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Designing an Audience-Oriented Assessment System for PBL-Based Senior High EFL Writing

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Abstract: Assessment in senior high EFL writing is often dominated by exam-facing criteria that privilege linguistic accuracy and fixed forms, which can misalign with project-based learning (PBL) writing, where students compose texts for authentic purposes and audiences. This paper presents an audience-oriented assessment system (AOPWAS) designed to align assessment with PBL writing processes and outcomes while remaining feasible for secondary classrooms. Grounded in assessment-for-learning and feedback literacy scholarship, the system integrates (a) an audience-aware analytic rubric, (b) portfolio-based evidence mapping across drafting and publication, (c) structured peer and self-co-assessment routines, and (d) brief teacher-student conferencing focused on feedforward and revision decisions. Rather than relying on complex statistical modelling, the protocol adopts a qualitatively driven mixed-evidence approach: qualitative data (classroom observation notes, student reflections, interview prompts, and writing portfolios) are prioritized to understand how assessment criteria shape revision behaviour and motivation, while lightweight descriptive summaries (e.g., rubric dimension profiles, rater agreement checks) support transparency. The paper details design principles, assessment tools, step-by-step classroom procedures, and an evaluation plan that can be adapted to different PBL writing topics. It contributes a practical assessment blueprint for teachers seeking to reduce assessment-instruction mismatch and to cultivate students' audience awareness, feedback uptake, and self-regulated revision in PBL-based writing.

Keywords: Project-based learning; EFL writing; Assessment for learning; Audience awareness; Analytic rubric; Portfolio assessment; Feedback literacy

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1. Introduction

In senior high EFL classrooms, writing assessment often functions as a gatekeeping mechanism linked to examinations. Under such conditions, teachers and students may treat writing as an accuracy exercise, emphasizing error counts and template conformity. This assessment logic can discourage risk-taking, narrow topic development, and reduce revision to surface-level correction.

Project-based learning (PBL) offers an alternative logic: students write to achieve a tangible outcome for a real or simulated audience, typically through extended inquiry and multi-stage production. When writing is situated in authentic communicative tasks, criteria such as purpose clarity, audience impact, organization, and evidence use become central.

However, if assessment remains exam-facing and product-only, students receive mixed messages about what counts as quality writing.

Assessment alignment is therefore not an auxiliary concern in PBL writing. It is a core mechanism that shapes learners' motivation, feedback engagement, and the quality of revision decisions. If criteria are transparent, actionable, and audience-oriented, assessment can function as a compass for revision and self-regulation rather than as a post-hoc judgment [1].

This paper addresses a practical question: how can teachers construct an audience-oriented assessment system for PBL-based EFL writing that is rigorous yet feasible in secondary classrooms? The paper proposes an Audience-Oriented PBL Writing Assessment System (AOPWAS) and provides an implementation protocol and evaluation plan consistent with qualitatively driven mixed evidence (QUAL → quan). The aim is to offer a reusable blueprint that teachers and researchers can adapt across project topics without introducing complex modelling or heavy data burdens.

2. Design foundations

Two strands of scholarship inform the AOPWAS design: assessment for learning and feedback literacy. Assessment for learning emphasizes the formative function of assessment evidence—helping learners understand standards, close gaps, and develop evaluative expertise [2]. A central implication is that criteria must be communicated in ways students can use during production, not only after grading.

Feedback scholarship further clarifies that information becomes feedback only when it is taken up and used to improve work. Models highlight the need for clear goals (feed up), information about current performance (feed back), and guidance for next steps (feed forward) [3]. Effective formative feedback tends to be specific, actionable, timely, and supportive rather than evaluative [4].

Recent work on feedback literacy reframes feedback as a capability students develop: appreciating feedback, making judgments, managing affect, and taking action [5]. This implies that assessment systems should build routines that require students to interpret criteria, justify revision choices, and reflect on learning—especially in writing, where improvement is mediated through cycles of drafting and revision [6].

Peer assessment and co-assessment are particularly relevant to PBL writing because peers represent an authentic readership and can increase feedback frequency. Evidence also suggests that providing peer feedback can strengthen the reviewer's own writing by deepening attention to quality criteria [7]. To avoid superficial peer comments, prompts, and roles need to steer attention to meaning-level issues—purpose, clarity, evidence, and reader experience—rather than only grammar.

Finally, qualitative methodological guidance supports the evaluation plan. The AOPWAS protocol prioritizes rich classroom evidence and thematic analysis to explain how assessment design influences writing processes, while using lightweight descriptive summaries to enhance transparency and feasibility [8].

3. The audience-oriented PBL writing assessment system (AOPWAS)

AOPWAS is designed as a coherent system rather than a single rubric. It integrates four components that operate across the project cycle: (1) an audience-aware analytic rubric; (2) a portfolio evidence map that records process and product evidence; (3) structured peer and self co-assessment routines; and (4) brief feedforward conferencing focused on revision decisions. Together, these components aim to (a) make criteria usable during writing, (b) increase the visibility of growth across drafts, (c) cultivate feedback uptake and judgment, and (d) keep workload manageable.

Figure 1 provides a text-based overview of the system flow. The protocol is compatible with different PBL writing themes (e.g., campus culture promotion, environmental advocacy, community service proposals) as long as the writing

product involves a clear audience and publication goal.

Project brief & audience → Criteria negotiation → Draft 1 (writer's note) → Peer review (structured prompts) → Teacher feedforward (2–3 priorities) → Uptake note & revision plan → Draft 2/3 (portfolio evidence) → Micro-conference (if needed) → Publication/showcase → Reflection & self-assessment

Figure 1. AOPWAS overview across a PBL writing cycle

4. Operational tools

This section details the core tools teachers can adopt with minimal adaptation. The tools are intended to be teacher-readable and student-usable, prioritizing clarity over technical complexity.

4.1. Audience-aware analytic rubric

The rubric operationalizes quality in ways aligned with authentic communication. It retains exam-relevant language accuracy but elevates audience impact and rhetorical effectiveness. To keep scoring feasible, the rubric is analytic but compact: five dimensions with four performance levels. Teachers can adjust descriptors to match local curriculum standards.

Table 1. Compact audience-oriented analytic rubric for PBL writing (excerpt)

Dimension	Level 4 (Strong)	Level 3 (Adequate)	Level 2 (Emerging)	Level 1 (Limited)
Purpose & audience impact	Purpose is explicit; addresses audience needs; persuasive/appropriate tone; clear reader takeaways.	Purpose is mostly clear; tone generally appropriate; audience considered but uneven.	Purpose vague; limited audience awareness; tone/ register inconsistent.	No clear purpose; ignores audience; tone inappropriate or confusing.
Organization & coherence	Logical structure supports message; strong paragraphing; effective transitions and signposting.	Overall structure apparent; some coherence gaps; transitions occasionally weak.	Loose organization; repetition or missing links; paragraphing inconsistent.	Disorganized; hard to follow; minimal coherence cues.
Evidence & content development	Relevant ideas with specific support (examples, data, reasons); accurate and sufficient detail.	Some support provided; examples may be general or uneven; minor relevance issues.	Limited support; ideas underdeveloped; evidence weak or off-topic.	Unsupported claims; minimal development; content largely irrelevant.
Language resources (accuracy & appropriacy)	Mostly accurate grammar and vocabulary; errors do not impede meaning; lexical choices suit audience.	Some errors; meaning generally clear; vocabulary adequate but not always precise.	Frequent errors; meaning sometimes obscured; limited lexical control.	Persistent errors; meaning often unclear; very limited language resources.
Revision and reflection (process evidence)	Substantial meaning-level revisions; explains feedback uptake decisions; reflection shows strategy awareness.	Some revisions beyond surface edits; explains some choices; reflection partly strategic.	Mostly surface-level edits; limited uptake explanation; reflection descriptive.	Little revision; minimal engagement with feedback; reflection absent or superficial.

4.2. Portfolio evidence map

Because PBL writing emphasizes learning over time, portfolio evidence is used to make growth visible. The evidence map specifies what artifacts are collected (drafts, peer comments, teacher feedforward notes, uptake notes, reflection entries, and final product) and how they correspond to rubric dimensions. This reduces the tendency to treat assessment as a single final score and supports student self-monitoring.

In practice, the evidence map can be a one-page checklist attached to each project, enabling students to track completion and enabling teachers to sample key artifacts rather than reading everything in full.

4.3. Structured peer and self co-assessment

Co-assessment routines help students internalize criteria and practice judgment. The protocol recommends short peer-review rounds using structured prompts that foreground the reader's experience. For example, reviewers answer: (1) What is the writer's main message and intended audience? (2) Where did you feel convinced/engaged, and why? (3) Identify one section where the audience may misunderstand; propose a concrete revision. (4) Suggest one improvement in evidence or organization. This keeps peer feedback focused on meaning-level revisions, which are crucial for authentic writing.

Self-assessment follows revision: students complete a brief reflection aligned with rubric dimensions, describing one major meaning-level change they made, one feedback point they rejected (and why), and one strategy they will transfer to the next task. These routines operationalize feedback literacy by requiring appreciation, judgment, and action.

4.4. Feedforward conferencing

Teacher conferencing is designed to be short and strategic: typically 3–5 minutes per focal student or group, triggered by bottlenecks such as unclear purpose, weak evidence, or low uptake. Rather than correcting every sentence, the teacher provides feedforward priorities and asks students to articulate revision intentions. This approach aligns with research emphasizing feedback that guides next steps and supports learner regulation.

5. Classroom implementation protocol

The following protocol describes a typical 3–4 week PBL writing cycle. Teachers can shorten or extend the timeline depending on project complexity.

5.1. Week 1: Launch and criteria negotiation

Introduce the project brief, audience, and publication format. Co-construct success criteria using exemplar texts or teacher models. Distribute the rubric and explain each dimension with concrete examples. Students write a brief "audience statement" describing who will read the product and what effect they aim to achieve.

5.2. Week 2: Draft 1 and peer review

Students submit Draft 1 with a writer's note stating purpose, intended audience, and one area where they want feedback. Conduct structured peer review in pairs or triads. Require reviewers to provide one audience-focused comment and one revision suggestion tied to rubric dimensions.

5.3. Week 2–3: Teacher feedforward and uptake note

Teacher reviews Draft 1 after peer comments and provides 2–3 feedforward priorities. Students complete an uptake note (adopt/reject/unsure) and write a revision plan specifying what will change and where.

5.4. Week 3: Draft 2 and micro-conferencing

Students produce Draft 2 and highlight major changes. The teacher conducts brief micro-conferences for students who

show minimal meaning-level revision or persistent audience/purpose issues. Conferences focus on revision choices and strategy, not exhaustive correction.

5.5. Week 4: Publication, portfolio submission, and reflection

Students publish or present the final product to the intended audience (or a simulated audience such as another class). Students submit the portfolio evidence map and complete a self-assessment reflection tied to the rubric. The teacher uses a sampling strategy to review portfolios efficiently, focusing on focal artifacts (Draft 1, Draft 2, final draft, uptake note, and one reflection entry).

6. Evaluation plan (Qualitatively driven mixed evidence)

AOPWAS can be evaluated without complex models by combining rich qualitative evidence with lightweight descriptive summaries. The primary aim is explanatory: to understand how audience-oriented criteria and routines influence revision behaviour, feedback uptake, and learner motivation in a specific classroom context.

Qualitative evidence sources include (a) classroom observation notes documenting criteria negotiation and peer-review interactions, (b) student portfolios showing draft trajectories and uptake notes, (c) short student interviews or focus groups about assessment perceptions, and (d) teacher reflective memos about feasibility and workload. Thematic analysis can be applied following the six-phase approach, with attention to credibility and audit trail practices.

Embedded quantitative summaries are limited to teacher-readable indicators, such as rubric dimension profiles across drafts, counts of meaning-level revisions, and simple rater agreement checks when multiple scorers are involved. These summaries support transparency and triangulation but do not aim to establish causal effects.

Example analytic categories for qualitative coding:

(1) Audience awareness (reader needs, tone/register choices, clarity of purpose)

(2) Assessment literacy (use of criteria language, ability to justify judgments)

(3) Feedback uptake (adopt/reject reasoning, revision planning specificity)

(4) Revision depth (meaning-level vs surface-level changes)

(5) Motivational responses (ownership, perceived fairness, confidence, workload perceptions)

(6) Feasibility (teacher time, student completion, bottlenecks, and adaptations)

7. Discussion and implications

AOPWAS responds to a common PBL writing challenge: learners may experience authentic tasks but still be assessed with criteria that do not reflect the communicative demands of the project. By foregrounding audience impact and revision evidence, the system aims to shift assessment from a single-score judgment to a process-oriented guide for improvement.

The system's design also supports feedback literacy. Uptake notes and co-assessment routines require students to interpret comments, make judgments, and take action—capabilities emphasized in contemporary feedback scholarship. In addition, structured peer review leverages peers as a readership and can strengthen the reviewer's criteria awareness.

For teachers, feasibility is addressed through compact rubric dimensions, evidence sampling strategies, and micro-conferencing triggered by traceable bottlenecks. This aligns with feedback design perspectives that stress systemic routines rather than isolated comment quality [9].

At a broader level, the protocol can help reconcile exam constraints with communicative writing goals. While accuracy remains a rubric dimension, it is embedded within an audience-oriented conception of quality. This positioning may support classrooms seeking to meet examination requirements while cultivating transferable writing competence.

8. Limitations and future directions

As an implementation protocol, this paper does not claim generalized effectiveness. The evaluation plan is intentionally lightweight and context-sensitive, and future work should include multi-site piloting and analysis across diverse proficiency levels and project themes.

Further development may also explore technology-supported portfolio management and traceable feedback workflows to reduce workload and improve visibility of uptake. Ethical considerations are essential in secondary contexts, including informed consent, data minimization, and secure handling of student work.

9. Conclusion

This paper presented an Audience-Oriented PBL Writing Assessment System (AOPWAS) designed to align assessment with the authentic purposes and audiences of PBL writing in senior high EFL classrooms. By integrating an audience-aware rubric, portfolio evidence mapping, co-assessment routines, and feedforward conferencing, the system offers a practical pathway for supporting revision depth, feedback uptake, and self-regulated writing. The accompanying implementation and evaluation protocol provides teacher-usable tools that avoid complex modelling while maintaining conceptual rigor grounded in established assessment and feedback research.

Disclosure statement

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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