

# POISON OR ANTIDOTE? THE ROLE OF FEEDBACK PRACTICES IN WRITING APPREHENSION

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This study, conducted at a research-intensive, English-Medium instruction university in Central Asia, explores how feedback practices influence writing apprehension (WA) and examines the strategies low WA students use to manage it. Employing a mixed-methods design—including a survey, semi-structured interviews, and a focus group—the study reveals a strong relationship between students' feedback experiences and their levels of WA. Receiving supportive, constructive feedback, and adopting a growth mindset about writing were found to be the most effective strategies for mitigating WA. This empirical study contributes to writing center scholarship by demonstrating how Writing Center pedagogy can be applied to reduce students' WA.

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## INTRODUCTION

As an undergraduate peer tutor and intern at the Writing Center, I underwent a rigorous process of training through a sequence of three writing fellow courses. These classes are designed to prepare undergraduate writing tutors and teach them writing center pedagogy and tools for conducting writing consultations. North's idea that the Writing Center should aim to create better writers—which we discussed in the first course in the sequence—deeply resonated with me and became a direction for me as a tutor. From that moment, I utilized the strategies I learned at the Writing Center to give constructive and motivational feedback to students to encourage their growth as writers. While most students I worked with were used to such feedback and did not show any reaction to my comments, some were tak-

en aback. One such student told me, "I was afraid you were going to heavily criticize my work, but you did not." This statement made me wonder. Being fortunate enough to receive positive and encouraging feedback from my instructors and peers from the Writing Center, it was hard for me to imagine fearing such one-to-one consultations. I became curious as to why some students may expect heavy criticism instead of constructive feedback, so I turned to research to answer my question.

This is when I started reading literature about feedback and discovered the topic of writing apprehension. Writing apprehension (WA) refers to the trait of being anxious about writing (Daly and Miller). WA differs from the simple decision of starting the assignment later due to feelings of discomfort, anxiety, and sadness associated with delaying writing

(Badrasawi et al.; Young and Fritzsche). There are two types of students with WA: low apprehension and high apprehension (Bishop; Sanders-Reio et al.). High-apprehension students are the ones who experience WA. These writers struggle with starting a paper and postpone writing until the last moment. They are also afraid of showing their work to their peers and instructors because they feel ashamed of the quality of their writing (Al-Shboul and Huri; Badrasawi et al.).

Since 1975, there has been a plethora of research investigating the causes of WA, its effects, and its correlation with academic performance and writing skills. Investigating the causal link between WA and poor writing skills, Muhammad Muhammad Mahmoud Abdel Latif concluded that poor writing skills cause WA, not the other way around. The same was confirmed by other scholars, such as Diane Clark. In short, WA emerges as a result of certain factors, an understanding of which can greatly benefit the Writing Center and our practices that aim to assist writers. Jaber I. Abu Shawish and Mohammad Atea Abdelraheem identified six domains of causes of writing apprehension, which included affective factors, cognitive factors, linguistic factors, students' behaviors, teaching practices, and feedback strategies. Given that the primary task of writing tutors is to provide quality feedback to foster the development of writers, it is important to explore what feedback is the most effective for students. This is especially crucial to understand for students with WA to avoid worsening their situation and help them overcome the fear of writing.

The main purpose of this study is to explore the role of feedback practices in fostering or hindering WA in undergraduate multilingual students at a research-intensive university with an English medium of instruction in Kazakhstan, a post-Soviet Central Asian country. By exploring the connection between feedback and WA, writing centers and peer tutors can assess the effectiveness of current writing center practices and implement changes to assist students with WA.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

Feedback is a crucial component in writing instruction because the type of feedback influences student learning and writing outcomes (Bijami et al.; Parr and Timperley). Proper feedback improves writing performance and students' grades compared to no feedback or poor feedback (Mahfoodh). However, what counts as "proper" feedback changed over time. At first, teacher feedback was primarily focused on grammar errors (Sommers), but then it was found that grammar-focused feedback was not sufficient for developing students' writing and analytical skills. Students consider such feedback focused on low-order concerns (LOCs) too shallow and ineffective (Bishop; Davis and Dargusch; Hedengren and Lockerd; Parr and Timperley), which leads to disappointment and lack of motivation. Thus, feedback also impacts students' motivation to write and their writing attitudes.

Another factor that may impact students' motivation to write and their attitudes towards writing is the source of feedback. The most

common types of feedback, often contrasted in the literature, are instructor and peer feedback. Several studies point out that students prefer instructor feedback because they trust their expertise and knowledge (Tian and Zhou; Zacharias). Due to this content knowledge, instructors tend to give more critical feedback that challenges students' ideas and promote analytical thinking (Hsieh and Hill; Li and Zhang). Students also preferred to receive shorter feedback from their teachers because it meant they made fewer mistakes (Zacharias). On the other hand, peer feedback is more informal and can prompt the self-reflection necessary for revision (Hsieh and Hill). It is also useful for identifying issues with clarity. Noora Al Muhairi and Khalid Al Jaber argued that peer feedback influences student writing performances more than the instructor's feedback. It is also considered the most effective for students with lower grades and special needs. Thus, one might expect that students with high WA will prefer peer feedback more.

The scholarly literature offers multiple suggestions for dealing with WA to avoid its negative consequences. The student in Kamal Badrasawi and colleagues' study reported that expansion of vocabulary and reading skills is a preferable method for tackling WA. The teachers, on the other hand, point out that better preparation and listening to the instructor's advice will help fight WA. However, Badrasawi and colleagues disagree with this and suggest making teachers aware of students' writing problems and being more empathetic when providing feedback. Along similar lines, Phillip Dawson and colleagues claim that

affective feedback will be useful for encouraging students. The affective feedback considers students' feelings and concerns, treating each writer as a separate individual (Badrasawi et al.; Mitoumba-Tindy). Teacher's encouragement may help students engage with their writing, which, according to Joanne Sanders-Reio and others, has a negative correlation with WA. Thus, teachers may learn to encourage students with affective feedback to lessen the impact of writing apprehension. If students feel appreciation for their work and proper engagement from the tutor, they will start trusting and listening to their feedback (Davis and Dargusch; Dawson et al.). At the same time, focusing on grammar and other LOCs appears vague to students and only makes them even more reluctant to write, as they do not know what to improve on (Bishop; Davis and Dargusch; Hedengren and Lockerd). Therefore, one of the ways of dealing with WA is to provide affective feedback and emotionally engage with the students, avoiding feedback focused on LOCs.

Another type of feedback that prevents writing apprehension is scaffolded feedback. It is the type of feedback where the instructor gradually removes guidance to help students to work independently (Finn and Metcalfe). Ehsan Rassaei conducted a study comparing the outcomes of scaffolded and corrective feedback (also called recasts). He found that scaffolded feedback is more effective as teachers use implicit correction, giving more opportunities for students to identify mistakes independently. They can identify such mistakes since scaffolding reduces the load on the working

memory of students during the planning, revision, and writing of the task (Kellogg). This way, students can focus on one task at a time, which makes writing easier. If the feedback is given in a timely manner, scaffolding can provide clear steps for improvement that can help students reflect on their writing and use this feedback in further assignments (Davis and Dargusch; Dawson et al.; Kellogg). Thus, it appears that reducing the difficulty of writing through scaffolding and increasing the engagement of students with affective feedback are useful strategies to mitigate WA.

The main goal of this empirical study is to understand the role of feedback practices in writing apprehension. Even though other causes of WA may emerge during the research process, focusing on feedback practices is more applicable in the writing center context. That is because peer tutors at the Writing Center can bridge the gap between instructor and peer feedback, as they have credibility due to their training but are not considered as authoritative as instructors, whom some students may view as intimidating. Researching the types of feedback WA students prefer to receive and how different feedback practices influence them can shed light on ways in which Writing Center tutors can help increase students' uptake of feedback and lessen WA. Another objective is to find strategies used by low-apprehension students that help them lessen or prevent writing anxiety that can be utilized by students and encouraged by writing fellows and tutors. So, my research questions are as follows:

**RQ1.** What is the role of feedback processes in writing apprehension?

**RQ2.** What are the strategies used by students with low WA that writing fellows and instructors can apply to assist high apprehension students?

## METHODS

This mixed-method research was conducted at an autonomous research university with an English medium of instruction in Kazakhstan, where the student population is multilingual, with most students speaking at least three languages (Kazakh, Russian, and English). The participants of the study are undergraduate students of any major and any year of study who are 18 years old and older. After receiving an IRB approval to conduct this research, I recruited participants through student-run Telegram chats with 300 to 1000 undergraduate and graduate students in them, including general chats for student announcements and chats by year of study.

My research design consisted of a survey, semi-structured interviews, and a focus group. By administering a survey, I categorized students into high, moderate, and low apprehension groups to ask questions appropriate for their level of WA during the follow-up interview. For example, students with low apprehension were asked about their techniques for dealing with WA. These suggestions were further discussed with a focus group consisting of moderate apprehension students to triangulate the strategies suggested by low apprehension group.

The survey is a validated test with 26 Likert scale items created by John A. Daly and Michael D. Miller, called the Writing Apprehension Scale (WAS) ("The Empirical

Development”). This test is used in most research on WA for classifying participants into high and low apprehension groups. The minimum score a participant can get on this test is 26, while the maximum is 130. If a participant gets a score lower than 59, they are classified as high writing apprehension. If their score is higher than 97, they are low apprehension. Students scoring anywhere between 59 and 97 are classified as moderate apprehension. The formula used for calculation and survey questions are included in Appendix A. While the survey items were not modified in any way, they were preceded by two optional questions about the participant’s major and year of study to make sure only undergraduate students took the test. They were also followed up by an item prompting participants to leave their contact information if they were interested in participating in a follow-up semi-structured interview. Except for this last optional item, the survey was administered anonymously.

The next stage after the survey was an interview with volunteers from both moderate and low apprehension groups. None of the high apprehension students agreed to proceed to the interview stage, so I had interviews with students with moderate and low WA instead. In total, I conducted 11 interviews, five with low WA students and six with moderate WA students. Thus, I was able to get almost an equal number of people in each group.

The average length of interviews was 22 minutes. Two questions in the interview guide utilized 15 metaphorical cards to probe differences in participants’ perceptions of feedback and writing. I curated the cards to encourage responses from participants and made sure that each could be associated with writing.

Both groups had separate sets of questions, but sometimes I would add several questions from the high apprehension interview guide to low apprehension interview guide and vice versa if I regarded it as necessary. Low apprehension students were additionally asked to give advice for high apprehension students and suggest strategies for dealing with writing apprehension.

Then, the strategies and solutions suggested by low apprehension students were discussed at the focus group interview with moderate apprehension students whom I had previously interviewed. The focus group was unstructured, as it depended on the results of semi-structured interviews. I hoped to get all six moderate apprehension students to participate in the focus group, but with the final exam period coming up, scheduling conflicts, and last-minute cancellations, I could only gather and interview two people. The focus group lasted for 37 minutes.

Information about the participants has been kept confidential. Participant names were replaced with aliases (e.g., “student 1” or “S1”) in interview and focus group recording transcriptions. Course and instructor names, or names of other people mentioned in the interviews were replaced with generic descriptions in square brackets, such as [name of the course]. All possible risks and benefits of this research were explained in the informed consent form and discussed with potential participants, including the possibility of discomfort in answering questions related to past writing experiences or the perceived risk of consequences if they mention a particular instructor. I made sure to explain the confidentiality of the research to help them make an informed decision and mitigate their stress, if any. Participants had full

agency in this research and could withdraw from the project at any time.

## RESULTS

### SURVEY RESULTS

In total, I received 21 responses in a 4-week period. Despite sending recruitment reminders in chats several times a week, the response rate was low, which was probably caused by the midterm season. The results of the survey were calculated by me as it involved simple arithmetic, and the formula for calculation was stated in the original paper by Daly and Miller.

Among these respondents, I identified 2 high, 11 moderate, and 8 low writing apprehension (WA) students. The average test score for the survey was around 86 and the median was 90, with the lowest score being 38 and the highest 120 (see Fig. 1).

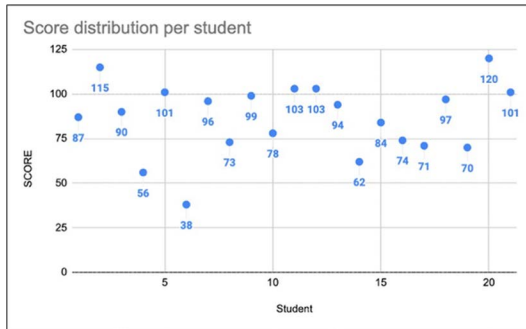


Fig. 1. WAS score distribution

Table 1 summarizes the average score for each survey item. A score closer to 1 means that more people answered “strongly agree” to a given item. Conversely, a score closer to 5 means that more people answered “strongly disagree”

to a given item. A score of 3 corresponds to the answer “uncertain” on the Likert scale.

Table 1. Averages for Each Item in the Questionnaire

Item	Average Score
I avoid writing.	3.24
I have no fear of my writing being evaluated.	3
I look forward to writing down my ideas.	2.24
I am afraid of writing essays when I know they will be evaluated.	3.38
Taking a composition course is very frightening experience.	2.9
Handing in a composition makes me feel good.	2.71
My mind seems to go blank when I start to work on a composition.	2.95
Expressing ideas through writing seems to be a waste of time.	4.52
I would enjoy submitting my writing to magazines for evaluation and publication.	2.81
I like to write my ideas down.	1.9
I feel confident in my ability to clearly express my ideas in writing.	2.76
I like to have my friends read what I have written.	3.33
I'm nervous about writing.	2.9
People seem to enjoy what I write.	2.71
I enjoy writing.	2.57
I never seem to be able to clearly write down my ideas.	3.33
Writing is a lot of fun.	3
I expect to do poorly in composition classes even before I enter them.	3.62
I like seeing my thoughts on paper.	2.33
Discussing my writing with others is an enjoyable experience.	2.95
I have terrible time organizing my ideas in a composition course.	2.9
When I hand in a composition, I know I'm going to do poorly.	3.29
It's easy for me to write good compositions.	2.86
I don't think I write as well as most other people.	2.86
I don't like my composition to be evaluated.	3.33
I'm not good at writing.	3.43

According to Table 1, students mostly enjoy discussing their writing with others (2.95) and writing down their ideas. They disagreed the most with the statement that writing is a waste of time (4.52).

## INTERVIEW RESULTS

The semi-structured interviews were conducted with six moderate WA and five low WA students who had indicated in their survey responses that they agreed to proceed to this stage. The results of the interview are divided by the most important emerging themes: perception of writing, perception of feedback, opinion on feedback types, writing apprehension, and suggested strategies. The first two subsections below report results based on responses to metaphorical cards. Although each of the 15 cards used was selected at least once, I will focus only on the three cards that were selected more frequently. Interestingly, some of them were chosen by both moderate and low WA students, who provided different explanations for their choice.

### PERCEPTION OF WRITING

There was a clear divide between moderate and low WA students on how they generally viewed writing. Moderate apprehension students were more likely to choose a metaphorical card, like Figure 2, describing writing as something with “no end,” “confusing,” “chaotic” because one can go in any direction when writing. As Student 5 put it, “You start with one topic, thinking about one thing, and then once you do your research, your opinion can change... So, that’s why it’s so confusing to me.” Other

moderately apprehensive students described writing as “having no sense of direction.”



Fig. 2. Metaphorical card 1

On the other hand, when low apprehension students chose the same card, they explained their choice by saying that writing is “like solving a riddle.” They considered difficulties in writing as an intellectual quest and were more excited to solve that riddle. Although they recognized that writing was a complicated process with no single right path, they felt empowered rather than daunted by it. Low apprehension students also tended to choose the card below (see Fig. 3), saying that writing helped them discover the knowledge inside themselves.

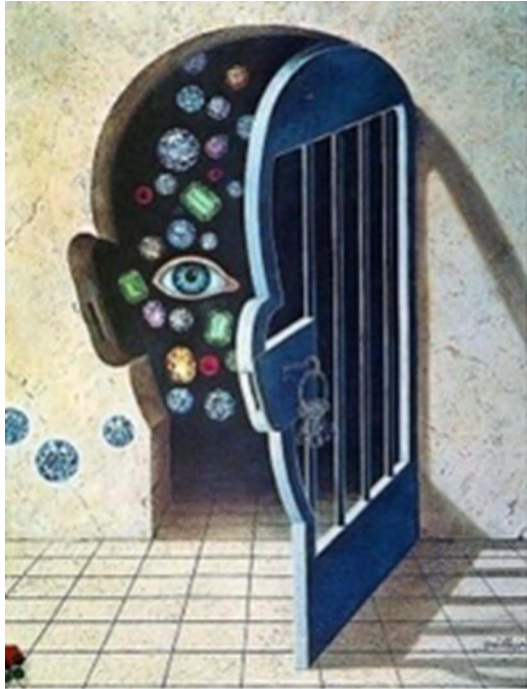


Fig. 3. Metaphorical card 2

Writing made low WA students “feel so smart” because it helped them connect different concepts learned in class, engage with scholarly articles, and express their ideas.

### PERCEPTION OF FEEDBACK

Most students, regardless of their score on the WA test, considered feedback as a guiding and helpful process. Low apprehension students usually recognized that “the process itself, the writing, what [they] end up producing is [their] own responsibility.” In other words, they recognized the importance of filtering and applying the received feedback. Similarly, one mod-

erate WA student pointed out that writing feedback is like a compass; it shows you the direction, but you choose whether to go in that direction or not.

Generally, low apprehension students seemed to have a more positive perception of feedback due to positive feedback experiences. Yet, some of them seemed wary of peer feedback. One low apprehension student shared her experience with peer tutoring after which she became reluctant to seek feedback from peers because she started to feel like a bad writer:

**Student 1:** “I feel a little scared of tutoring now a little bit. Because I feel like they might have this assumption that I’m a bad writer or they might kind of make me feel like I’m a bad writer. And when it comes to professors, I’m almost always certain that they’re not gonna do that to me, so I guess that’s why I feel positive towards their feedback.”

Similarly, other low apprehension students (3 out of 5 in total) prefer going to their professors for feedback on their writing, be it by attending a writing center tutorial or their professors’ office hours. They seem to seek validation from a professor “because [they] want to hear that [they are] doing a good job,” and this motivates them to improve. As for their reasons for not seeking peer feedback, two are common: they are afraid of peers’ feedback affecting their work or do not want to bother their peers, who they think might be busy with their own tasks and homework.

Moderate apprehension students, on the other hand, viewed feedback as an “unstable

structure” (see Fig. 4) because of negative feedback experiences at school or university. The student with the lowest test score out of all interviewees also added that getting feedback depends on the feedback giver, so it is like “gambling” to them.



Fig. 4. Metaphorical card 3

Unlike low apprehension students, only one moderate apprehension student prefers professor feedback and visits a writing center, while others prefer peer feedback or do not seek feedback at all. The reason for choosing peer feedback is usually related to being afraid of the professor’s judgement. As Student 2 puts it,

feedback from friends “doesn’t feel as offensive as from the professor.” Most (4 out of 6) moderate WA students tended to not get feedback on their drafts at all. Since they usually start writing just days before the deadline, they do not get a chance to visit the Writing Center or office hours. One student said that they went to office hours for the first time in their four years of undergraduate studies to check a paper written in Kazakh, not in English, because they were less familiar with academic conventions in Kazakh compared to English. Another student said that she goes to the Writing Center only to see tutors that she already has some connections with.

## OPINION ON FEEDBACK TYPES

Participants also shared their opinions on how various types of feedback impact their motivation to write and which ones they would like to receive more of.

The most disliked type of feedback was harsh feedback that only includes criticism. One low apprehension student had an experience with a professor who called her paper “garbage” and harshly criticized it. This situation impacted her motivation to review the feedback for subsequent papers:

**Student 9:** “I just didn’t even open the feedback because I didn’t want to see the negativity. It’s kind of weird when I think about it. It’s been like a year, and I still haven’t opened it. This email is still stored in my account, and that’s it.”

Another type of feedback that is not appreciated by either moderate and low apprehension students is the one that concentrate on low-order concerns and include short and uninformative comments such as “this is good.” As a rule, students found it difficult to pinpoint the exact reason for disliking grammar-related comments. However, they were eager to describe the type of feedback they liked:

**Student 2:** “What I prefer is to receive feedback more on, like, how to be more concise, how to make your writing more readable, something like that.”

Even though students liked being praised by professors and others, they still mention that simply receiving “this is good” as a comment is not encouraging and motivating.

**Student 11:** “I have this professor who gives me feedback this semester, and she’s like, ‘Oh, this is good.’ Or then she goes, ‘good, good’. And I’m like, ‘What’s good? I don’t need this.’”

This student also added that explanations for what is “good” in their writing would be useful. This point is consistent with the types of feedback most interview participants agreed is the most useful. They liked feedback that is process-oriented, where the feedback giver is “more interested in what [a student is] thinking than trying to change something in [their] writing.” Most mentioned that big comments with detailed explanations is the most desirable type of feedback because details can help make feedback more applicable and understandable.

As one student highlighted, “you have to make it [at the] level of the student.”

## FEEDBACK, WRITING APPREHENSION, AND MOTIVATION

Students seem to agree that feedback has an impact on motivation to write and writing apprehension. Low apprehension students, for example, highlighted that praise made them more eager to improve their skills in writing. Consider this excerpt from a low apprehension student:

**Student 7:** “After working hard on an assignment, I would receive good feedback about my work. So that’s also reinforcing my desire to continue writing, continue learning, and studying, and applying whatever I learned to research papers and to essays.”

Positive and properly phrased constructive feedback reinforced their desire to continue improving. At the same time, these same students may take writing feedback more personally as they closely associate writing with their identity and creativity. So, the personality and identity of the writer seem to play a role in feedback processing and, subsequently, WA.

The same effect of personality and identity was observed in moderate apprehension students. For example, some students with moderate WA identified themselves as procrastinators and non-writers, which became an excuse for them not to start or improve their writing:

**Student 8:** “And I’m just afraid to start and also I’m a procrastinator. I can’t start it.”

While answering the question about WA and procrastination, Student 6—also a moderate WA student—admitted that writing was not the only aspect of academia, and even life, that they procrastinated on: “It’s not just writing procrastination. It’s anything procrastination.” Most moderate WA students procrastinate writing until the day of the deadline. Despite attempts to plan and space out their writing process, some of them failed to implement commonly proposed solutions for fighting writing procrastination, such as starting early. Several moderate WA students pointed out that once they open the document, they “sit there, staring at it and ... go to [their] phone or do other things [they] have to do.” One student even sat in front of a blank document screen for six hours, not knowing how to start. It usually happens with big papers and assignments because students become “scared that [they] will not have enough things to write about ... enough sources to refer to, or ... enough ideas.” Some of them acknowledge that they “don’t care about their papers,” so they receive bad feedback that reinforces their beliefs about being bad at writing.

Another interesting finding is that perfectionism seems to have a strong impact on WA, especially for low apprehension students. Since these students perceive themselves as good at writing, there is pressure for them to do well on every writing assignment. If they receive less than excellent feedback or grades, they

become anxious as well. Consider the following answer:

**Student 9:** “Because whenever I feel pressure, I get very anxious. And this feeling of anxiety just overpowers whatever little motivation I might have or whatever thoughts, whatever ideas I can think of, whatever arguments I have.”

Another low apprehension student emphasized, “If I’m not sure that I’m writing [well], if it’s not perfect, why [should I] do it at all?” Moderate apprehension students with scores closer to those of low apprehension seem to experience the same problem. One of them pointed out that she is “a perfectionist, and writing is a highly imperfective activity” and that is why she frequently procrastinates. Thus, perfectionism seems to affect both groups of students and their writing processes.

## SUGGESTED STRATEGIES

While all participants admitted that they can procrastinate on writing assignments and experience writing apprehension at least occasionally, the way they deal with it seems to differ drastically. When prompted to give suggestions for dealing with writing and WA, low apprehension students generally recommended setting artificial deadlines to finish the work earlier, finding a good feedback giver, reading more, practicing writing, and changing one’s mindset about writing. Student 7 suggested to shift to a more process-oriented mindset when approaching writing assignments:

**Student 7:** I like to get into the mindset that I need to articulate an idea. I need to explain a phenomenon, for example. And I need to do it as clearly as possible and as interestingly as possible. And this is what helps me to shift a bit from the idea of what perfect work would look like and get into more of a process-oriented approach and how I can achieve the same quality of work by actually being interested and involved in the process.

Although I did not plan to ask moderate apprehension students about strategies, sometimes they brought up interesting ideas that I considered worth exploring. For example, one moderate apprehension student uses ChatGPT to deal with writing anxiety. They said that they do not simply copy and paste what ChatGPT gives them but take a more critical approach and use it as a tool for dealing with perfectionism:

**Student 11:** “It’s a tool that eases the burden that I have on me... Sometimes ChatGPT writes the bullshittest thing ever. And I read that, ‘Oh, that’s okay. I can write that too.’”

This practice seems to ground them and help them overcome writing apprehension. It motivates them to produce something of their own when they see that even ChatGPT can do something with their ideas.

## FOCUS GROUP RESULTS

After the semi-structured interviews, six moderate apprehension students agreed to participate in the focus group, but only two of them were able to make it. Validating the findings from the semi-structured interviews, focus group participants also agreed that feedback affects one’s motivation to write, but they still considered it students’ responsibility to not take critical feedback personally and improve their writing skills:

**Student 2:** “I think people should work on their perception of feedback. It depends on perception, and this is the only thing you should fix not to feel anxious and upset about the feedback.”

**Student 8:** “While I receive feedback, I should not think of it as feedback of me... Don’t perceive it personally.”

Then, I suggested some strategies to them that were mentioned by low apprehension students to deal with WA. They agreed that appropriately phrased and balanced feedback is the best for fostering excitement for writing. Their opinion does not seem to drastically differ from what was mentioned in the interview stage. However, they provided a rationale for not liking grammar-focused feedback:

**Student 8:** “English is not my native language, so I do make mistakes in English, so I do not think that concentrating only on grammatical mistakes is a good thing.”

**Student 2:** “Actually, that’s the same as native speakers. They do not know the grammar properly. And we are the ones who learn grammar very thoroughly, and then the professor points out the mistake, and you are like, ‘I spent hours learning this and then I make mistakes.’”

Such feedback seems to make EFL students upset since they are aware of their weaknesses in grammar as non-natives, so just pointing at their grammatical mistakes does not motivate them to improve.

While moderate apprehension students agreed with most strategies offered by low apprehension peers, they worried about the use of AI for idea synthesis and structuring of the paper. They thought its use should be avoided, even if you do not directly copy-paste the text from ChatGPT.

**Student 8:** “I don’t think it’s legal. But personally, I would use ChatGPT for this kind of stuff. But not copy-paste.”

Another participant shared their fear of using AI tools for writing for two different reasons. The first one is the fear of plagiarism, while the second one is generic ideas from ChatGPT.

**Student 2:** “To be honest, I am scared of using AI when writing, especially in English because even if you generate ideas and everyone in class have the same topic, you will probably have the same arguments and the same points in your essay. And that will be detected as plagiarism. I also noticed that ChatGPT

does not really provide you with any unique ideas, something extraordinary.”

## DISCUSSION

The current study demonstrates a strong relationship between students’ feedback experiences and their motivation to write, although feedback may not be the sole contributor to writing apprehension. Specifically, feedback can both motivate and discourage students depending on what it focuses on and how it is presented. However, perfectionism and personal identity also play a role in this relationship, as they impact how feedback is perceived and acted upon. For example, even low apprehension students, who identify as good writers and feel the pressure to do well, may experience WA or at least some symptoms thereof, such as negative feelings towards writing and procrastination, if the feedback does not include praise and encouragement. This emphasizes the need for supportive feedback from professors as well as peer tutors.

Regarding feedback types, my findings also correspond to the literature and the writing center pedagogy. From the description of good feedback from participants of the interview and the focus group, the preferred type of feedback for both low and moderate apprehension groups seem to be the one that is focused on the process and offers concrete suggestions for how to improve the clarity and cohesion of the writing, not merely the grammatical correctness of the text, because it shows care for and engagement with one’s work. Students appreciate big comments that include details

and explanations of what is good and bad in a paper with a fair amount of praise and encouragement. This confirms that, for multilingual or EFL students, detailed and supportive feedback with little focus on grammar seems to be the best solution for lessening WA (Badrasawi et al.; Mitoumba-Tindy; Sanders-Reio et al.).

Such feedback strategy that involves feedback focused on high-order concerns is taught in the writing center and is called motivational scaffolding. Jo Mackiewicz and Isabelle Thompson studied such feedback practices and highlighted the importance of showing care for students and praising them, providing verbal strategies for expressing care for students' writing. Since motivational scaffolding is already practiced in the writing center, it seems that current writing center feedback strategies meet students' needs. To maintain such support, writing centers should continue engaging with students' writing through Socratic questioning and motivational scaffolding during consultations.

Overall, feedback source preferences differ significantly between the two groups. Low apprehension students turn to professors to seek validation and ask more content-related questions, while moderate apprehension students do not usually ask for feedback. However, when moderate apprehension students do end up asking for writing feedback, they prefer asking their peers because they are afraid of judgement from a professor. This finding corresponds to the literature that states students are more receptive to peer feedback than instructor feedback (Al Muhairi and Al Jaber). This highlights the crucial role that peer tutors

can play in the writing center, supporting students with higher writing apprehension.

Answering my second research question about low apprehension students' strategies for dealing with writing and WA, students generally suggest starting an assignment early to accommodate the writing process. Another suggestion was a mindset change about writing. As was demonstrated by their choice of metaphorical cards, low and moderate apprehension students tended to differ in their views on writing and feedback. Even though both groups admit that the process of writing is complex, low apprehension students are more open to its challenges, which they see as creative and expressive opportunities. Moderate apprehension students, on the other hand, view writing as a chaotic endeavor. According to Laura Miller, peer tutors have an influence on students' mindsets, so they should aim to foster a growth mindset and positive attitude towards writing in their tutees through feedback and communication. Therefore, it is important to instill a growth mindset in apprehensive students, which, in combination with other strategies, will improve their writing skills. I suggest emphasizing this during writing fellow trainings to ensure that students benefit from writing consultations. Apart from peer tutor training, the Writing Center could organize various writing workshops for students and faculty from other departments on how to give and receive feedback. Such workshops will increase students' writing competence and teach them how to work with feedback, gradually steering them from the fixed mindset to a more open-minded and process-oriented approach to writing.

One novel strategy that was mentioned by participants was the usage of ChatGPT for dealing with WA. Students who mentioned AI tools indicated that they use them for brainstorming ideas. In the study about teacher's attitudes on the use of AI tools for content and organization of students' writing, Marzuki and colleagues stated that teachers agreed that the use of AI tools can improve the quality of students' writing. Yet, students should avoid being too reliant on these tools, as this hinders their critical thinking skills and other important skills necessary for thriving in the academic environment (Marzuki et al.; Yu). This is similar to concerns raised by the focus group participants, who are reluctant to use AI writing tools for mitigating WA because they believe AI-assisted writing lacks creativity and uniqueness. It is interesting that moderate WA students seem to keep ethical and expressive concerns in mind, although one may assume they will not be concerned with ethics of using AI tools to deal with writing. It seems that these students recognize such limitations of GenAI because they use it frequently.

## CONCLUSION

In conclusion, this paper investigated the role of feedback in writing apprehension and ways of dealing with writing apprehension. It found that feedback both encourages and discourages students depending on its focus and form, serving as both "poison" and "antidote" for WA. The most preferred type of feedback by both low- and moderate apprehension groups was balanced feedback that contains praise and constructive criticism. Students appreciate

big comments that include details and explanations on how to improve further, especially when those details and explanations have to do with higher-order concerns. The mindset change was suggested by low apprehension students as a strategy to deal with WA. Thus, working on changing students' perspectives about writing and feedback through training and workshops is an approach writing centers can take to make them more receptive to feedback and lessen their writing anxiety.

One student suggested a strategy of using AI tools for dealing with writing apprehension that I did not consider prior to this research. Since the focus of this research was not the use of AI tools in writing, I could not go into detailed discussion and research of this theme. However, given the growing integration of AI tools in writing workflows and instruction, future research may consider exploring the effectiveness of AI tools in lessening writing anxiety.

One limitation of the current study is the low number of respondents for the survey and focus group, which was caused by the final exams season. A larger sample size would likely lead to richer and more robust findings. Despite this, the research yielded compelling results, and I was able to conduct eleven interviews, compensating for the low number of responses. Another limitation is that high apprehension students did not agree to be interviewed after taking the survey, so findings of the study apply to moderate apprehension and low apprehension students only. One of my assumptions is that high apprehension students may avoid discussing writing at all, given their anxiety and fear. It may also be the case that

some moderate apprehension students in my study were, in fact, high apprehension: they may have answered the survey items in ways that they thought were more socially acceptable (social desirability bias), which may have skewed their test scores.

Despite such limitations, the study contributes to the literature on WA, finding a strong connection between feedback and writing apprehension. It also shows that Writing Center

pedagogy with its emphasis on affective and constructive feedback practices can be used to mitigate WA. It is one of few studies conducted in the multilingual setting and in the Central Asian context about writing apprehension and feedback, shedding light on feedback preferences and WA mitigation strategies that can be further compared to monolingual and multilingual students' strategies in other parts of the world.

## APPENDIX A: WA SCALE TEST (DALY AND MILLER)

1. I avoid writing (+)
2. I have no fear of my writing being evaluated (-)
3. I look forward to writing down my ideas (-)
4. I am afraid of writing essays when I know they will be evaluated (+)
5. Taking a composition course is very frightening experience (+)
6. Handing in a composition makes me feel good (-)
7. My mind seems to go blank when I start to work on a composition (+)
8. Expressing ideas through writing seems to be a waste of time (+)
9. I would enjoy submitting my writing to magazines for evaluation and publication (-)
10. I like to write my ideas down (-)
11. I feel confident in my ability to clearly express my ideas in writing (-)
12. I like to have my friends read what I have written. (-)
13. I'm nervous about writing (+)
14. People seem to enjoy what I write (-)
15. I enjoy writing (-)
16. I never seem to be able to clearly write down my ideas (+)
17. Writing is a lot of fun (+)
18. I expect to do poorly in composition classes even before I enter them (+)
19. I like seeing my thoughts on paper (-)

20. Discussing my writing with others is an enjoyable experience (-)
21. I have terrible time organizing my ideas in a composition course (+)
22. When I hand in a composition I know I'm going to do poorly (+)
23. It's easy for me to write good compositions (-)
24. I don't think I write as well as most other people (+)
25. I don't like my composition to be evaluated (+)
26. I'm no good at writing (+)

Formula:  $WA = 78 + PSV(\text{positive statements}) - NSV(\text{negative statements})$ .

## APPENDIX B: INTERVIEW GUIDE FOR HIGH APPREHENSION STUDENTS

1. Can you choose a card that you mostly associate with writing and explain why?
2. Can you choose a card that you associate with getting feedback the most? Why?
3. Would you prefer having 3 midterms during finals week or 1 big paper? Why?
4. How was your experience of receiving feedback from your professors?
5. What is your writing process like?
6. What do you consider to be good feedback?
7. What factors do you think cause writing anxiety?
8. Do you usually experience writing procrastination? Do you do anything to cope with that?

## APPENDIX C: INTERVIEW GUIDE FOR LOW APPREHENSION STUDENTS

1. Can you choose a card that you mostly associate with writing and explain why?
2. Can you choose a card that you associate with getting feedback the most? Why?
3. Would you prefer having 3 midterms during finals week or 1 big paper? Why?
4. How was your experience of receiving feedback from your professors?
5. What is your writing process like?
6. What do you consider to be good feedback?
7. Are you proactive about feedback? Do you ask others for feedback yourself?
8. Do you have any strategies you use to deal with writing?
9. What do you like the most about writing, if anything?
10. What would be your advice to people who fear writing?

## APPENDIX D: METAPHORICAL CARDS



Fig. 5. Picture of all metaphorical cards

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