CHAPTER IV

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

In this chapter, the answers to the research questions in section 1.3 are discussed. First, an overview of the writing strategies identified in this study is presented. Features obtained from the analysis of the frequency count obtained are discussed. Then, the results from the analysis of the interview protocols are presented with the description of problems encountered. In reference to these problems, a general description of strategies used is presented. This is then followed by a detailed discussion of the effects of specific strategy use as identified from a cross analysis of the three sources of data from this study, i.e. the rank order of the written drafts, the think-aloud and the interview protocols. The chapter then concludes with a summary of major findings and a model to explain strategy use in the process of writing business letters.

4.1   Overview of Strategies Used

Twenty-seven strategies were identified from the think-aloud protocols. From this list,   fourteen were categorized as cognitive strategies, nine as

metacognitive strategies, and four as social strategies (see section 1.4 for definitions). As mentioned in section 3.5.1, three flow charts were developed to help the researcher chart specific features of each strategy. These flow charts (Figure 3, 4 and 5) were then used as a guide for coding the think-aloud protocols.

The frequency counts (f) presented in Table 2 highlight the following six as the most dominant strategies used in writing business letters among weak learners, i.e. transcribing (19.5%), rehearsing structure (12.7%), monitoring production (11%), scanning (8.6%), translating (7.6%), rehearsing ideas (5.6%) and repeating (5.6%). The high frequency of these strategies is consistent with research findings on writing processes which identified dominant sub-processes like reading, rereading or reviewing, rehearsing, transcribing, translating, planning, revising and editing occurring in a recursive manner (e.g. Raimes, 1985; 1987; Zamel, 1983; Perl, 1979).

Table 2 also shows that the students appeared to have switched strategies more often for Task 2. This is indicated by the difference in the total frequency count between the two tasks (i.e. 664 for Task 1 and 766 for Task 2). This seems to support the assumption made in section 3.4 about the level of difficulty of these two tasks. Task 2, which was assumed to be more difficult than Task 1,

Table 2: Frequency of Strategies Used Between Tasks

	Task 1		Task 2		Total	
Cognitive Strategies	f	%	f	%	f	%
Transcribing	122	18.4	157	20.5	279	19.5
Scanning	46	6.9	77	10.1	123	8.6
Translating	47	7.1	61	8.0	108	7.6
Repeating	43	6.5	37	4.8	80	5.6
Resourcing	24	3.6	32	4.2	56	3.9
Revising	23	3.5	25	3.3	48	3.4
Skimming	11	1.7	14	1.8	25	1.7
Notetaking	17	2.6	8	1.0	25	1.7
Drafting	8	1.2	9	1.2	17	1.2
Summarizing	3	0.5	10	1.3	13	0.9
Making Connections	3	0.5	5	0.7	8	0.6
Deducing	2	0.3	4	0.5	6	0.4
Paraphrasing	3	0.5	2	0.3	5	0.3
Guessing Meaning	0	0.0	2	0.3	2	0.1
Metacognitive Strategies						
Rehearsing Structure	80	12.0	102	13.3	182	12.7
Monitoring Production	77	11.6	80	10.4	157	11.0
Rehearsing Ideas	49	7.4	31	4.0	80	5.6
Evaluating Production	16	2.4	11	1.4	27	1.9
Monitoring Comprehension	14	2.1	8	1.0	22	1.5
Evaluating Comprehension	3	0.5	5	0.7	8	0.6
Evaluating Ability	2	0.3	6	0.8	8	0.6
Monitoring Style	4	0.6	1	0.1	5	0.3
Evaluating Task	0	0.0	3	0.4	3	0.2
Social Strategies						
Directing Self	33	5.0	29	3.8	62	4.3
Questioning Self	22	3.3	36	4.7	58	4.1
Questioning Others	5	0.8	7	0.9	12	0.8
Answering	7	1.1	4	0.5	11	0.8
Total	664	100.0	766	100.0	1430	100.0

Table 3: Use of Strategies Among the Participants

	Mohd	Zahir	Wadi	Lina	Milah	Sani
Cognitive Strategies						
Transcribing *	√	√	√	√	√	√
Scanning *	√	√	√	√	√	√
Translating *	√	√	√	√	√	√
Repeating *	√	√	√	√	√	√
Resourcing *	√	√	√	√	√	√
Revising *	√	√	√	√	√	√
Skimming *	√	√	√	√	√	√
Summarizing	√	√	-	-	√	-
Making Connections	√	√	-	-	√	-
Deducing	-	√	-	-	√	-
Note-taking	√	-	-	-	-	√
Drafting	-	-	√	-	-	-
Paraphrasing	√	-	-	-	-	√
Guessing Meaning	-	-	-	√	-	-
Metacognitive Strategies						
Rehearsing Structure *	√	√	√	√	√	√
Monitoring Production *	√	√	√	√	√	√
Rehearsing Ideas*	√	√	√	√	√	√
Evaluating Production *	√	√	√	√	√	√
Monitoring Comprehension	√	√	-	√	√	√
Evaluating Comprehension	√	√	√	-	-	√
Evaluating Ability	-	-	√	-	√	√
Monitoring Style	√	√	-	-	√	-
Evaluating Task	-	-	-	-	√	-
Social Strategies						
Directing Self *	√	√	√	√	√	√
Questioning Self *	√	√	√	√	√	√
Questioning Others	-	-	√	-	√	√
Answering	√	√	-	√	√	-
Total number of strategies	20	19	16	15	21	20

* Strategies used by all students

could have posed more challenges to the students, and this might have caused a higher frequency of strategy switch.

However, very little difference is noted in the rank order of the strategies for the two tasks attempted. The dominance of the six strategies seems to hold true for both tasks. However, slight changes in the rank order is observed among the other less frequent strategies like skimming, note taking, paraphrasing and monitoring style for Task 1, and summarizing, evaluating ability and evaluating task for Task 2.

The study also found that students have different repertoires of strategies. Only 12 out of 27 strategies were shared by all the students, seven 7 of which are cognitive, 4, metacognitive and 2 social in nature (Table 3). Guessing meaning and evaluating task, for example were used by only one student, while deducing, note taking, drafting, and paraphrasing were used by two students. However, it was noted from cross-referencing these two tables that the dominant strategies were common strategies among all the students.

4.2   Description of Problems Encountered

As mentioned in section 3.5.2, the post-session interview protocols were analyzed to identify "language-related-episodes" that corresponded to problems

encountered in the writing task. Thirty episodes were identified from this exercise. These episodes were then categorized under two main areas of concern: comprehending task requirements and managing production of ideas. Table 4 summarizes the categories of problems identified from the interview protocols.

From the thirty episodes identified, 5 corresponded to problems in comprehending task requirements while 25 corresponded to problems in managing production of ideas (Table 5). The distribution of language related episodes concerning problems encountered was found to be quite similar in number for both tasks. However, the type of problems encountered for each task differed slightly. More students encountered problems in selecting and evaluating ideas for Task 1. However, for Task 2, the problems encountered were mainly generating ideas and structuring ideas.

A possible explanation for this difference lies in the different nature of the two tasks. For Task 1, the ideas needed for the letter was given in the tasksheet. However, for Task 2, the students had to generate their own ideas to suit the situation given, and structure them in English.

In the following sections, a detailed description of the problems encountered is given. Reference would be made to these problems later in

Table 4 : **Categories of Problems Identified from the Interview Protocols**

Problems Identified	*Sample Extracts from Identified Episodes*
Comprehending Task Requirements	"Susah ... Sebab tak faham." "Masalah tentang soalan ini." "Sekarang kita faham separuh-separuh. Apabila kita nak tulis tu susah."
• Understanding Meanings of Words	"Ada perkataan-perkataan yang saya tidak dapat faham dengan baik."
• Relating Ideas Within the Tasksheet	"... sebab saya tak faham maksud di bawah ni saya tak dapat nak agak samada mesin ini dah lebih setahun atau kurang daripada setahun. Sebab disini, dia kata last six months."
• Relating Ideas with Prior Knowledge	"Surat ini saya faham sikit-sikitlah kehendak dia. Tapi untuk nak tahu surat jenis apa yang sepatutnya saya tulis, tak tahulah ... ah.. tak pasti."
Managing Production of Ideas	"Actually, tak ada masalah sangatlah sebab content dah diberikan. Cuma elaborate sajalah."
• Generating and Shaping Ideas	"Buntu. Susah nak keluarkan idea." "Sambil tulis baru cari idea yang hendak dituliskan"
• Selecting and Evaluating Ideas	"Penutup ini tak tahu nak buat macam mana. Lepas itu tak buatlah."
• Sequencing Ideas	"Mulanya tinggalkan introduction. Lepas itu ingat kena buat introduction dulu."
• Structuring Ideas	"Biasanya masalah dari segi penyusunan ayat." "Mungkin kita ada idea. Tapi bila kita nak tulis, kadang-kadang tu tulis separuh, separuh lagi tak dapat tulis."

Table 5 : Distribution of Problems Between Task (Interview Protocols)

Problems Encountered	Task 1						Task 2					
Students	M	Z	W	L	Mi	S	M	Z	W	L	Mi	S
Comprehending Task Requirements												
• Understanding Meanings of Words										√		
• Relation of Ideas within Text		√								√		
• Relation of Ideas with Prior Knowledge			√								√	
Managing Production of Ideas												
• Generating Ideas		√	√						√	√	√	√
• Selecting and Evaluating Ideas	√	√		√	√					√		
• Sequencing Ideas						√						
• Structuring Ideas	√			√		√			√	√	√	√

sections 4.3 and 4.4 where a detailed description and discussion of the strategies used are attempted.

4.2.1 Understanding Meanings of Words

Five students highlighted problems related to task comprehension, but only one reported a struggle with difficult words in the tasksheet. In the following excerpt from the post-session interview, Lina explained that she was dissatisfied with her performance, as she was unsure of the meaning of words like *entertain* and *expect*. This uncertainty affected her confidence in the interpretation of the task.

> "Ada perkataan-perkataan yang saya tidak dapat fahami dengan baik. Entertain, expect the expired guarantee... masalah tentang soalan dia...." (Lina 2)

The other students did not report difficult words as problematic. This could be due to two possible reasons. For one, they may not have encountered any problems with meanings of words or they might have employed effective strategies to overcome this problem. The other reason is that they might not have been aware of this problem. The analysis of the think-aloud protocols supports this when it showed that some students employed various strategies to deal with difficult words. It was also found that while one student did not report any

problems with difficult words, he misinterpreted the task when he assigned incorrect meanings to important words from the tasksheet (see 4.4.1).

4.2.2 Relating Ideas within the Tasksheet

Making sense of information given on the tasksheet was found to be a challenging task to these students. Two students expressed some degree of difficulty while trying to relate information extracted from the tasksheet to form an understanding of the situation involved.

Lina, while trying to decide on whether to grant or to reject the adjustment, had to relate information given on the guarantee period with the alleged period when the problem started, the date of purchase and the date when the claim was made. In the following excerpt, she expresses her uncertainty over her analysis that determined the accuracy of interpretation made.

> "Tak puas hati samada betul atau tidak tarikh jaminan itu dah lebih satu tahun atau belum cukup setahun lagi. Tak pasti..... dia beli mesin itu pada 30 April kan. Tapi, ... sebab saya tak faham maksud di bawah ni (instruction and additional information given in the tasksheet)... saya tak dapat nak agak samada mesin itu dah lebih setahun ataupun kurang daripada setahun sebab disini dia kata last six months. Enam mei ... sebab itu tak pasti."

Zahir highlighted a similar problem when he was asked to explain why he was shifting through the textbook, the tasksheet and his written work after he had

written the first sentence for the letter. In the following excerpt, he explained his attempt to ascertain whether the *new list* mentioned in the tasksheet referred to the English and Italian story books that were requested or to a new range of books which was to be introduced.

> "Tak faham dia punya ... macam ... dia suruh dia tanya pasal story books inikan. Tapi dah habis stok. *Lepas tu dia nak hantar new list of them.* **Tapi saya tak faham dia punya new list.** ...
> ... *Sekarang ni saya tak faham dua.* **New list ni kan sama ada nak hantar buku ni ke atau hantar buku yang lainlah.**

The above examples also support the observation in studies on other writing tasks (e.g. Flower et al., 1989; Harris, 1989; Lee, 1990), which found that students do attempt to refine their task representation before and after starting to write.

4.2.3 Relating Ideas with Prior Knowledge

Two students also highlighted problems related to the use of prior knowledge in enhancing task comprehension. In the following excerpt, Milah claimed that she could understand the information given in the tasksheet but she could not relate it to her knowledge of different types of letters. In other words, she was faced with the challenge of finding a suitable match between her knowledge on writing specific types of letters with the situation given.

"Surat ini saya faham sikit-sikitlah kehendak dia. Tapi untuk nak tahu surat jenis apa yang sepatutnya saya tulis saya tak tahulah. Ah.. tak pasti."

The students in the study had enrolled for a course where various types of letters such as letters for inquiries, requests, credit and collection and claims and adjustments were taught. Although Milah managed to identify that the letter given in the tasksheet was a claim letter, she was not sure if a letter of adjustment would be a suitable reply.

Wadi was another student who also encountered this problem but his attempt to overcome it was not successful. The excerpt below suggests that Wadi was using prior knowledge to make some assumptions about the situation. However, Wadi was not aware that the assumptions he made were not logical. Therefore, it did not help him to comprehend the task better.

R: Apa yang Wadi faham daripada soalan ini?
S: **Yang kita faham tadi sebelum ni dia order. Tapi buku itu masih dalam stok dia.. simpanan dia. Kita cakap mungkin kita keluarkan pada musim panas nanti. Sini dia akan bagi   ... apa... senarai barulah. List baru dan catalog baru. Suruh dia buat pilihan baru.**
R: *Minta dia buat pilihan baru? Buku lama yang dia order ni nak hantar ke tak hantar ni?*
S: *Itulah, tak tahu.*
R: Wadi ada buat andaian ke?
S: *Kita cakap kita simpan dulu stok. Kita hantar pada sekian-sekian haribulan*
R: Kita simpan dulu stok? Buku itu ada ke tak ada?
S: *Stok. Tak adalah.*
R   Jadi?
S: *Tunggu stok barulah.*

From the above exchange, it can be seen that Wadi was not able to make sense of various information given in the tasksheet. This is evident when he could not connect the *new list* to his explanation on why he thought it was necessary to ask the customer to submit fresh orders from the new list. Moreover, the assumptions made about keeping the books in stock until a certain date before delivering it also does not fit in with his later explanation that the books were actually out of stock. The above observation suggests that the student may have a problem with assimilation of new information with existing knowledge, and this impeded his comprehension of the task.

4.2.4   Generating and Shaping Ideas

Fewer students reported problems in generating ideas for Task 1. Nevertheless, the description of the problems provided by the two students suggests possible differences in the complexity of the problems encountered. Wadi expressed problems getting started with this task as he felt that his understanding of the task was not complete. Then, he explained that writing the body of the letter for task 1 was difficult since he could only write whatever that came to his mind (see section 4.4.6 for a detailed discussion on the use of drafting for development of ideas).

Zahir, on the other hand, encountered problems of a different nature. He had interpreted the task as a sales letter and he remembered that the third step in composing a sales letter involved a call to respond to the product. However, he had difficulty generating suitable ideas for a concluding statement. He explained his encounter in the following exchange.

R: Di sini apa masalahnya?
S: Sales letter ni ada tiga (step) kan. Yang last sekali mesti ada.
      Saya tak tahu macam mana nak tarik dia ... reaksinya. Nak
      suruh dia belikan?

For Task 2, four students reported difficulties with generation of ideas to get started with the task, and two different approaches were used to solve this problem. Sani resorted to reading the tasksheet to resource for ideas while Lina and Milah referred to the textbook for help.

Although both Lina and Milah turned to the textbook for help, they used the textbook in a different manner. Milah skimmed through the chapter on writing claim and adjustment letters to glean for steps to structure the paragraphs in her letter. Lina, however, skimmed through the textbook to look for a suitable introduction that begins with the phrase "as you requested". The following are the exchanges that illustrate this difference.

"Saya cuba cari inilah. Step untuk tulis surat ini. Tapi dari sini saya baca sekali lalu saja. Tak faham. Complicated sangat."

"Nak cari idea untuk memulakan ayat 'as you request' dan kemudian saya cari dalam buku tapi tak dapat tackle apa-apa

permulaan dan kemudian saya sambung dengan apa yang sebenarnya Mrs Chong itu minta .. request.. balas saja."

The above observation suggests that while some students attempt to solve this problem from conducting a search for ideas before moving on to structure these ideas, other approach it from the reverse order. In other words, while some students worked on getting a perceptual framework, others constructed this framework as they wrote. See section 4.4.4 for a detailed discussion on the use of resourcing for idea generation.

4.2.5 Structuring Ideas

Another main problem raised by the students was their concern for correct sentence structure and their ability to construct grammatical sentences in English to express the ideas that they had. The following excerpts from the interview illustrate their uncertainty about their sentence structures.

"Biasanya, masalah dari segi penyusunan ayatlah. Tak tahu betul atau tak betul. ... Makna saya samada ayat ni kan dia punya grammar tu betul pun saya tak surelah."

"Sebab saya rasa... apa yang saya tulis ni.. kurang... bertepatan... bukan bertepatan.. kurang jelas tentang apa yang Sarah Barnard ni suruh. Mungkin orang lain yang baca ni dia tak faham. Mungkin ada ayat-ayat yang tak betul"

To deal with this problem, several strategies were employed. The most popular strategy was resourcing. Most of the students referred to the tasksheet as

well as the textbook to copy suitable words and phrases. When the textbook was used, the search involved a random search where students merely flipped through the pages of any chapter hoping to find suitable phrases or sentences. The textbook was often a source of disappointment as the students' random search often proved futile (see 4.4.4).

In some instances, this problem also resulted in the student abandoning or adapting the ideas generated. The following excerpts illustrate how Sani decided to abandon the idea for the concluding paragraph of her letter as she was uncertain about its correctness.

> "*Lepas itu penutup ni tak tahu macam mana. Lepas itu tak buatlah....*
> ... Kita ucap terima kasih kepada mereka kerana berhubung dengan syarikat kita dan kalau boleh kita hendak dia terus berhubung dengan syarikat kita walaupun ... apa tu, apa yang dia inginkan tak ada lagi.
> *Mula saya nak buat macam tu tapi tak tahu nak buat. ...Tak tahu nak buat ayat macam mana. Tak tulislah. Kalau tulis pun takut silap.*"

Wadi also faced a similar problem. In the following excerpt, he explained his predicament when faced with such situations.

> "Mungkin kita ada idea tapi bila kita nak tulis kadang-kadang tu tulis separuh, separuh lagi tak dapat tulis. Pusing sajakan. Manalah yang agak sama maksud macam tulah. Tak ... macam mungkin yang kita plan nak tulis tu lain... seperti tu.. Jadi bila dah tengah-tengah tak tau maksud kadang-kadang susah nak sambung ayat. Kadang-kadang kita cancel delete sahaja. Kadang-kadang yang itu buat saja yang lain."

Only one student expressed a concern about her style of writing which corresponded to one of the principles of effective writing taught in the course. Sani explained that she was not satisfied with the length of her sentences. She felt that they were too wordy but she was not able to make them more concise.

> "......Tak tahu apa... tak tahu dia punya maksud. Lepas tu panjang sangat tak tahu nak pendekkan..... Tak puas hatilah sebab dia panjang."

4.2.6 Selecting and Evaluating Ideas

Some students also encountered problems which were related to applying specific principles that were taught in the business communication course. The students were taught to think of the reader when they write business letters. Concepts like projection of a positive tone, conciseness, completeness and correctness were emphasized in the writing class. Incidentally, the problems raised in connection with idea selection and evaluation relate to these principles.

Mohamad expressed a concern about one of these principles: projecting a positive tone. He encountered difficulty in transforming his ideas to focus on the positive. He explained that he wanted to apply this principle but he was not able to do so. In his post-session interview he said:

> "Cuma aspek yang tak puas hati, saya susah sikit nak tukar kepada bentuk yang positiflah. Bentuk yang lebih positif seperti yang ni kan. Saya kata dia out of stock, terpaksa juga cakapkan. Tak erti

nak elaborate dengan lebih positif lagi."

In the subsequent session, Mohamad was still concerned with this issue, but he chose not to pay much attention to it as he wanted to practice writing within a limited period of time. Unlike Task 1, in this case he attributed the problem to a lack of time as according to him, transforming the ideas to focus on the positive would require him to think for a longer period.

> "Sebab ini I try to finish by the time because the test kita kena cepatkan. Tak boleh lambat-lambat. I try ikut masalah kan. Tapi kalau bagi lagi lama lagi, lagi baiklah.... (kalau ada banyak lagi masa) saya akan perbaiki dari segi dia punya reasonlah. Lebih more positive tone. Ini sebab just positive tone juga tapi kurang sikitlah. Sebab tak ada masakan. Nak fikir panjang. Kalau banyak masa lagi bolehlah."

Milah was the only student who expressed concern about another principle: the completeness of the ideas expressed in her letter. She felt that she should have elaborated on the new list by recommending some titles from the list enclosed in the letter for Task 1. The following exchange illustrates her assessment of the written product.

S: Tak puas hati. About a new list... new list ni. Kita kena terangkan lebih lanjut tentang apa yang kita publish tentang new list ini. Cakap sini... I just statelah the new list but tidak terangkan lebih lanjut lagi apa produk."

R: Kalau nak terangkan apa maklumat yang diperlukan?

S: Ah... dia order untuk intermediate student. So, buku yang sesuai untuk dia orang."

R: Maksud Jamilah nak perkenalkan buku kepada mereka?

S: Ya.

The study also suggests that while some students were concerned about idea selection and evaluation, some were not. Wadi exhibited this indifference in the following exchange when he was asked if he checked the suitability of the ideas generated while drafting.

> R: Ada tak cuba tengok yang terlintas tu sesuai atau tidak?
> S: Mungkin pada masa exam tengoklah. Tengok masalah. Kalau sempat tengoklah. Kalau tak sempat tak tengoklah.
> Dah biasa keluar tulis sahajalah. Secara lakarnyamacam inilah. Dalam kelas tulis balik cantik sikit. Nak tambah nak potongkan.

It can be concluded here that these students were more concerned with fundamental problems like generating and structuring ideas than to be concerned with idea selection and evaluation. This observation suggests certain pertinent implications for the design of courses in business writing for weak learners. Training students to apply the effective writing principles mentioned earlier may prove to be a futile effort if the learners are not ready for such tasks.

4.2.7   Sequencing Ideas

Two students expressed concern about the organization of ideas in the letters written. Milah explained that she spent some time to consider the sequence of ideas before she started writing.

> R: Semasa tulis surat, Jamilah berhenti agak lama selepas menulis ayat yang pertama. Apakah masalah yang dihadapi?

S: Kat sini. Saya sedang fikirkan apa yang terdahulu yang
       saya perlu cakap. Ah.. yang kita memang tak dapat
       terima order dia dan sebagai alternatif dia apa yang perlu
       kita buat. Yang satu lagi I nak susun ayat ni macam
       mana nak cakap.

Sani, however, expressed this concern when she was asked to report on
the problems encountered. She explained that she realized that something was
amiss while reading her letter in an attempt to monitor production. Subsequently,
she added an introductory sentence to mention that the letter was received on
February 15.

R: Ada tak menghadapi apa-apa masalah
S: Masalah itu memang ada. Pasal tu... pasal nak tulis surat
       ni .. nak buat macam mana. Nak.. nak .. letak yang
       mana dulu kan...Mulanya tinggalkan introduction .
       Lepas itu ingat kena buat introduction dulu. Lepas itu
       penutup ni tak tahu nak buat macam mana. Lepas itu
       tak buatlah.
       ....
R: Masa teringat introduction, baru masuk ya?
S: Bila teringat baliklah. Bila dah siap kita baca balik.
       Rasa macam janggal sikit. Tengok macam ... tengok
       macam ada sesuatu tertinggal tau. Tengok-tengok...
       tengok balik sini sebab dia beritahu surat ini 15
       haribulan. Jadi, bolehlah kita betul sikit.

4.3   Description of Strategies Used

In this section, a detailed description of the strategies used is attempted.
Reference will be made to section 1.4 for definitions of the strategies mentioned.
The strategies will be described to show the environment in which they operate.

Where relevant, reference will also be made to the effect of strategy use on problems encountered in section 4.4.

4.3.1   Cognitive Strategies

In this study, most of the cognitive strategies were used to manage task comprehension and to refine representation for the writing task. Consistent with other studies on writing processes (e.g. Raimes, 1985; 1987; Flower et al., 1989), the students in this study were also engaged in the process of comprehending task requirements indicated by the use of a variety of reading strategies. For example, all the students started the task by skimming through the tasksheet to get a general idea of the task demands.   This strategy was often followed by other cognitive strategies like scanning and translating as illustrated in the following excerpt.

Example 1: (S1b.2)

Follow the instruction in this memo and write a letter...	Skimming
To Rosalind ... from Sarah ... Date 1 march ... Please type a letter to .. use reference rw/sb.. his letter date 15 February.. he ask about story books... tell him they're out of stock ... will be publishing ... send him details of the new list and a current catalogue of present...	
Follow	Scanning
ikuti arahan memo ini untuk tulis surat ...sarah barnard ialah pengarah pengurusan barnard press ltd ... dan rasolind tu ... secretary dia ..	Translating

Scanning and translating were reported by two students in this study as useful strategies that aided comprehension and enhanced the retention of details. Apart from these, some students also resorted to resourcing immediately after skimming through the tasksheet. In these situations, the students referred to the textbook to check the format for a business letter. Some students were also engaged in a random search for suitable words and phrases from the textbook to help them start writing. This strategy of getting help from professional models was also reported in Leki (1995) and Matsumoto (1995).

Other cognitive strategies like repeating, note taking, summarizing, making connections, paraphrasing, deducing and guessing meaning were also used to help students understand the demands of the task. For instance, some students used strategies like making connections, deducing and paraphrasing to interact with information from the tasksheet to refine their understanding of the task. The following example shows how the student looked at the two dates available on the worksheet - the date of the letter and the date of purchase for the vacuum cleaner. She then connected them with the information presented at the bottom of the worksheet to conclude that the guarantee was no longer valid.

Example 2: (M2b.2)

30 April 1996... now is may ...April may.. 30 April may..	Making Connections Scanning
the guarantee period expired one year after the purchase and, although she claims that the problems... she cannot expect the expired guarantee to be applied..	
cos after one year... 30 April.. sebab sekarang may... so the guarantee period expired	Making Connections

Students resorted to these cognitive strategies prior to transcribing, and when they were blocked in the process of transcribing. In such situations, these strategies were used to help students to refine their understanding of the task requirements. In example 3, scanning, repeating, evaluating comprehension and making connections were engaged to help the student overcome the momentary block encountered after transcribing the following:

> *"After I referred to your receipt dated 30th of April 1995. I found that your purchased a vacuum cleaner had been more than one year guarantee.*
> *As you know every purchase especially a vacuum cleaner that you bought at our shop. It have the guarantee period. For your case, the guarantee period expired one year after the purchase and I thought you know about it."*

Example 3: (M1b.1)

As you know every purchase especially our vacuum cleaner that you bought at our shop, it have the guarantee period. For your case, the guarantee period expired one year after the purchase and I thought you know ... about it	Monitoring Production
Although you claim the problem during .. although ... you claim the problem ... you claim the problem with the machine during the guarantee period .. you can expect it ...so	Scanning
with the machine during the guarantee period... she cannot expect the expired guarantee to be applied... the guarantee period expired ... although she claim the problem	Repeating
Oh... so I see...	Evaluating Comprehension
Dia mesti after I refer to your receipt dated 30th April	Making Connections

Although most of the cognitive strategies found were used primarily for task comprehension concerns, some were used with metacognitive and social strategies to address other concerns in the writing process. Translating, for

example was often used in a variety of situations with other metacognitive strategies like monitoring production and rehearsing structure to address problems while transcribing ideas for the letter. As illustrated in the example below, translation was used to check the accuracy of the written expressions, to generate ideas and to recall suitable words and phrases for a particular situation.

Example 4: (M1b.p5)

Like... you .... like you know...	Transcribing
seperti yang kamu tahu	Translating
like you know	Monitoring
	Production
seperti yang kamu tahu, seperti yang kamu tahu ...	Repeating
walaupun....	Rehearsing
	Structure
like you know.. *however...*	Translating

Summarizing was also used by some students to interact with information in the tasksheet to refine their task representation. The use of this strategy appeared to be a helpful strategy for task representation and it also appeared to affect the success of idea generation efforts (see 4.4.2). The following example illustrates how summarizing was used with other strategies to enhance comprehension prior to transcribing. In such situations, summarizing was often used with metacognitive strategies like rehearsing ideas and rehearsing structure for idea generation.

Example 5: (Mi2b.8)

It's unlikely that Mrs. Chong's request can be entertained. The guarantee period expired one year after ...	Scanning
the guarantee period expired one year after the purchase ..	Repeating

OK

Monitoring
Comprehension
Scanning

although she claim that the problem with the
machine begin during the guarantee period ... she
cannot expect the ... the expired guarantee to be
applied. You are the manager of this electrical shop
Ehmm dia beli barang dan menuntut .. ah..
menuntut barang itu rosak.. dan menuntut gantirugi
dan kita ... nak jawab

Summarizing

Rehearsing ideas

Among all the cognitive strategies, only one was identified to be used for idea generation. However, only one student used this strategy extensively to generate ideas. Drafting was found to be used with other strategies like revising and rehearsing structure where students tried to write quickly only to be blocked by uncertainty. Such blocks were often highlighted by long pauses and the sudden decision to delete a sentence and paragraph as seen in the following example.

Example 6: (W2.5)

Thank you for ... purchase...he
(cancels the
washing machine... the vacuum cleaner...

Dafting
Revising
Rehearsing
Structure

vacuum cleaner... from my shop
macam mana ya?
(Flipping of text)

Drafting
Questioning Self
Resourcing

Firstly... I would like... would like to tell you... to tell
you.. about ...
(Cancels the whole sentence)

Drafting

Firstly... I would like... order you ...a new .... vacuum
cleaner
(revises – incorrect spelling)

Revising
Drafting

Revising

4.3.2 Metacognitive Strategies

From the list of 10 metacognitive strategies identified, only two strategies were found to be related to task comprehension, i.e. monitoring comprehension and evaluating comprehension. The following example illustrates a successful attempt.

Example 7: (S2b.29)

Nak beritahu dia ni nak beritahu dia ... tak tahu nak beritahu macam mana? Reading Silently	Rehearsing ideas Evaluating Ability Monitoring Comprehension
Dah tahu dah. Dah tahu dah.	Evaluating Comprehension Summarizing
Sebab dia beli 30 haribulan April. Lepas itu dia hantar surat ini pada bulan Mei. Lepas tu tempoh guaranteenya dalam satu tahun. Maknanya dia hantar surat ini lepas guarantee tu dah habis. Hmm..	Making Connections

The other metacognitive strategies were mainly used to address three main concerns in the writing process: idea generation, selection and evaluation of ideas, and structuring of ideas. Rehearsing ideas, for example, a strategy that manifested itself in the form of self-talk about ideas to be written, was often used to generate ideas prior to transcribing the letter. This was observed when students spent a substantial amount of time talking about what to write, after they had written the inside address, the dateline and the opening salutation. Other students, however used this strategy prior to beginning a new paragraph or a new sentence. In such situations, this strategy was often used with other

metacognitive strategies like rehearsing structure and monitoring production as shown below. This strategy was also used with other metacognitive strategies like monitoring style (example 11) and evaluating task and ability (example 12).

Example 8: (Mi2b.44)

Ensure the customer has received completion usually mentioned before discussion. Stress what can be done	Resourcing
we are really...	Rehearsing Structure
we are really., sympa.. sympathy., sympathies...	Transcribing
cakap dimana bersimpati dengan masalah yang dihadapi oleh mereka ni... supaya dia lebih baik..	Rehearsing ideas
with the... ah...ah..take care.. dah.. problem..	Rehearsing Structure
the problem.. that.. the problem of .. of a vacuum... cleaner.	Transribing
we are really sympathize with the problem of a vacuum cleaner	Monitoring Production

However, some students, instead of working from generating ideas to structuring ideas, developed their ideas from available structures. Such students, were often engaged in a search for "starter phrases" to get them started on shaping their ideas. They tended to rehearse the structures extensively prior to transcribing while monitoring their production of language quite closely as illustrated in the following example.

Example 9: (Mi2b.44)

repair your... your... vacuum cleaner..	Transcribing
however if you need to repair your vacuum cleaner	Monitoring Production
I'm glad	Rehearsing Structure
however if you need to repair your vacuum cleaner	Monitoring Production

you..   Rehearsing
                                                    Structure
although you problem started   Scanning
if you need to repair the vacuum cleaner   Monitoring
                                                    Production
<u>you can send</u>   Transcribing

This was also observed in other studies reported in Cohen (1990) which expressed the use of words to generate ideas, and it explains the cyclical process observed in writing where students move backwards in order to go forward.

Only three students made use of monitoring style to check on the suitability of ideas and expressions used and only 5 situations were identified. In two of these situations, they were merely comments or questions on how the writer could fulfill a particular criteria which was considered important for idea selection. The excerpt below illustrates these two situations.

Example 10: (M1b.p4)

As you requested .. in english.. so as you requested   Rehearsing
.. the story books in...   Structure
Ayat mesti positif ...   Monitoring Style
as you requested ...   Rehearsing
                                                              Structure
<u>As you... as you requested...</u>   Transcribing
                  ....(student writes the first sentence)...
as you requested about your letter   Monitoring
                                                              Production
Seperti yang kamu minta about story books in italian   Translating
and english...
<u>for... for intermediate students... students..</u>   Transcribing
for story books for intermediate students   Monitoring
                                                              Production
I... hmm   Rehearsing
                                                              Structure
macam mana nak kata yang positif   Monitoring Style

When used appropriately with other metacognitive strategies, it was found to have helped idea generation as shown in the following example.

Example 11: (Mi1b.p4)

kita tak boleh cakap ... ah.. ah.. secara direct.. sebab... secara direct.. sebab kita tidak sebab... out of stock.. ni..	Monitoring Style
Beri positif. *Menghargai dia punya minat.. dia punya minat untuk beli ni.*	Directing Self Rehearsing ideas

In the process of writing, most of these students experienced some degree of writers' block. Some were aggravated by the presence of negative emotions resulting from a lack of confidence. The presence of metacognitive strategies such as evaluating task and evaluating ability in the following example illustrates the detrimental effect negative self-critical evaluation has on the writing process. Most of the time, these strategies were used prior to soliciting help from the researcher.

Example 12: (Mi2b.28)

Macam mana ni ? *Susahnya* *ah... tak tahu buat... macam mana* *surat ah...* *kita nak buat surat mada ada kita terima ataupun tidak dia punya tuntutan ni kan?*	Questioning Self Evaluating Task Evaluating Ability Rehearsing ideas Questioning Others

In this study, evaluating task and evaluating ability were used in a negative sense, thus resulting in frustration on the part of the writer. Other

students, however, were found to have managed such emotions using other strategies. These students while exhibiting nervousness and insecurity (as inferred from the heavy breathing observed, the occurrence of sighing and nervous appearance noted in the running narratives), chose social strategies like questioning self, directing self and questioning others to overcome such mental blocks (see section 4.4.3 for a discussion on apprehension and strategy use).

4.3.3 Social strategies

Four out of the twenty-seven strategies identified were classified as social strategies. These strategies, as their definitions in section 1.4.5 suggest, involved interaction, and they were found to be used in all situations for a variety of purposes. For example, directing self was used to self-instruct the writer, and this was often done to overcome negative mental blocks that interfered with the writing process. When used effectively, this strategy was often followed by other strategies such as rehearsing structure, rehearsing ideas and questioning self that sets the writing process into motion again. The following example suggests directing self as a decision-making strategy that pushes the writer out of the doldrums in the writing process.

Example 13:
macam mana subjectnya   Questioning Self
format ... hm... subject dia ... out of stock at the   Answering
moment
ikutlah out of stock at the moment   Directing Self
subject dia nak beritahu stock sekarang tak ada lagi   Rehearsing ideas
so subject dia ialah... hmmm   Directing Self
<u>out of stock</u>   Transcribing

Apart from managing negative mental states that block the progress of writing, social strategies were also used to manage concerns with task comprehension, and idea generation and selection during the writing process. For example, questioning self was found to be used with other cognitive strategies like guessing meaning, scanning and repeating in example 17, section 4.4.1 to address problems with meanings of words. This strategy was also used with other strategies to brainstorm ideas for a logical solution (example 14) and to refine ideas expressed in the letter (example 15).

Example 14: (L1b.p3)

Send him details of the new list and a current catalogue of present stock ...hmmm send him hantarkan dia	Scanning
the details of new list...	Translating
	Scanning
details?... what is details?	Questioning Self
details... terperinci	Answering
senarai yang baru yang terperinci dan katalog	Monitoring
semasa of present stock terkini... hantar details	comprehension
hmm... for your information... for your information	Rehearsing

Example 15: (Z2b.p3)

so we cannot	Rehearsing
	Structure
so... so.. we... we can refund or replace ... replace the machine	Transcribing
er... however	Rehearsing
	Structure
macam mana kalau er... katakan ada vacuum yang	Questioning Self
lain bagi dia... ar... macam mana	
however... however... now we..	Transcribing
we have a ... sold a new ...however now we... er...	Rehearsing
we have a ... a new... now our shop...	Structure
macam mana eh	Questioning Self
kita ada vacuum cleaner yang baru	Rehearsing ideas
we have a new vacuum cleaner ... ah	Rehearsing
	Structure
macam mana	Questioning Self

kami ada... er.. vacuum cleaner kan ... yang .. yang lebih bagus ...

Rehearsing ideas

now we have... now our shop had .. now we had

Rehearsing Structure

When self-reliance failed or faltered, students often resorted to questioning others to deal with the problems encountered. Most of the time, students used this strategy when faced with uncertainties about their understanding of the task as illustrated in the following excerpt.

Example 16: (W2b.p2)

the guarantee expired
walaubagaimanapun
although she claim the problem with the machine begun during the guarantee period ...
buat aduan berkenaan dengan masalah mesin yang bermula semasa guarantee period ...
macam mana nak buat ah?
(Flipping of text)...claim letter... claim
madam

(Flipping of text)
macam mana nak buat ni? Sekarang ni kita nak balas macam mana? Dia dah claim ni kita nak macam mana nak jawab ya? Sebab sekarang ni dia dah claim berkenaan dengan masalah yang dia dapat dengan mesin ini. Jadi kita sebagai agen kena cakap macam mana pulak? Kita akan hantar processkan pulak?
R: (researcher responds)
Kita akan cakap apa?
Kita akan cakap dia beli vakum ini pada 30 April 1995. Dia ada dan dia lampirkan sekali dia punya surat rujukan yang dia beli tulah. Enam bulan kemudian dia dapati dia ada sebarang masalah pada tu ... pada mesin dia tu ..

(Student continues to read in whispers)
Kemudian pada akhir-akhir dia ini selalu bunyi bising bila suis dibuka. Kadang-kadang bau masak terbakar dia pun mula-mula ...

Scanning
Translating
Scanning

Translating

Questioning Self
Resourcing
Rehearsing
Structure
Resourcing
Questioning
Others

Translating

Translating

4.4   Effects of Strategy Use

In this section, the use of specific writing strategies are analyzed further to study how strategy use affected the process of writing business letters. Strategies used to deal with the concerns mentioned in the previous sections are also analyzed to elicit effective and ineffective strategy use among weak ESL learners for writing business letters.

In order to do this, the written drafts were analyzed and ranked by the researcher. The drafts were also rated by another course instructor in the university, and an average reliability rate of 0.83 was obtained. Total agreement was obtained for the ranks of 8 drafts. This is evident for the first two and the last ranks for both tasks (Table 6).

Table 6: Rank Order of Written Drafts for both Tasks

1 - best ; 2 - good; 3 - average; 4- below average; 5 - poor; 6 - weakest

Students	Task 1		Task 2	
	Rater 1	Rater 2	Rater 1	Rater 2
Zahir *	1	1	1	1
Mohamad *	2	2	2	2
Sani *	3	3	5	5
Milah	4	5	4	3
Lina	5	4	3	4
Wadi *	6	6	6	6

* Total agreement of rank order for both tasks

A comparison of strategy choice was then undertaken between students who encountered problems and students who did not report these problems. In most cases, the students who did not encounter any problems were also those who wrote more effective letters. The think-aloud protocols of each task were also scrutinized to identify turning points where strategy use resulted in positive and negative writing outcomes.

4.4.1 Lower-Order Cognitive Reading Strategies

All the students in the study were found to have used four cognitive strategies to manage task comprehension: skimming, scanning, translating and repeating. In addition to these strategies, the study showed that the students who encountered problems with comprehending task demands also made use of resourcing and guessing meaning to resolve problems with meanings of words.

Sani and Milah referred to an English-Malay dictionary and wrote the Malay meanings of these words above its English equivalent on the tasksheet. In all the situations observed, this strategy was found to be effective with the exception of one instance. She accepted the first meaning that was listed in the dictionary for the word condition - *keadaan*, which was incorrect in that particular context. This shows that while this strategy may be useful, it requires correct usage of the dictionary to render it effective.

While some students took to the dictionary readily, others like Lina chose to make calculated guesses of problematic words by association of meanings with familiar words in their vocabulary store. The following excerpt illustrates Lina's success in managing a difficult word with this strategy. In this particular situation, Lina made use of questioning self before resorting to guessing its meaning.

Example 17:

She cannot expect the expired warranty to be applied.	Scanning
She cannot expect the expired guarantee to be applied... she cannot expect expect? expect apa expect?...	Repeating
she cannot **expectation...** she cannot **tafsirkan** the expired guarantee to be applied.	Questioning Self Guessing Meaning (word association)

However, the use of questioning self was not always effective. In many instances, self-questioning was found to lead to nowhere. And as for guessing, while it might have been an effective strategy to deal with difficult words, it is still possible for students to make incorrect guesses. In fact, in some situations, incorrect guesses lead to incorrect representation of the task.

Wadi, for example, tried to guess the meaning of unlikely but was not successful because he identified the wrong root word for 'unlikely'. As a result, he associated the meaning of the word to 'like' instead of 'likely' and deduced the meaning as not liking. The following excerpt supports this observation.

R: Apa yang Wadi faham dari ayat pertama ini?
        (It is unlikely that Mrs. Chong's request can be entertained.)

S: Macam mana... seperti yang diceritakan tadi berkenaan tu ...
      yang ni adalah bahagian yang tidak disuka oleh Mrs Chong.
R: Apa maksud unlikely?
S: Maksud dia bukan 'tak suka'.
      Tak suka dengan keadaan.. problem tulah.

4.4.2 Higher-Order Cognitive Reading Strategies

Students who did not encounter any problems in comprehending task demands were found to have made use of an additional range of strategies. Among them were summarizing, making connections, deducing, paraphrasing, note taking and monitoring comprehension. These strategies were not used to address problems with difficult words but were used to relate ideas within the tasksheet and with prior knowledge. The following table shows the frequency of these strategies used among the students.

Table 7 :   Frequency of higher-order cognitive reading strategies

Students Strategies	Task 1						Task 2					
	W wp	Z wp	M	L	Mi	S	W wp	L wp	Mi wp	S	M	Z
Summarizing	0	1	1	0	1	0	0	0	3	2	3	2
Making Connections	0	0	1	0	2	0	0	0	0	0	3	2
Deducing	0	0	1	0	1	0	0	1	2	0	0	1
Paraphrasing	0	0	2	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	2	0
Note taking	0	0	16	0	0	1	0	0	0	2	6	0
Monitoring Comprehension	0	3	3	2	2	4	0	1	1	0	5	1

wp: students who encountered problems in comprehending task

Wadi encountered the problem of comprehending task requirements for both task and the above table shows that he did not make use of any of the above strategies that were attempted by other students. Another interesting difference noted from the above table is the wide range of strategies employed by Mohamad and Zahir who did not encounter any problems for task 2. The following extract from Zahir's think-aloud protocol illustrates the positive effects of having a wider range of strategies for comprehending task demands.

Example 18:

Your company has just received the following letter.	Skimming
... Write a suitable reply to this letter.	
Jadi dia beli	Translating
I purchase a vacuum cleaner pada 30 April 1995...	Scanning
Sekarang ni May 6, 1996. Oh setahun...	**Making Connections**
From your shop... ehmm for the last six months ni	Skimming
Oh masalah. OK	**Monitoring Comprehension**
This vacuum cleaner is little more than a year old	Scanning
Pun dah setahun dah... ah..	Translating
I therefore request that you either refund ...	Scanning
bagi balik duit ataupun ganti	Translating
Yours faithfully alice chong	Scanning
sekarang tempoh dah habis... yang ni claim.. claim..	**Summarizing**
claim... claim letter	

A closer look at how these strategies were used also revealed that these strategies have to be used in a certain manner to render them effective. In the following excerpts, summarizing was attempted twice. First, Sani appeared to be using the bottom-up approach to process meaning of the text where she highlighted important points in the order that was presented in the tasksheet.

This attempt however proved to be less effective as it did not help her understand the relevance of the ideas presented.

Example 19:

Bagi surat kepada customer sebab ada bunyi. Dia hendakkan balik duitnya atau ganti yang baru... Lepas itu tempoh guarantee dia... Dia sudah satu tahun tapi enam bulan.. Lepas itu sebagai manager syarikat elektirk ini kita kena tulis surat balasan biasa kepada dia	Summarizing
Nak beritahu dia ni .. nak beritahu dia.. tak tahu nak beritahu macam mana	Evaluating Ability
Silence	Reading Silently
Dah tahu dah. Dah tahu dah.	Evaluating Comprehension
Sebab dia beli 30 haribulan April. Lepas itu dia hantar surat ni pada bulan Mei. Lepas itu tempoh guaranteenya dalam satu tahun. Maknanya dia hantar surat ini lepas guarantee tu dah habis. Hmmm	Making Connections

In her second attempt, however, she picked up dates and details of time which were related to a particular issue: guarantee. This attempt appeared to support the top-down approach to processing information where its success does not depend on the student's ability to understand the meaning of every word in the text. Sani was able to summarize her understanding of the task more effectively in this attempt when she related only details that were relevant to the issue of guarantee; a pertinent issue, for her response to the situation described.

Therefore, the above observation suggests that the ability to summarize effectively and the ability to identify relevant information related to the central issue of the task may determine the success of one's attempt at writing. It also

suggests that there may be a relation between the use of top-down approaches in reading with writing ability.

A similar observation was also made with the strategy use of another student. Lina was the only student who didn't have any problem getting started despite having difficulty understanding the task. A close look at the strategies employed reveals a possible change in the approach towards solving her comprehension problems.

Initially, Lina used only strategies for bottom-up processing to help her deal with this problem, and this is reflected in the sharp increase in the frequency of cognitive strategies shown in table 8. However, they were not very effective. This prompted Lina to start writing the address of the company and the dateline for the letter. When she had done this, she tried to resolve her comprehension problem again with the same range of strategies. Again, these strategies did not seem to have provided her with an answer to her problem. Subsequently, she continued filling in the details for the inside address.

Table 8:   **Frequency of Dominant Lower-order Cognitive Reading Strategies for Lina**

Task \ Strategies	Scanning	Translating	Repeating
Task 1	11	9	7
Task 2	43	26	20

The turning point was observed when she was trying to compose her letter. Lina had to address her comprehension problems before she could ascertain the suitability of her ideas generated for the letter. She took on two task simultaneously: refining task representation and idea generation. At this point, it was observed that Lina was making connections between the details found in the tasksheet to understand the logic of events. The use of this strategy appeared to have helped her comprehend the demands of the writing task. The following excerpt illustrates her choice of strategy after she had written the following sentence.

"As you requested about the machine that you bought on 30th of April 1995 from our shop, we are sorry about the lack of condition. We cannot refund the purchase price of RM 455 because"

Example 20:

We are sorry about the lack of condition	Monitoring Production
Dia minta ganti harga belian atau.. supply dia dengan mesin yang baru	Translating
Jadi macam mana nak jawap	
The guarantee period expired	Questioning Self Scanning
Satu tahun selepas belian walaupun... walaupun dia mendakwa that the problem...walaupun dia mendakwa masalah mesin itu bermula... during the guarantee bermula pada tarikh jaminan	Translating
She cannot expect the guarantee period to be applied	Scanning
Dia tak dapat	Translating
She cannot expect the guarantee peiod to be applied. You are the manager of this electric shop. Awak adalah pengurus syarikat electric. Tuliskan surat yang sesuai.	Scanning Translating
It is unlikely... that mr chong request can be entertained...	Scanning
Entertain... entertain	Repeating
Makna entertain... entertain	Questioning Self
The guarantee expired one year after the purchase	Scanning

Dia beli 30 haribulan April 1995. Surat ni bulan may... may 1996. Jadi dah lebih saya rasa dari tempoh setahun.. ehmm..
Although she claims that the problems with the machine began during the guarantee period, she cannot expect the guarantee period to be applied.
We cannot refund the purchase price of RM455 because ... ahh...

We cannot refund the purchase price of RM455 Because... the ...warranty... expired... is ...one... year... after... the ...purchase.

Making Connections

Scanning

Monitoring
Production
Repeating
Transcribing

4.4.3 Questioning Others

Ten accounts from the interview protocols were related to problems in idea generation (Table 5). Out of these, only 4 were related to getting started and they involved only 1 student for Task 1 and 3, for Task 2. For these students, the occurrence of 3 strategies, i.e. evaluating task, evaluating ability and questioning others, were observed and summarized in table 9.

Table 9 :   **Analysis of Student Apprehension by Frequencies of Questioning Others and Selected Metacognitive Strategies**

Students / Strategies	Task 1						Task 2					
	W wp	M	Z	L	Mi	S	W wp	Mi wp	S wp	L	M	Z
Evaluation Task	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	3	0	0	0	0
Evaluating Ability	1	1	0	0	0	0	1	2	2	0	0	0
Questioning Others	3	0	0	0	0	2	3	2	2	0	0	0

wp: students who encountered problems in getting started

The above table suggests that students who were more apprehensive of the task and less confident of their own ability were more likely to encounter problems getting started with the task and they have a tendency to question others to overcome this problem. This suggests a possible relation between apprehension and confidence with generating ideas to get started.

Wadi, Milah and Sani, for example, were found to be apprehensive while attempting task 2. Their think-aloud protocols recorded accounts of judgement made on the level of difficulty of the task and their inability to attend to the task. To cope with this problem, they sought the help of the researcher.

The effectiveness of this strategy was put to test as the researcher made a conscious effort not to render too much help to the students. When students asked questions, the researcher refrained from giving students a direct answer. The students were directed to read the task again or to summarize their understanding at that point of time. The following excerpt illustrates one exchange which took place.

Example 21:

Dia kata walaupun dia claim problem itu began during... during the guarantee period, she cannot expect... ah... the expired guarantee to be apply. Jaminan.. tempoh masa	Scanning
Macam mana ni? Susahnya	Evaluating Task
Ah tak tau buat.. macam mana	Evaluating Ability
surat ah? Kita nak buat surat sama ada kita	**Questioning**
terima ataupun tidak dia punya tuntutan kan?	**Others**

(Researcher directed student to read the task again.)

(Silence)
tak boleh nak acceptlah tuntutan dia ni... ah
penolakan.. buat surat pe.. apa penolakan dia
punya claim ini.

(Silent Reading)
Summarizing
Comprehension

This strategy was found to have helped Milah and Sani proceed with the

task effectively.   However, it should be noted that their success could be

attributed to their ability to summarize effectively as they were able to do so

when directed by the researcher to reassess their comprehension.   Wadi, however,

was not able to summarize effectively.   Therefore, his use of questioning others

appeared to be less effective.   Had the researcher offered more help, the results

might have been different. The following excerpt illustrates Wadi's attempt at

getting started for Task 2.

Example 22:

Macam mana nak buat ni? Sekarang ni kita nak
balas macam mana? Dia dah claim ni. Kita
nak macam mana nak balas ya? Sebab sekarang
ni dia dah claim berkenaan dengan masalah
yang dia dapat dengan mesin ini. Jadi kita
sebagai agen kena cakap macam mana pulak?
Kita akan hantar processkan pulak?

Questioning Others

R: Kita akan apa?
Kita cakap dia beli vakum ini pada 30 April
1995. Kia ada dan dia lampirkan sekali dia
punya surat rujukan yand dia beli tulah. Enam
bulan kemudian dia dapati dia ada sebarang
masalah pada tu... pada mesin dia tu..

Translating

(Student continues to read in whispers)
Kemudian pada akhir-akhir dia ini selalu bunyi
bising bila suis dibuka. Kadang-kadang bau
masak terbakar dia pun mula-mula...

Translating

recently...
kadang-kadang apa.. apa ni?
begun to cut out ... while being used
masa   digunakanlah.   Dia   takut   dia   akan

Scanning
Questioning Self
Scanning
Translating

meletup...
dia punya ni kurang jelaslah.   Evaluating
                                                 Comprehension
Tak tahu apa nak tulis.   Evaluating Ability

R: Apa yang kurang jelas?

S: Ni ya. Hmm dia takut dia cerita pasal tu
     je. pasal masalah yang dihadapi. Kemudian
     vakum cleaner itu cakap litte more than a
     year old.

Macam mana ya.. Kemudian dia pasti setuju   Questioning Others
yang you.. macam mana ya?
Di sinilah ... tak fahamlah   Evaluating
                                                 Comprehension

Unlike the other students who were able to solve their comprehension problems, Wadi was not able to. He did not make use of any effective higher-order cognitive reading strategies. Therefore, he was more reliant on direct help from the researcher. Directing him to read the tasksheet again and to summarize his understanding did not seem to have helped him with his writing as it did with Milah and Sani.

This observation also further supports the earlier assertion about the effects of higher-order cognitive reading strategies like summarizing and making connections on the success of comprehension and writing.

4.4.4 Resourcing

Another strategy that was found to be frequently used to get students started on the task is resourcing. This strategy was also used to help students generate and structure ideas while writing. While some student referred to the textbook for organizational plan and letter format, others looked for suitable words and phrases. Milah, for example used the textbook quite extensively to gather ideas for her writing. This strategy not only helped her to get started with writing, it also helped her to generate ideas as she monitored her writing. In the post-session interview for task 2, Milah confirmed the use of this strategy in the following exchange.

R	Masa you tengok buku tadi, apa yang you cuba cari?
S	Saya cuba cari... inilah.. step.. untuk tulis surat ini. Tapi dari sini saya baca sekali lalu saja. Tak faham. Complicated sangat.
R	Pernah tak baca chapter itu.
S	Tak pernah
S	Complex macam tak dapat gambaran lagilah apa yang dicerita kat sini.
R	Jadi, ada tak ikut step dia disini. Inilah appreciate ni satulah, Ni explain. Dua sajalah.
R	Selain daripada menguna buku teks semasa tulis, apa yang jamilah buat? Semasa you menghadapi masalah tak tahu idea, susah
S	Biasanya saya buat sajalah. Terus saja buatlah. Daripada fikir terlalu lama takkan buat. Terus je. Mungkin nanti datang idea macam mana

The manner how Milah used the textbook was also identified as effective use of this strategy. While other students like Zahir referred to the textbook for suitable ideas by looking for and adapting suitable structures that fitted the

requirements of the task, Milah skimmed through the text and scanned through guidelines for suitable ideas. The following excerpt illustrates this attempt for task 2.

Example 23:

(Skimming text) Ehmm... first paragraph **ah... firstly mesti beri penghargaan sebab dia beli kita punya produk.** Dear sir... ehmm....ehmm..	**Resourcing** Directing Self **Rehearsing ideas**
	Monitoring Production
<u>Appreciate.. as our... customer... as our customer..</u> we appreciate you as our customer.. ah.. ah..	Transcribing Monitoring Production
Appreciate you as one of our customer <u>as our customer on a... our customer on a ... on.. a vacuum cleaner...</u> we appreciate you as one of our customer on a vacuum cleaner ...	Repeating Transcribing Monitoring Production
<u>on the 30th of April</u> **Ensure the customer has received completion usually mentioned before discussion. Stress what can be done** We are really	Transcribing **Resourcing** **(text)** Rehearsing Structure
<u>We are.... really... sympa... sympathy... sympathies</u> Cakap dimana bersimpati dengan masalah yang dihadapi oleh mereka ini supaya dia lebih baik... with the... ah.. ah.. take care... dah... problem	Transcribing Rehearsing ideas Rehearsing Structure
<u>the problem... that the problem of ... of a vacuum cleaner..</u>	Transcribing

The other students who referred to the textbook as a source of words and phrases practiced a hit and miss approach with their search. They merely flipped through the text randomly to search for any expressions that seemed appropriate. Frequently, this search proved to be futile. The following exchange illustrates an example observed.

R	Sani tengok buku teks banyak kali. Apa yang Sani carikan?
S	Tengok dia punya format. Lepas tu tengok dia punya introduction. Ayat untuk permulaan.
R	Dapat cari tak?
S	Tak.
R	Jadi tulis sendiri ke?
S	Ya
R	Kemudian, masa nak habis, you tengok buku juga.
S	Ingat nak lihat pasal penutup ni.
R	Dapat cari tak?
S	Tak dapat.
R	Cari dalam chapter apa?
S	Letter format and letter style.

From the above excerpt, we can conclude that the search was not effective because the students referred to the wrong chapter. Instead of referring to the chapter on letters of claims and adjustments, she referred to the chapter on letter format and style. This was also observed among other students.

An analysis of the strategies used by Zahir, the student whose drafts ranked best for both tasks, revealed the effective use of resourcing to cope with idea generation. Unlike other students who only referred to the textbook, Zahir made several attempts to refer to past writing experiences to help him with idea generation. This was evident in both the tasks where his concerns were focused on adapting successful attempts in the past to suit the present situation. The following account illustrates this with Task 1.

Example 24:

and last sekali
Refer sales letter.. letter..

Directing Self
Resourcing
(Memory)

February 15 ...dah salah
For your information, the story book that you asked was sold out; but we will... a new list and... a current catalogue... ar
Please ... ar... please... hmmm..

selling letter biasa ada

Jadi,... er sincerely... sincerely... managing... director..
subject... for you information, the story books that you asked for was sold out, but we'll be publishing a new list and a current catalogue of present stock this summer... eh..
please... er...please write... er.. please call us... er... please call us..
Flipping textbook
Please return.. please return...

Please call us...

Revising
Monitoring
Production

Rehearsing
Structure
Resourcing
(Memory)
Transcribing

Monitoring
Production

Rehearsing
Structure
Resourcing
Rehearsing
Structure
Transcribing

Here, although Zahir tried to search his memory for a successful writing encounter in the past that fitted the requirements of the task, he was unable to find a suitable match. He could remember that in the case of the sales letter, the principle of resale would be appropriate for the conclusion. However, he encountered difficulty applying this knowledge. His explanation of this difficulty in the following excerpt from the post-session interview supports this observation, and it illustrates how this problem was subsequently overcome by modelling and adapting ideas from the textbook.

R: Yang kat sini (referring to the conclusion) apa masalahnya?
S: Sales letter ini ada tiga (step) kan. Yang last sekali mesti ada... saya tak tau macam mana nak tarik dia... reaksinya... Nak suruh dia belikan.
R: Ini bukan sales letter kan? Ini surat jenis apa?
S: Habis tu dia tanya tentang buku?
R: Jadi, kamu rasa ini sales letter. Jadi kena tulis reaksi tapi tak tau apa reaksi nak tulis.

S: Ah. Saya tengok-tengok, belok-belok tengok.. kalau ada idea
       dari sinikan. Saya tengok sama ada tak yang sama dengan yang
       disinikan.
R: Ada tak ambil idea dari sini?
S: Tak ada. Cuma yang inilah. Please attach the reply cardlah kan.
       Jadi saya rasa macam dia suruh. Jadi saya pun masuk please call
       us.

Although Zahir's earlier attempt was not successful, it did not deter him from using this strategy again for task 2. The following excerpt from the post-session interview of Task 2 illustrates the effective use of resourcing which involved recalling of successful attempts in the past and connecting past experiences with the current situation.

R   Kenapa you stop lama lepas thank you.
S   Pasal saya nak fikirlah.. nak tulis selepas ini apa idea nak
      tulis apa lagi tu saya kena fikirlah. Lepas itu nak ingat
      macam mana saya nak tulis dalam BI. **Apa yang saya
      belajar sebelum ini kan... saya nak ingat baliklah. Habis
      tu saja, saya fikir yang mana terbaik yang saya belajar
      sebelum ini yang ada kaitan dengan surat inikan.**
      ....
      Ini .... (referring to the idea expressed in the last paragraph of
      the letter written) ... **ini saya ingat dari kelas dululah.**
      Yang saya tengok member tuliskan... macam mana yang
      ditulis .... hari itu pasal... untuk assignment tu... saya ingat
      dari sinilah. **Bila saya tengok perempuan punya (peer
      work)... soalan yang sudah out of style (referring to
      written task in class)... saya ingat idea dia... tapi ada yang
      baru. Itu sebab dapat sinilah.**

4.4.5 Rehearsing ideas

Example 23 in section 4.4.4 also illustrates the effective use of rehearsing ideas in guiding logical thinking in the planning process. While other students also made use of this strategy, it is often truncated and not well-executed. This is evident with the use of social strategies to seek help from the researcher. The following excerpt taken from Wadi's think-aloud protocol for task 2 illustrates the ineffective use of this strategy.

Example 25:

uhh... mula-mula tulis... she cannot expect the guarantee to be apply... tell her..	**Rehearsing ideas**
Flipping of text	
uhh... may... 20...1996...96... to alice chong	Resourcing
	Transcribing
Mrs alice chong	Revising
16 jalan hijau... 50123 kuala lumpur	Transcribing
tentang request....	**Rehearsing ideas**
the guarantee period expired	Scanning
walaubagaimana ... apa ..	Translating
although she claim the problem with the machine begun during the guarantee period...	Scanning
buat aduan berkenaan dengan masalah mesin yang bermula semasa guarantee period...	**Rehearsing ideas**
macam mana nak buat ah?	
	Questioning
	Others
Flipping of text... claim letter... claim	Resourcing
madam	Rehearsing
	Structure
Flipping of text	Resourcing
macam mana nak buat ni? Sekarang ni kita nak	Questioning
balas macam mana? Dia dah claim ni. Kita nak	Others
macam mana nak jawab ya? Sebab sekarang ni dia dah claim berkenaan dengan masalah yang dia dapat dengan mesin ini. Jadi kita sebagai agen kena cakap macam mana pulak? Kita akan hantar processkan pulak ke?	

The following example shows how social strategies like questioning self, answering and directing self were also used together with rehearsing ideas to generate and shape ideas for the task.

Example 26:

OK, surat jenis apa?	Self-Questioning
Surat untuk ....ah.. adjustment.	Answering
Balas surat dia mengata bahawa kita accept atau tidak ....ah... dia punya tuntutan.....	Rehearsing ideas
actually...ah ikut format dulu...ah... company...superelectric..."	Directing Self

Example 27:

Sini kita harus	**Directing Self**
Here is a detail...here is a detail of the new list and a current catalogue of the present	Rehearsing Structure
kami terangkan about ...new list... senarai yang baru ...senarai yang baru about... sebabnya dia nak story book in english and italian for intermediate students ... so .. eh.. saya fikir alternatif kita nak cadangkan yang baru	Rehearsing ideas
... apa benda yang kita nak cadangkan...	**Questioning Self**
new list... new list... kita kena beri... kita kena beri ... senarailah	**Answering**
here ... is.... the.....new...list...	Transcribing

The use of the above strategies in example 27 was found to have helped Milah generate suitable ideas for the written task. An analysis of the strategies used by Mohamad and Milah revealed two distinct approaches towards writing. While Milah consistently worked on constructing a framework of ideas before moving on to structuring these ideas, Mohamad generated and shaped ideas by using a number of strategies in a cyclical manner. The strategies often involved are rehearsing structures, monitoring production, repeating, and translating.

Therefore, the ideas appear to have emerged from this cyclical process. The following excerpt from Mohamad's think-aloud protocol illustrates this observation.

Example 28:

As you request.. as you requested...	Rehearsing Structure
(flipping of textbook)...	Resourcing
as you requested... in English ... so as you requested... the story books in...	Rehearsing Structure
ayat mesti positif	Monitoring style
as you requested...(mumble).. (pause)..	Rehearsing Structure
As you... as you requested...	Transcribing
as you requested about... as you requested ... ah	Monitoring Production
berkenaan... about	Translating
about... about... story books	Transcribing
Flipping	Resourcing (Notes)
about story books... about story books	Monitoring Production
in... english... and italian... italian... for...	Transcribing
as you requested about your letter	Rehearsing Structure
seperti yang kamu minta about story books in italian and english...	Translating
for... for... intermediate student... students...	Transcribing
for story books for intermediate students	Monitoring Production

From the above analysis, it can be concluded that Milah was a careful planner while Mohamad developed his ideas as he wrote. The written drafts of Milah, however was found to rank lower compared to Mohamad despite her careful planning (Table 6). The observation made here appears to support the findings of Torrance et al. (1994) which asserts that planning while being necessary need not be a sufficient criteria for effective writing.

4.4.6   Drafting and Revising

The following drafts written by Wadi illustrate the effect drafting and revising had on the development of ideas.   The difference observed in the first and second draft suggests that the student had refined his understanding of the task as he composed.   The development of ideas from the second to the third draft illustrates further refinement of the task representation.

Draft 1
Thank you for purchased the a vacuum cleaner from my shop.
Firstly. I would to tell you about
Firstly. I would like to order you a new vakum vat vacuum cleaner on 15th June 1996. on
-> clai (m) give.

Draft 2
Thank you for purchased a vacuum cleaner on the 30th April 1995 for from my shop.
For your claim about that. we can referer you invois no. 14552. like.
We can refund your your money at your account no. 1422345-7-1 at 27 June 1996.
I hope you. I hope you waiting until about that.

Draft 3
Thank you for purchased a vacuum cleaner from my shop on the 30th April 1995. Also we are glad because you are claim about your dissatisfaction about your purchasing.

Firstly. we reffere your enclosed. that the invoise no 22345. type is vacuum cleaner at 30th April 1995.

According your claim. Now we agree to refund your money on in the cheque no. 121345-7-1 on the 13th June 1996 ad RM455.

We hope you are satisfati. satisfied about my this.
Thank you.

This observation supports the findings of Torrance et al. (1994) which suggests that drafting does not necessarily lead to effective writing. In the above example, while the ideas expressed in the letter do become clearer with each subsequent draft, the requirements of the task is not addressed as the student had misinterpreted the task, thus rendering the written product irrelevant to the task assigned. The student had written a letter granting adjustment, when the task suggested that adjustment should be declined.

In this case, the ineffectiveness of the written product is not attributed to strategy choice for generating and shaping ideas. The problem, however, was a result of inaccurate task representation resulting from problems with comprehension of the task. Wong (1993) made a similar conclusion when she compared the writing strategies of college writers composing in English and Chinese. In her study, she concluded that weak and good writers may have a similar repertoire of writing strategies, and that task comprehension may have a greater influence on writing performance.

4.5   Discussion and Summary of Findings

The study identified three categories of strategies that were used for different purposes at various points in the writing process. Cognitive strategies, for example, were used mainly for managing task comprehension and refining task representation, while metacognitive strategies were mainly used for

monitoring and evaluating comprehension, and managing idea production. Social strategies, on the other hand were used for managing negative emotions like uncertainty and a high level of anxiety.

As for the problems encountered, two main concerns were identified: task comprehension and production of ideas. The study found the students differed in their awareness of their problems. While some students were able to identify their weaknesses accurately, others were not. The level of difficulty reported by them also differed. For example, some students attributed the problem of comprehension to difficulty in understanding meanings of certain words while others attributed it to sentence and contextual meaning (see 4.2.2 and 4.2.3). As for problems with idea production, it was found that only a few students paid any attention to the criteria for effective business letter writing taught in the course, i.e. the 5 C's of effective business communication: conciseness, clarity, courtesy, completeness and correctness (McComas and Satterwhite, 1990). Those who did try reported having difficulty. It was therefore concluded that weak learners may not have the capacity to focus their attention to these task demands if concerns for comprehending task demands were not resolved effectively.

One of the major findings of this study on strategy use for task comprehension is the discovery of a few cognitive strategies for effective management of comprehension problems which subsequently affected task representation for writing. Students who were not able to comprehend the task

effectively were mainly engaged in using lower-order reading strategies like scanning, translating and repeating to process information from the tasksheet. In contrast, students who were able to resolve this problem engaged strategies that reflected a top-down approach to processing information for comprehension. These students were able to identify the major issue of the task with strategies like summarizing, note taking and monitoring comprehension before they related the issue identified with the details given in the worksheet (see section 4.4.2). This finding supports studies on comprehension strategies which found that less proficient ESL readers tend to use of "bottom-up" strategies, while proficient ESL readers were able to engage "top-down" strategies while reading (e.g. Ting, 1995).

Higher-order reading strategies like summarizing, making connections and note taking were identified for effective management of task comprehension problems which subsequently affected task representation for writing and idea generation. These findings support findings from other studies on the reading-writing connection where better readers were found to be also better writers (e.g. Eckhoff, 1983; Taylor and Beach, 1984; Stotsky, 1983). The connection between reading and writing is more apparent in this study because of the nature of the task presented. Students who were not able to comprehend the explicit and implicit demands of the task accurately were found to produce ideas which were inappropriate; thus rendering the written letter ineffective or inappropriate.
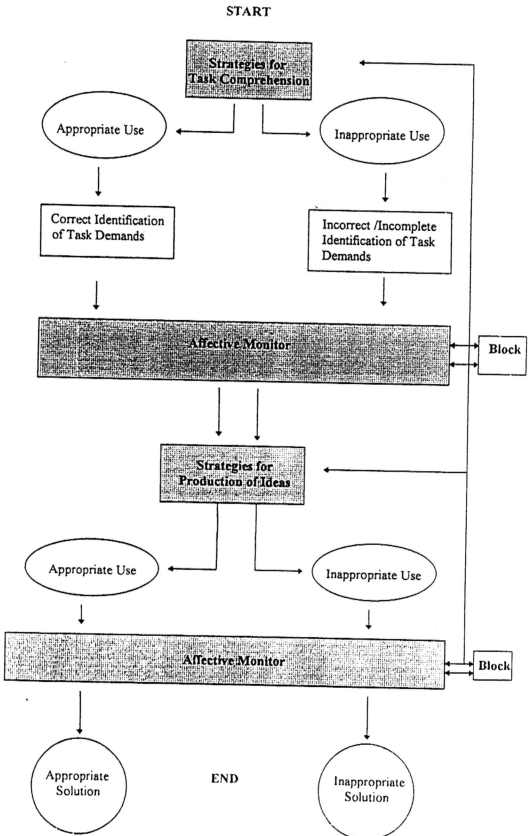
The results of the analysis of strategy use also suggest that the effectiveness of the strategies used is also dependent on the manner of its use. For example, consistent with findings of other studies (e.g. Leki, 1995; Matsumoto, 1994), resourcing was found to be an effective strategy for some students. The textbook, the dictionary and the tasksheet were resources for suitable "starter phrases" to 'jump start' ideas for writing, as well as suitable resources for letter writing plans. The use of past knowledge and experience as a resource instead of the textbook was also found to be a useful strategy. However, accounts of ineffectiveness of this strategy were also identified in this study. One account of ineffective use of the dictionary was identified, while other accounts on futile search efforts involving the textbooks were also identified (section 4.4.4).

The study also found traces of apprehension while trying to get started on the writing task. Students who were more apprehensive, as inferred from a high frequency of strategies like evaluating task and evaluating ability, resorted to getting help from others to cope with negative emotions that were blocking progress in the writing process (see 4.3.3). This observation also supports the use of social strategies for effective management of task comprehension and idea production, hence, supporting the use of social activities where students get to talk about their ideas before writing them down.

To summarize these findings. Figure 6 presents strategy use in the context of business letter writing. This model summarizes how strategy use affects the writing of business letters. It addresses both cognitive and affective factors in the writing process and it accounts for both appropriate and inappropriate use of strategies for problem resolution in the writing process. The process of writing business letters starts with the writer making attempts to comprehend the task and this involves the use of reading strategies to manage task comprehension problems. In managing this first cycle of problems, appropriate use of these strategies may lead to correct or incorrect identification of task demands. This process is filtered by the monitor with the use of metacognitive strategies like evaluating task, evaluating ability, monitoring and evaluating comprehension .

The monitor is very vulnerable to negative mental states of the writer. Mismanagement of such emotions may result in a temporary block or a permanent block in the writing process. In the case of a permanent block, the student abandons any effort at resolving the problem and accepts defeat. Other affective conditions as identified by other researchers (e.g. Oxford and Nyikos, 1989; MacIntyre, 1994) such as attitude, confidence and risk taking may push the student to repeat the cycle in search of a more acceptable way to manage the problem.

Figure 6:   **A Model of Strategy Use in Business-Letter Writing**

START

Strategies for
Task Comprehension

Appropriate Use — Inappropriate Use

Correct Identification
of Task Demands

Incorrect /Incomplete
Identification of Task
Demands

Affective Monitor — Block

Strategies for
Production of Ideas

Appropriate Use — Inappropriate Use

Affective Monitor — Block

Appropriate
Solution   END   Inappropriate
Solution

If subsequent attempts are successful, the student moves one step further to address problems related to the production of ideas. The student may also decide to disregard negative emotions and self-feedback about task comprehension and decide to move on to the next step. When this happens, it is quite likely to result in inappropriate resolution as the effectiveness of the second cycle relies heavily on the accuracy of the first cycle.

Nevertheless, the writer may revert back to the first cycle while attempting to manage problems with production of ideas. The monitor in the second cycle is represented by the use of metacognitive strategies like monitoring production, evaluating production, monitoring style, directing self, evaluating task, and evaluating ability. Depending on the decisions made at this point, the student may revert to problems in the first cycle or continue with problems in the second cycle.

The monitor which is activated to manage problems in the second cycle is also vulnerable to negative emotional states. As explained earlier, mismanagement of such emotions at this point can also result in a temporary or permanent block in the writing process.