



# Enhancing Eighth-Grade Students' Writing Skills in Recount Texts Through the Use of Pre-Writing Planning Strategies at SMP AL Muslim Sidoarjo

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## Abstract

The research examines how eighth-grade students at SMP Al Muslim Sidoarjo perform in writing recount texts. The primary purpose of this research is to evaluate the effectiveness of pre-writing planning strategies for enhancing student writing abilities. English writing presents a complicated skill for junior high students because they face problems with thought organization and text coherence. The research implemented classroom action research methods during two cycles, which included thirty students. The research instruments included student questionnaires, writing tasks, and observations of classroom activities. Students received different pre-writing strategies, which included brainstorming, mind mapping, and outlining during the intervention. Students became better at organizing their thoughts through these techniques, which resulted in more organized, coherent, and explicit recount texts. As a result, they demonstrated significant improvement in text structure and coherence. They demonstrated significant progress in organizing their thoughts, which produced more cohesive, structured, and explicit recount texts. The research documented considerable growth in students' writing confidence and interest in writing assignments. The pre-writing activities reduced students' writing stress while making the process more approachable and engaging. The research indicates that including pre-writing strategies within English language teaching leads to better student writing results and creates more favourable attitudes toward writing. It suggests that English teachers at SMP Al Muslim Sidoarjo and comparable educational institutions should implement pre-writing planning as an essential element of their writing instruction, especially when teaching narrative forms, including recount texts.

**Keywords:** Classroom action research, Junior high school students, Pre-writing strategies, Recount text, Writing skills

## Introduction

SMP Al Muslim eighth-grade students struggled to express their thoughts, especially when writing recounted texts. The writing of recounts is an essential tool for students to develop their experiences into organized narratives while building reflective thinking skills. Many students struggled to create coherent, meaningful narratives when expressing their thoughts. Second-language writers commonly face these problems because they experience challenges in idea generation and maintaining text cohesion (Hyland, 2003). The concern about students' writing quality led

to implementing pre-writing planning strategies as a teaching approach. The strategies help students develop their ideas before writing to enhance their written work's clarity, organization, and confidence. Studies indicate that brainstorming, outlining, and mind-mapping activities improve writing quality by establishing a structure for idea development (Harmer, 2007; Richards & Renandya, 2002). The implementation of these strategies reflects a shift not only in teaching techniques but also in the student's ability to express themselves more effectively.

Writing is an essential skill that helps students advance academically while providing

them with crucial abilities for their future careers. Students who demonstrate writing proficiency better communicate effectively within their academic environment and their future professional lives (Graham & Perin, 2007). Writing remains crucial for learning, yet numerous students experience difficulties because they receive insufficient direct instruction about planning and idea organization during the writing process. Students face additional difficulty when they need to create recount texts because they must remember and tell stories about their personal experiences in an orderly fashion. Writing is complex because it demands advanced mental processes, creative thinking, and effective thought organization (Richards & Renandya, 2002). Students can overcome writing difficulties by using pre-writing strategies, which include brainstorming, outlining, and mind mapping. These strategies act as a scaffold to assist learners in systematically developing and arranging their ideas before writing (Harmer, 2007).

## Literature Review

Communicating effectively is a fundamental life skill that substantially benefits academic progress and professional achievements after graduation (Graham & Perin, 2007). Students benefit significantly from writing tasks, especially recount texts, because they develop their language skills and enhance their critical thinking abilities and clear self-expression. The initiative at SMP Al Muslim worked to improve student writing abilities while building an engaging classroom atmosphere that supports academic development. The initiative focused on student-centred learning by providing learners with useful writing tools, which included pre-writing planning strategies to reduce writing anxiety and increase structure (Richards & Renandya, 2002).

The following sections of this study describe the writing difficulties that students experience, the instructional interventions used to address these problems, and the observed improvements that resulted from pre-writing techniques. This research aims to not only demonstrate the effectiveness of these strategies but also to offer practical suggestions for educators who are trying to enhance writing instruction. This

initiative demonstrates how flexible teaching methods can enable students to overcome obstacles while creating valuable educational opportunities (Harmer, 2007).

## Methodology

The research followed best practice classroom action research principles to enhance writing abilities for recounting texts through pre-writing planning strategies. The research method allowed the teacher-researcher to monitor classroom activities while reflecting on practice for ongoing enhancement. The research spanned two cycles: planning followed by action, observation, and reflection (Kemmis & McTaggart, 1988). The participants were 30 eighth-grade students from SMP Al Muslim Sidoarjo during the academic year 2024/2025. The students came from mixed ability levels and were selected based on their participation in regular English language instruction. The researcher acted as both teacher and observer. Data were collected using multiple instruments: Pre-test and post-test writing assessments to measure improvement in recount writing. Observation checklists to monitor student engagement and strategy implementation. Student worksheets (LKPD) to document planning stages. Questionnaires and interviews will be used to gather student feedback on the learning process.

The intervention consisted of implementing pre-writing planning strategies such as Brainstorming and freewriting, Clustering (mind-mapping), Outlining/drafting, Peer review and editing using guided criteria, and Integration of digital tools such as Jamboard for collaborative brainstorming and idea organization. The teacher demonstrated each strategy, followed by guided practice through LKPD and structured peer feedback activities. Observations, worksheets, and student feedback were analyzed qualitatively using thematic analysis to identify patterns in student engagement, challenges, and strategy effectiveness. To enhance validity, triangulation was applied by cross-checking results from different sources (test scores, observations, and student reflections). Peer discussion and reflective journaling were used to ensure reliability and reduce researcher bias during analysis. All participants were informed about the purpose of the study. Parental

consent was obtained, and student anonymity was preserved throughout the research.

## Results and Discussion

### *Situation*

The main problems eighth-grade students of SMP Al Muslim faced in writing recount texts were a lack of proper guidance and insufficient knowledge of how to write effectively. Many students had difficulty structuring their ideas clearly and coherently, which, in turn, affected their ability to narrate their personal experiences. Recount writing requires the ability to recall specific events and the capacity to arrange them in a logical and chronological order (Anderson & Anderson, 1997). The writing process frustrated many students because they could not plan and organize their work and make necessary revisions.

Additionally, students were rarely encouraged to engage in critical thinking or consider the structure of their writing before composing their texts. Without prior planning, they often felt overwhelmed by the complexity of writing tasks and uncertain how to begin (Graham & Perin, 2007). This situation highlighted the need for more strategic instructional approaches. Recognizing this gap, the implementation of pre-writing planning strategies emerged as a practical solution to help students organize their ideas and develop greater confidence in their writing (Richards & Renandya, 2002).

### *Challenges*

Students faced multiple writing challenges because they lacked proper structure and guidance in the systematic writing process. Students lacked direction when starting their recount text composition because they received no specific instructions. Students found writing difficult because they received minimal exposure to different writing methods, which prevented them from developing practical ideas and organization systems (Graham & Perin, 2007). The issue became most apparent among students who lacked prior experience with instructional methods that promote writing development.

The writing process became difficult to manage because students lacked scaffolding support during critical stages: brainstorming,

outlining, drafting, and revising. Without explicit instruction in specific writing strategies, students relied solely on their limited writing experience, resulting in disorganized work and diminished motivation (Richards & Renandya, 2002). Writing instruction becomes effective when teachers move beyond task assignments because they must teach students specific strategies, including graphic organizers, collaborative learning, and guided drafting (Harmer, 2007). Students began using pre-writing planning strategies after recognizing these obstacles, which provided them with a structured approach to organize their thoughts and improve their writing clarity and confidence.

### *Action*

The teacher implemented pre-writing planning strategies to address students' writing challenges that segmented the writing process into clear, manageable stages. This method was intended to demystify writing for students and increase their engagement by providing structured support. In preparation, the teacher carefully designed instructional tools, including lesson plans, student worksheets (*Lembar Kerja Peserta Didik* or LKPD), and interactive learning materials. These resources aim to guide students through each writing process phase—beginning with brainstorming and moving through organization, drafting, revising, and editing (Harmer, 2007).

One of the initial strategies introduced was a guided brainstorming activity, where students were presented with focused prompts related to recounting texts, such as "A Memorable Vacation" or "The Day I Learned Something New." These prompts were integrated into the LKPD to give students a foundation for idea generation. During brainstorming students were encouraged to write without constraints, focusing on generating ideas rather than correctness. This technique, often referred to as "*free writing*" or "*idea dumping*," is supported by writing pedagogy as a means to reduce writer's block and stimulate creativity (Graham & Perin, 2007; Richards & Renandya, 2002). To support struggling writers, the teacher also incorporated sentence starters and guiding questions to scaffold the process effectively.

Clustering was introduced as a key pre-writing strategy to support students in organizing

their ideas visually. The teacher included clustering templates in the student worksheets (LKPD), allowing learners to categorize their thoughts under guiding questions such as "Who," "What," "Where," "When," and "Why." Prior to the activity, the teacher modelled how to use clustering by applying it to a sample recount text, helping students understand how visual mapping can aid in developing logical, structured narratives. Visual tools like clustering promote idea generation and support students in establishing clear connections between concepts (Harmer, 2007; Richards & Renandya, 2002).

In the drafting stage, students transitioned from planning to composing complete paragraphs. Rather than using rigid paragraph frameworks, students were given the freedom to write about a personal experience within a ten-minute time frame. This activity was designed to encourage spontaneous expression and reduce anxiety related to grammar or structure (Graham & Perin, 2007). The teacher supported students by offering clear prompts-such as *"A Day I'll Never Forget"* or *"A Funny Incident with Friends"*-to spark ideas. A model draft was also analyzed together with the class to help students understand narrative flow. This emphasis on free expression and delayed revision aimed to reduce the fear of making mistakes and foster a more creative, confident approach to writing.

**Formative Assessment  
Learning Objective 1  
Instruction:**

1. Think of an experience where you were confident that you remembered all the details accurately
2. Go to the assigned slide on the Jamboard
3. Write key details about the memory in phrases, including the date, location, people involved, and significant moments
4. Reflect on the emotions you felt during that memory and how they contributed to your recollection
5. Ensure your response is clear, engaging, and well-organized.
6. Use the provided scoring rubric to evaluate memories shared by your peers

**Figure 1** Learning Objective 1 (Brainstorming).

Based on figure 1, it illustrates an assessment activity which enables students to practice recall and organization and emotional reflection through collaborative digital work on Jamboard. Students learn to remember important details from their personal memory while understanding how emotions affect their recall abilities. The exercise develops both cognitive abilities (memory and organization) and affective competencies (self-awareness and empathy).

Points	Accurate Details
0	Inaccurate or incomplete details
1	Some accuracy but with notable omissions or errors
2	Accurate information with minor omissions or errors
3	Exact and complete information in phrases
Points	Emotions and Reflection
0	No reflection on emotions or their role in memory
1	Basic reflection on emotions and their influence in phrases
2	Detailed emotional reflection that significantly contributes to memory recollection in phrases
Points	Clarity and Engagement
0	Not engaging or clear; lacks organization
1	Somewhat engaging and clear; could be more organized
2	Highly engaging and clear, well-organized response in phrases
Final Score	Derived Score: Maximal Score X 100 Derived Score: 7 X 100

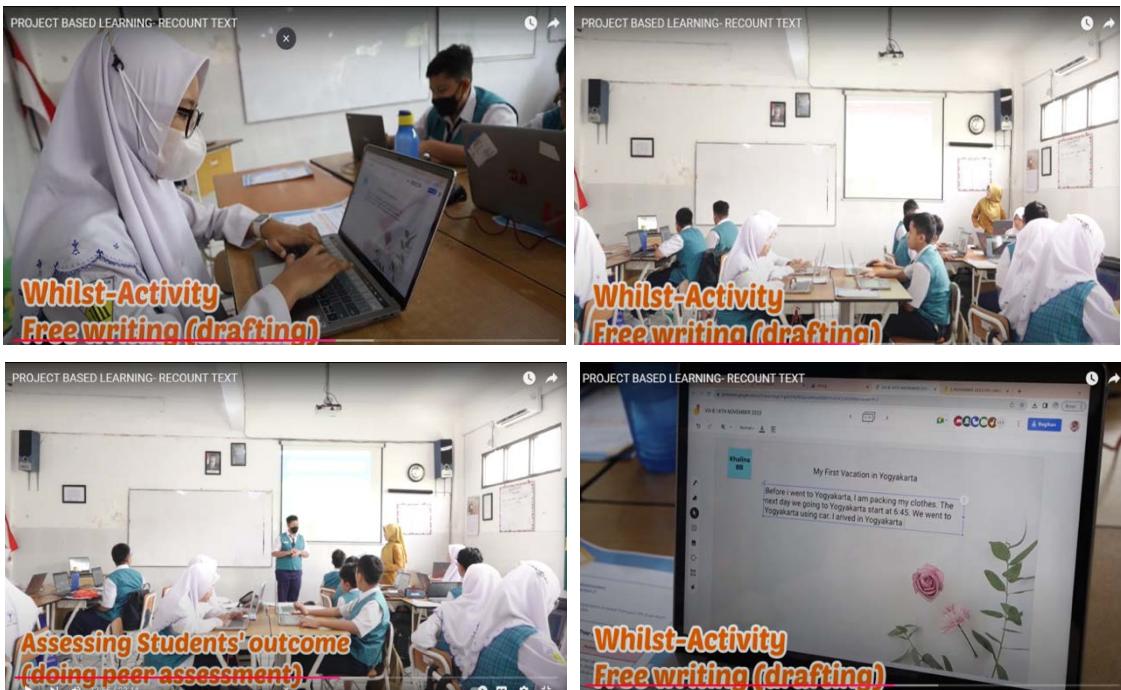
**Figure 2** Assessment Rubric of Brainstorming.

In Figure 2, the rubric establishes a precise framework to assess student brainstorming work during the formative assessment activity (Figure 1). The rubric provides both fairness and consistency in grading while showing students what they need to achieve. The rubric

evaluates three essential elements which include Accurate Details, Emotions and Reflection, and Clarity and Engagement.

The teacher implemented a formative assessment strategy focused on peer evaluation and constructive feedback to emphasize the value of editing and proofreading in the writing process. Rather than using an essential checklist, students were instructed to carefully review their classmates' recount drafts using clearly defined assessment criteria outlined in the *LKPD* (student worksheet). Each criterion included specific descriptors such as logical organization of ideas, appropriate use of past tense, and accuracy in spelling and punctuation.

Working in pairs, students exchanged their drafts and assessed one another's work by assigning scores on a scale of 0 to 4 for each component. The teacher modelled this activity by demonstrating how to give balanced and meaningful feedback, highlighting the strengths and areas that required revision. This approach encouraged critical thinking and promoted collaborative learning-both essential components of process writing (Graham & Perin, 2007; Harmer, 2007). By concluding the session with a discussion of scores and performance, the teacher reinforced the idea that constructive peer review and iterative revision are key to developing writing proficiency (Richards & Renandya, 2002).



**Figure 3** Teaching Practice process.

The teaching practice session in a classroom is shown through Figure 3. The visual representation shows student-teachers and trainee teachers as they create learning activities and interact with students while evaluating their results. The figure demonstrates teaching methodologies in practice by showing both instructional elements and assessment points.

#### *Stages Depicted in the Images*

##### 1. Whilst-Activity: Freewriting (Drafting)

The students participate in freewriting by creating their ideas without focusing on grammar or correctness. The writing stage at

this point focuses on fluency and creativity to allow students complete their work freely. The teacher maintains supervision while offering direction to students throughout the process.

##### 2. Classroom Interaction during Freewriting

The drafting stage requires students to work both independently and together with their peers. The teacher maintains student engagement through classroom movement while checking on each student's active participation. The teacher functions as a guide during this phase which demonstrates student-centered learning.

##### 3. Assessing Student Outcomes

The teacher starts evaluating student drafts following the activity before delivering formative feedback. The assessment process focuses on recognizing students' writing abilities and their development needs. The assessment for learning process appears as an integral part of the teaching practice instead of existing as an independent step.

#### 4. Use of Digital Tools in Freewriting

The last image displays a digital screen containing student-written drafts which run through an online platform (such as Google Docs or another similar tool). The integration of technology in teaching practice becomes visible through this image because it allows students to write together and edit their work and receive immediate feedback. The image shows digital literacy as an essential component of contemporary EFL teaching methods.

<p><b>Formative Assessment</b> <b>Learning Objective 4</b></p> <p><b>Instructions:</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Read the personal experience draft thoroughly</li> <li>2. Evaluate each criterion based on the provided descriptors and assign a score between 0 and 4</li> <li>3. Be specific in your feedback and note any strengths or areas for improvement</li> <li>4. After scoring all criteria, sum up the scores to determine the overall score</li> <li>5. Provide constructive feedback on your friend's work based on the assessment rubric</li> </ol>
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**Figure 4** Learning Objective 4 (Revising).

To further enhance the effectiveness of the pre-writing planning strategies, the teacher incorporated Jamboard as an interactive, collaborative tool where students could generate and exchange ideas and offer feedback in figure 4. Prior to implementation, the teacher structured the digital workspace by creating specific sections dedicated to brainstorming, clustering, and peer review. For instance, one slide on Jamboard was designated for collecting ideas using sticky notes, while another was arranged to visually group those ideas into clusters. A brief demonstration

was provided at the beginning of the lesson to ensure students understood how to navigate and contribute meaningfully to the platform. This digital collaboration encouraged peer interaction and cultivated a sense of community throughout the writing process (González & St. Louis, 2020).

The pre-writing planning strategy effectively addressed students' writing difficulties by combining well-structured resources with digital collaboration and clear teacher guidance. It equipped them with practical tools and greater confidence in composing recount texts. Integrating LKPD, digital platforms like Jamboard, and modelled.

Please use the following scoring rubric to evaluate the personal experience draft. Assign a score between 0 and 4 for each criterion, where 4 is "exceptional", 3 is "proficient", 2 is "basic", 1 is "limited", and 0 is "Not evident"

Criteria	Score
<b>Content and Relevance</b> The story is rich, engaging, and relevant	0-4
<b>Organization</b> The story is exceptionally well-structured	0-4
<b>Clarity and Coherence</b> The narrative is exceptionally clear and coherent	0-4
<b>Language and Style</b> The language and style are exceptional	0-4
<b>Grammar and Mechanics</b> Grammar and mechanics are exceptional	0-4
<b>Past Simple Tense Usage</b> Past simple tense usage is masterful, accurate, and appropriate	0-4
<b>Overall Impact</b> The narrative leaves a powerful and lasting impression	0-4

**Figure 5** Assessment Rubric of Revising.

In Figure 5, the teacher implemented Jamboard as an interactive, collaborative tool to enhance the effectiveness of pre-writing planning strategies by allowing students to generate ideas and provide feedback. Before starting the implementation, the teacher organized the digital workspace through designated

brainstorming, clustering, and peer review areas. The Jamboard platform contained two distinct slides where students added ideas through sticky notes, and another slide functioned to group these ideas into clusters visually. The teacher briefly introduced platform usage at the start of class to ensure students could use it effectively for meaningful contributions. The digital collaborative environment allowed students to interact with peers while building a sense of community throughout the writing process (González & St. Louis, 2020).

The pre-writing planning strategy solved the students' writing difficulties by integrating well-structured resources with digital collaboration and clear teacher guidance. It provided them with practical tools and more confidence in writing recount texts. Using LKPD, Jamboard, and modelled instruction helped create a dynamic and supportive classroom environment where students could progress at their own pace and receive consistent and scaffolded support (Graham & Perin, 2007; Harmer, 2007).

### Reflection

Students became more enthusiastic and actively participated in the writing process after implementing pre-writing planning strategies. The methodical approach allowed students to understand the fundamental elements of recounting texts and develop effective strategies to structure their ideas. The method increased student writing confidence and delivered better results in

summative assessments. Students became more independent when performing their writing assignments. Students started to take charge of their work after mastering the pre-writing planning stages by deciding how to organize their ideas and what content to include. The students' internalization of the taught strategies became evident through this development. The effectiveness of pre-writing planning strategies became evident through student scores exceeding the established passing standard.

In table 1, the general success of pre-writing planning strategies in implementation revealed specific areas that needed improvement during reflection. Most students showed improvement, but some struggled, especially at the beginning of the planning process. The strategy failed to benefit some learners fully because they needed extra instructional support to derive maximum benefit. The students who required additional support learned they needed more individualized guidance and scaffolding to develop practical organization skills and generate suitable content. The Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) by Vygotsky shows that students achieve better results when they receive support that matches their learning requirements (Vygotsky, 1978). The process of adapting pre-writing activities to meet different student abilities remains essential. Implementing specific instructional methods and additional targeted interventions will allow all students, particularly those who need extra support, to actively participate in the writing process and reach academic goals (Tomlinson, 2014; Graham & Perin, 2007).

**Table 1** Analysis of writing presenting story.

No	Name	Content and Creativity	Structure and Organization	Use of Past Tense	Grammar and Mechanics	Vocabulary and Description	Derived Score	Final Score
		1-4	1-4	1-4	1-4	1-4		
1	Aldo	4	3	3	3	3	16	80
2	Aisyah	3	4	4	3	3	17	85
3	Fia	4	4	4	3	3	18	90
4	Khalina	4	4	4	3	3	18	90
5	Azalea	4	4	4	3	3	18	90
6	Bima	4	3	3	3	3	16	80
7	Bintang	4	3	3	3	3	16	80
8	Brianna	4	4	4	3	3	18	90
9	Bimbi	3	4	4	3	3	17	85
10	Darrel	4	3	3	3	3	16	80
11	Faza	4	3	3	3	3	16	80
12	Eci	3	3	3	3	3	15	75
13	Dhani	3	3	3	3	3	15	75
14	Kafka	3	4	4	3	3	17	85
15	Kirana	4	3	3	3	3	16	80
16	Caca	3	4	4	3	3	17	85

No	Name	Content and Creativity	Structure and Organization	Use of Past Tense	Grammar and Mechanics	Vocabulary and Description	Derived Score	Final Score
		1-4	1-4	1-4	1-4	1-4		
17	Fadhil	3	4	4	3	3	17	85
18	Mirza	4	4	4	3	3	18	90
19	Danish	3	4	4	3	3	17	85
20	Bimo	3	4	4	3	3	17	85
21	Raka	4	3	3	3	3	16	80
22	Azka	4	3	3	3	3	16	80
23	Syahmi	3	4	4	3	3	17	85
24	Axel	4	4	4	4	3	19	95
25	Shifan	3	4	4	3	3	17	85

## Conclusions and Recommendation

Implementing pre-writing planning strategies has dramatically improved the writing skills of eighth-grade students when composing recount texts. The method proved helpful and inclusive because it tackled fundamental writing problems while implementing multiple teaching methods, including brainstorming, clustering, drafting, editing, proofreading, and digital collaboration through Jamboard. The combined elements enhanced the writing process while supporting students in maintaining steady progress in their performance. The findings confirm that teaching methods focusing on student needs lead to better writing performance when students tackle complex writing assignments. The positive results from this method show that systematic pre-writing strategies help students overcome their first writing obstacles to produce better-written work. Future success depends on continuously improving these strategies and enhanced support for students who need additional help to achieve equitable learning opportunities. The experience demonstrates how flexible educational methods enable students to develop their learning potential while fostering their interest in education and building a mindset that supports growth.

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