

## Smartphones, GPAs, and Fluency Writing

by David Kehe



**RECENTLY**, I arrived at my academic EAL class 15 minutes early and noticed that four students were already there. All of them were focused on their phones. One of them in particular seemed to be especially amused, so out of curiosity, I asked her what was so funny. She laughingly told me that she was exchanging text messages with her friend across campus who was supposed to be listening to a lecture in her Psychology class.

Students are aware of how smartphones can keep them from getting physical exercise, or from socializing with family members and friends, or from getting enough sleep. However, few seem to be aware of how they can negatively affect their GPAs. There is research<sup>1</sup> that shows this, and by presenting this to students, it could motivate them to reconsider how they use a phone during a class.

However, instead of just telling students about the research, I have found that a more effective way of sharing these research results with them is by incorporating the information into a Fluency Writing activity. In this activity, students are able to use all four skills while simultaneously learning about the research.

Fluency Writing activities involve 3 steps:

1. In groups of threes, each member of a group is given one-third of an article. They start by silently reading their part of the article.
2. Students then take turns reading their parts of the article (which the others can't see) and listening to their partners read theirs.
3. After they feel that they understand all three parts clearly, without looking at the article, each member individually

writes a paraphrase with as many details as possible from all three parts of the article. (Some “key” words are given to help them remember the information.)

Besides the opportunity for students to learn some new information, Fluency Writing has several positive aspects:

1. Unlike most writing tasks, in Fluency Writing, students don't need to spend time and mental energy coming up with their own ideas. The content of what they write about comes from the articles.
2. For the teachers, these are relatively easy to mark. The content of every students' written product is the same, so when giving feedback on these, the teacher would be able to focus on just the grammar and style.

If you'd like to see more information about this activity, here is the link: [commonsense-esl.com/2017/10/09/discouraging-smartphones-from-disrupting-students-focus-in-class/](http://commonsense-esl.com/2017/10/09/discouraging-smartphones-from-disrupting-students-focus-in-class/). Feel free to print these out and use them with your students.

<sup>1</sup> Lepp, A., Barkley, J. & Karpinski, A. (2015 January-March, 2015) The Relationship Between Cell Phone Use and Academic Performance in a Sample of U.S. College Students. *SAGE Open*, 1-9. <http://journals.sagepub.com/doi/pdf/10.1177/2158244015573169>



David Kehe is currently a coordinator in the Academic ESL program at Whatcom Community College, Bellingham, WA. He has taught for over 35 years in Asia, Europe and the U.S. and with the Peace Corps in Africa. He has co-authored nine textbooks. You can find his blog at [CommonSense-ESL.com](http://CommonSense-ESL.com)