างไรอีกด้วย ดังนั้นเพื่อช่วยให้นักศึกษาสามารถเขียนการเขียนเชิงอิสระได้ อาจารย์สอนภาษาอังกฤษควรสอนนักศึกษาถึงกระบวนการการเขียนซึ่งรวมถึง การวางแผน, การสร้างภาพประกอบ, การเชื่อมความเกี่ยวข้องถึงบริบทสังคม, การประมวลความคิด เป็นต้น บทความนี้ผู้เขียนจึงเสนอแนะวิธีการสอนการเขียนเชิงอิสระต่ออาจารย์สอนภาษาอังกฤษเพื่อนำไปประยุกต์ในชั้นเรียนภาษาของพวกเขา ในการสอนผู้เขียนมอบหมายให้นักศึกษาเลือกสถานการณ์จริงหรือภาพฉากจริงโดยการนั่ง ณ สถานที่หนึ่ง และ ณ เวลาหนึ่งและเขียนเรื่องราวของเขาเองที่เกี่ยวกับสถานที่นั้น

**คำสำคัญ:** การเขียนเชิงอิสระ ปัญหาของการเขียนเชิงอิสระ กระบวนการการเขียนเชิงอิสระ

การประเมินกระบวนการการเขียนเชิงอิสระการเขียนเรื่องราว

## Introduction

Ransdell (1993) stated that writing was not only focusing on language skill but also the writers' ideas. Furthermore, writing is a complex process and it is concerned with the writers' thinking skill. Hence, those who learn writing have to spend time to practice from the sentence level, paragraph level to the whole paper. Palmer, Hafner and Sharp (1994) assert that there are various types of writing such as academic writing, personal writing, free writing, etc. Particularly, the students at a tertiary level are usually assigned to compose free writing. Earnshaw (2007) added that free writing could be used and provided students an opportunity to write the story on their own and they could put their ideas of what they think on paper freely. The students can be assigned to find the pictures from magazines or websites and write about what those pictures trigger in their mind what comes into their mind about those pictures such as talking about future trip or explaining the surrounding in the pictures and their feelings about the pictures. In contrast, the students cannot express the scene into their own ideas for writing as much as possible. Consequently, this situation interests the author to suggest how to teach students free writing. First of all, the author provides the definition of free writing.

## Definitions of free writing

According to Ransdell (1993, p.40), "free writing is writing about something which a person is interested in, and this may include the tasks of writing of poems, novels, and anecdotes of an

incident experienced by the writers.” Tomlinson (2013) added that free writing involves performing imaginative tasks when the writer undertakes to write such things as poetry, stories, short story and plays. Li (2007) asserted that free writing was concerned with writing what was enjoyable for the writer and it provides a means for self-discovery to promote imagination to write what they are interested in the writing tasks. Earnshaw (2007) claimed that, when writers write the stories, they are able to promote a description of the situation. This means that writing reveals their own feeling and imagination. Free writing enables them to relate their experience and situation to the readers. Therefore, free writing has created enjoyment, so it may be taught in English language classes.

## Nature of Free Writing

Pupipat (2004) said that the free writing encompasses communication and creativity. it involves the process of communication in that a message is transmitted from the sender to the receiver. As the source or sender, the writers initiate the process by interpreting and organizing their experience of the words which they have thought into a written message and impart it to a receiver or an audiences. Communication is said to be effective and successful when both the person sending the message and person receiving it understand the key ideas or intended meanings of the messages being transmitted. Free writing is a source of creative inspiration. In composing the message, the writers can explore and create the world, through their imagination, with the use of language. They can play with language choices, styles, and genres. The message may be in the form of jokes, poems, love letters, and so on. The message can be either light-hearted, or serious, or sarcastic. It can be something new with an unpredictable ending. Angelelli (2000) asserted that free writing can show that the writers put creative and free idea. Hence, if students are able to show ability of imaginative situation, etc, the free writing paper can be evaluated as creativity. Ransdell (1993), he wrote a short joke such as shown in the example below.

### Example

Maurice, (1988) suggested one way of teaching students to write a free writing by giving students a cartoon picture and asking them to write a short joke. The example below is a student's short joke which is a free writing.

*At school John was giving a report on modern aeroplanes and finished his report proudly:  
“Modern aeroplanes can do anything a bird can do, and more.”*

*From the back of the class, another boy whispered. “I’d like to see one of them lay an egg!”*

To the example, the students could put the idea freely. Moreover, it motivates students to write and this writing enables students to practice thinking skill. Regarding free writing, the students had problems when they composed.

## **Problems of Free Writing**

Of the four language skills, writing is considered to more difficult to command or master than any other skill even in the person's mother tongue (Hedge, 2000) and Leki (1998). ESL students, including EFL students, find it even more difficult writing in English because they have to think and write in a language which is totally new and unfamiliar to them in terms of grammatical structures, word orders, Grammar rules, word choices, etc. Writing can be difficult language skill, and it is difficult for Thai students, since it requires good command of grammar, sentence structure, word choice and thinking skill (Earnshaw, 2007). In addition, the writing is shown the message to the readers, so idea and accuracy are crucial and students need to practice. Particularly, free writing requires motivation, content, and thinking skill. However, the students who compose free writing may lack these three main issues which are discussed below.

### **Motivation**

According to Chimombo (1987, p.204), "Reality in free writing is difficult for students to practice because the writing is not a part of most students' daily lives; consequently, they only have a chance to practice as an assignment by assigning from English class." Additionally, free writing requires writers' imagination, thinking skill, process of writing, so it is necessary to provide a supportive environment and time for the students to acquire the skill (Pawliczak, 2015). Therefore, to motivate students to compose a free writing cannot be easy because the students have to spend time to compose the task. Besides, they do not have much chance to write in English in the real situation. Therefore, to motivate students to write may not come from the students themselves but from learning courses and the tasks assigned.

### **Content**

Hedge (2000) claimed that some pictures in magazine and / or newspaper could be good input for free writing activity. Hedge (2000) continued that she gave each students the pictures and each of them were asked to select a picture. The students selected the pictures depending on their satisfaction and they wrote by expressing the scene. To free writing, each student made the topics of picture by themselves. Woolfolk (1993) stated that free writing might be difficult for students to put content because the content is really from students' idea to talk about the picture and the students cannot contribute or take as much responsibility as they should. This means that

writing requires idea for writing but the students cannot express about the pictures. Therefore, it shows that the content of free writing is students' problem as well (Indrisamo & Squire, 2000).

### Thinking Skill

Leki (1998) noted that thinking skill is a problem which students face when they composed. Hence, students have to spend time to improve but they have less chance to practice. To compose a free writing paper, students need to organize their thoughts into a sequence which makes sense and they should express their ideas coherently. Leki (1998) continued that, when students compose the texts, they should consider the main or central idea of a piece of writing. Kroll (1991) supported that the students should link from the first to the second, the third to the last sentence to connect their ideas. English is not their mother tongue, so it can be difficult for students to write with coherence and cohesion. Consequently, the free writing task should encourage them to think and imagine creatively.

Regrading the nature of free writing, it has the processes.

### Process of Free Writing

Earnshaw (2007) and Kirby (2015) said that there were four steps in the process of free writing. First, it is to collect ideas on a preparation for writing. The writers jot down the ideas that come into their heads and then draw their ideas in a mind-mapping or in note-taking form. Moreover, they use the paper to write what they want to start through the end of the story. This preparation means that the writers make pros and theme of writing. Second, it is to categorize ideas in order to transfer the theme from idea collection sheet. This process means that those who will compose free writing, they use idea collection sheet as a precursor to mind mapping which is an inspired material to help them for categorizing the points on the idea collection sheet before organizing them into a map. Third, it is conversion to linear form. It means, the writers will write the important words, phrases and sentences as well as what they want to express into their mind mapping. To this step, it helps writers organize their free writing. Fourth, it is to transfer the map into draft. It means, the writers will transfer what they plan to compose free writing into the story or essay and they re-write; revise and edit their stories.

Palmer, Hafner and Sharp (1994) stated that while the writers proceed on writing tasks, they re-read, re-think, re-make re-create the writing paper. Moreover, Tribble (1997) claimed that the writers read through what they have written and make corrections for grammatical accuracy. In addition, editing can involve replacing one word with another to make it fit better or more vivid. Hence, skillful writers know that they need to read their texts carefully in order to check errors

such as spelling, punctuation, structure, word choice, etc. After composing free writing, the papers should be assessed by criteria below.

## **Free Writing Assessment**

Weigle (2002) claimed that there are the assessments to evaluate writing. Importantly, the evaluation can be applied to evaluate free writing such as the students' short story from their selected place. In addition, free writing can be evaluated by using analytic scoring. The use of analytic scoring is concerned with evaluating of the vocabulary use, organization, writing skills, content, grammar and sentence structure. According to Schweiker, Zogby, Carey, Kozup, Plempel and Martine (2002), supported that the assessment of free writing could consider content, organizing of text, word choice and language used. Thus, the criteria for assessment of free writing are to evaluate the following factors.

### **Assessment of Content**

Content assessment is an assessment which should be considered to evaluate information of free writing papers. It is concerned with the writers / students' information, theme, vocabulary used, ideas that are the core of their texts (Weigle 2002). Furthermore, Schweiker, Zogby, Carey, Kozup, Plempel and Martine (2002) claimed that the content of the story should include the main idea of story and the content must be relevant to the topic of story. Schweiker, Zogby, Carey, Kozup, Plempel and Martine (2002) continued that to evaluate content of the free writing by making story from selected place, one should consider the logical sequence of information, relevance between topic and information of composing papers. Hence, this writing should present the students' proficiency of information of their writing.

### **Assessment of Language Used**

Weigle (2002) said that the written works should be evaluated in terms of correct grammar, sentence structure, and appropriate vocabulary or word choices. To a free writing by composing story from selected place, so this point of criterion should evaluate the use of correct grammar points such as verbs, conjunction, subject and verb agreement, etc. Dees (2003) stated that in case of the use of vocabulary, the students' writing should be considered the use of appropriate vocabulary in the writing story.

### **Assessment of Writing Skill**

Grabe and Kaplan (1996) claimed that to evaluate the writers' skills of this writing, one should consider the use of writing process. Therefore, the writing process needs the writers' awareness of planning stage; *mind map*, *note taking*, *outlining*, *drafting*, *editing* and *revising* (Weigle, 2002).

Moreover, the writers should be able to present their linking on the surface of writing texts so that the connection will be clear to the readers. With reference to free writing paper by composing short story from the students' scene of selected place, the writing must be meaningful as a discourse. Consequently, if the writing paper lacks writing process, linking on the text surface, it shows that the writers lack writing skill.

### **Assessment of Thinking Skills**

McWhorter (1988) said that a criterion to evaluate writing task should include the writers' thinking skills. In addition, logical thinking was concerned with the writers are able to interpret their idea to express into writing paper clearly. Furthermore, thinking skills are necessary for the writing and the writers have to clarify, generate, organize and express their clear ideas. In addition, the writers interpret idea to compose their free writing. To the free writing, it should present logical thinking and organizing idea. This means that the writers should be able to explain the readers to understand what the writers think. Thus, it is obvious that the areas for assessment thinking skills of free writing should be evaluate by logical thinking and organizing idea (Weigle 2002).

To sum up, free writing is not just an input of information into a written text, but it must also be rearranged into a logical and connected discourse. Moreover, the writing must be corrected on grammar points, sentence structures and word choices. Hence, the assessment of free writing should use the criterion to evaluate the content, language use, writing skills and thinking skills.

Normally to teach free writing, students were usually assigned to write the stories and to make topic by themselves but the teachers might not provide interesting materials to encourage their students. Thus, the author decided to encourage the students to write free writing on their own by assigning them to sit at a place where the students were satisfied in order to imagine and write their own story. The steps of the task are (1) Each student's selected place on their satisfied situation. (2) The students were assigned to write short story from their real scene where they were sitting. To do this, the scene or surrounding provided positive atmosphere and it provided students to have motivation to write the free writing or short story. In addition, it introduces a refreshing change from routine to the task on what they are asked to write what the teachers selected for them (Mlazar 2004).

To various mentioned theories, the author apply to teach students for composing free writing, the author suggests and shares experience in the following topics.



## Applying for teaching students how to do free writing

The author divided the stage of teaching into 2 parts which are preparing-stage and real-stage of free writing.

### Preparing-Stage of Free Writing

To do this stage, the author only motivated and prepared students before real stage. The author selected a picture and showed it to the students in language class. The picture (**See Appendix 1**) was taken by the author for students to write their short story or express feeling from the picture. Then, the author persuaded students to imagine and asked them to put themselves into the picture. By doing this stage, the author taught them to know the process of free writing. By applying the theory mentioned, the author gave students the planning paper in order to teach them how to organize idea. (**See Appendix 2**). The students use the paper as idea collection sheet for drawing their ideas or theme of story before drafting. The author explained each point of mapping since what should be topic, main point and supporting details. To explain each step, it helps students understand how to organize their free writing. Then, students had to explain what they felt and expressed their feeling into writing paper by transferring the mapping into drafting (**See Appendix 3**). After the students wrote to express their feeling about the picture, the author did not correct their grammar, sentence structure, word choices, etc. Moreover, in this preparing stage, the author did not expect the length of writing because it was only the encouragement of students' imagination for free writing depending on students' idea. Then, the author asked students to do the real stage on free writing as the next step.

### Real-Stage of Free Writing

Regarding the real stage of free writing, the author asked the students to find a place where they were satisfied with surround such as the park, the beach, the yard in village, etc. The author suggested the students to put feeling, imagined on that place. Then, the students had to compose their own short story while they were sitting in their selected place as well. The length of story depended on the students' idea and imagination and / or what they need to write into their papers freely. The writer asked the students to collect all their own process of writing so that the writers know how they composed their stories. When, students finished writing, they had to submit their story on the next class (**See Appendix 4**).

When students submitted their free writing story, the author read each paper and gave scores in order to assess their papers. The scores ranged from 1 to 5 of each criterion on the evaluation form. For the score, they are 5 = the highest, 4 = high, 3 = moderate, 2 = low, 1 = the lowest. (**See Appendix 5**). Then, the author gave the students feedback after reading and giving



scores for every paper. Furthermore, the author also suggested to the students about sentence structure and how to use cohesion and coherence on their writing. In addition, the students had to rewrite their free writing after they were given feedback.

## Conclusion

Free writing can be useful for teachers to apply and gain its utilization for teaching free writing. However, the teachers of English should not assign the writing task without training in order to help the students understand the step of this type of writing. Moreover, the teachers should show the students to see example of free writing and the teachers should teach students by starting from the preparing step of writing such as writing mind map, the first draft to the last draft. Additionally, teachers of English should not forget that those who are assigned to write a free writing should have good proficiency of English at a level of study. The students should be assigned to write what they want so that they are able to create and write to express their idea appropriately. Finally, the teachers should not expect the students' length of writing and they should not really correct grammar point at the first time of free writing.

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## Appendix 1

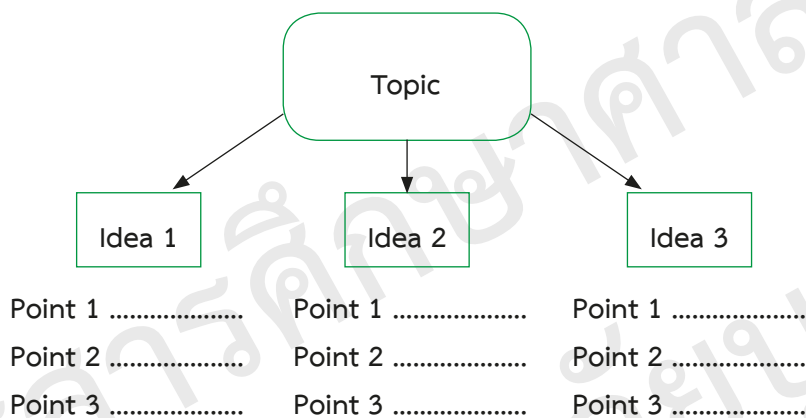
Example of picture

The picture was taken by the author



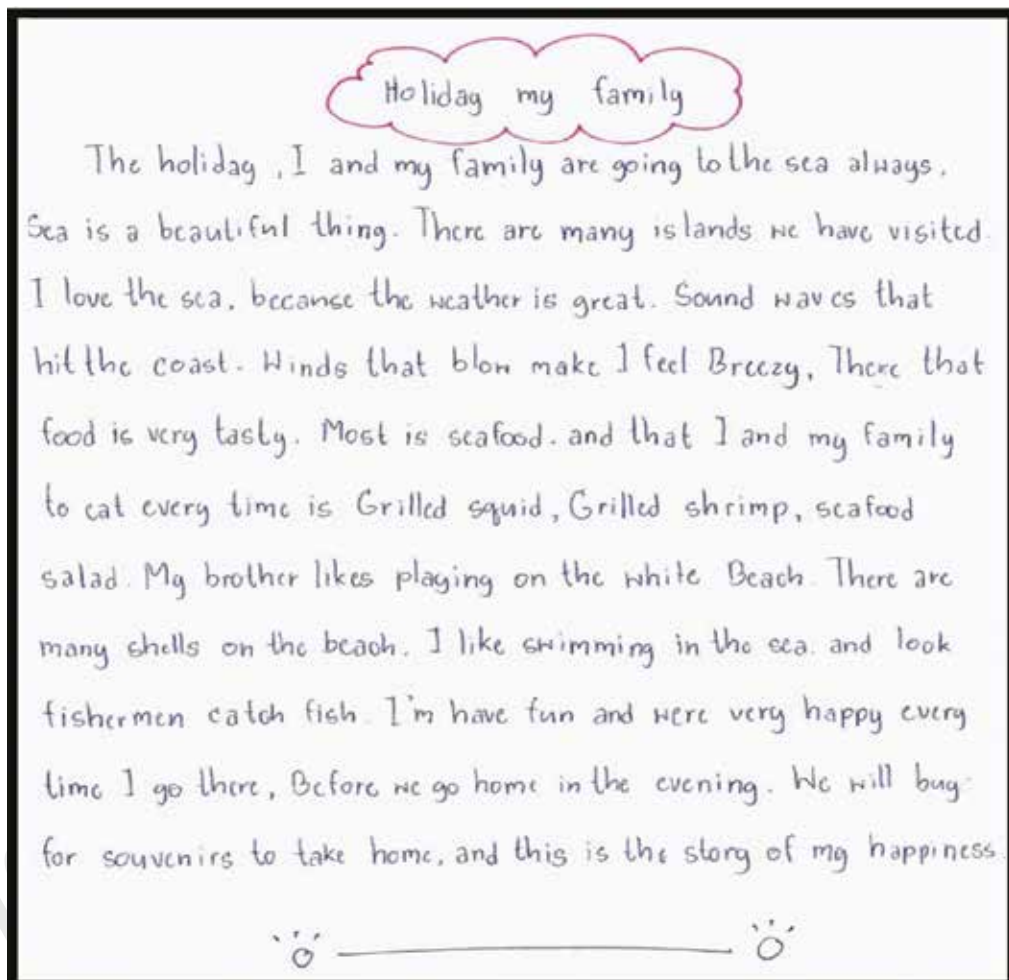
## Appendix 2

Planning Paper for Free Writing



## Appendix 3

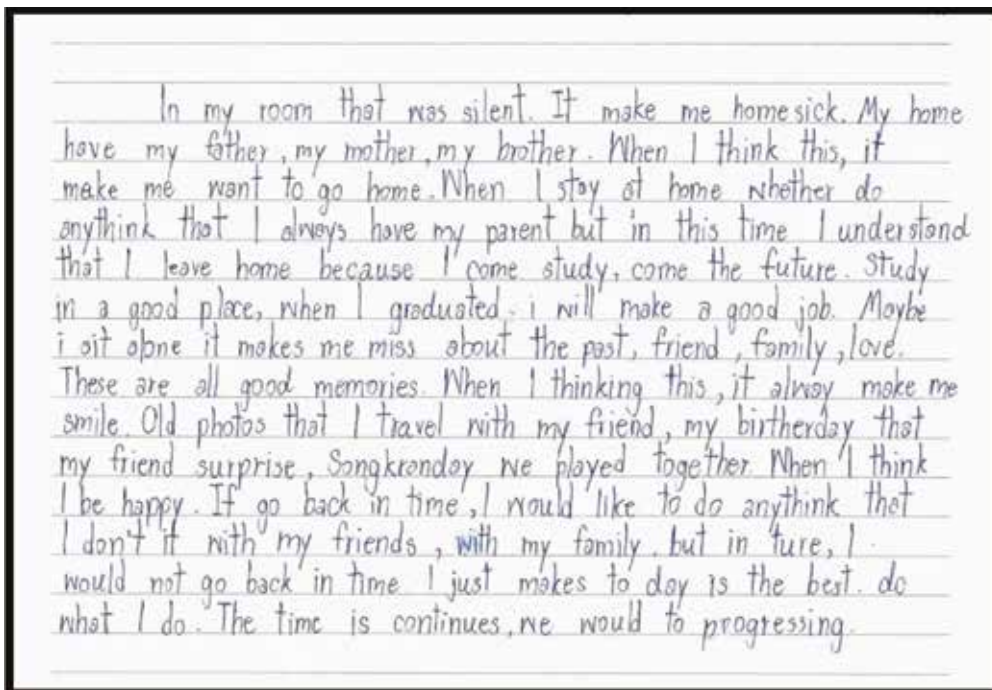
## Example of Students' free writing at the preparing stage



## Appendix 4

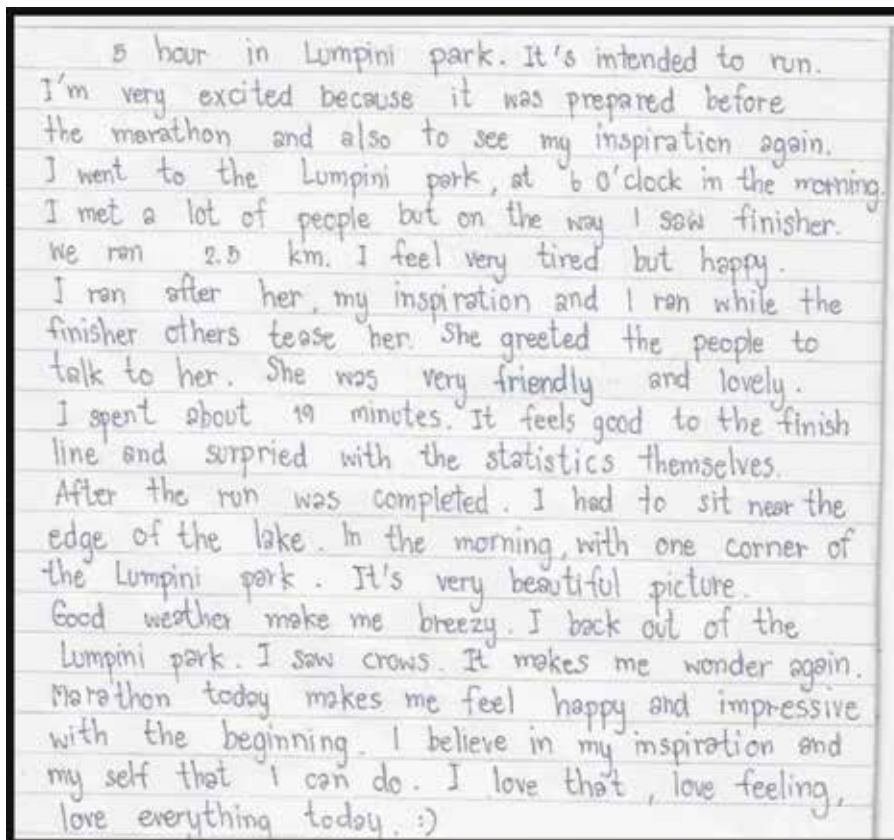
Examples of students' free writing from Scene of Place Selecting (Real Stage of Free Writing)

## Example 1



In my room that was silent. It make me homesick. My home have my father, my mother, my brother. When I think this, it make me want to go home. When I stay at home whether do anythink that I always have my parent but in this time I understand that I leave home because I come study, come the future. Study in a good place, when I graduated. i will make a good job. Maybe i sit alone it makes me miss about the past, friend, family, love. These are all good memories. When I thinking this, it alway make me smile. Old photos that I travel with my friend, my birtherday that my friend surprise, Songkrenday we played together. When I think I be happy. If go back in time, I would like to do anythink that I don't it with my friends, with my family. but in ture, I would not go back in time. I just makes to day is the best. do what I do. The time is continues, we would to progressing.

## Example 2



## Appendix 5

## Evaluation Form

## Score

5 = the highest      4 = high      3 = moderate      2 = low      1 = the lowest

Content

☐ Main Idea      ☐ Important information      ☐ relevant of topic and story

Language Use

☐ Grammar      ☐ Sentence structure      ☐ Appropriate Vocabulary

Writing Skills

☐ Cohesion      ☐ Coherence      ☐ Writing Process

Thinking Skills

☐ Creativity      ☐ Interpretation of idea Organizing Idea