

**Is Writing an Art or Craft?
How Students at the Department of English-Ibri- at University of Technology and Applied
Sciences View Writing: An Art, or Craft?**

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Abstract

Whether **Writing** is an art or craft is still controversial; some academicians believe that writing is a pure sort of art, while others think it is just a means of making living--craft. Whether it is an art or craft, it remains a means of written communication by which people interact and get their needs fulfilled. This paper explores a group of students' viewpoints regarding this issue in the classroom. For more details, a questionnaire has been distributed among (21) students in the Foundation Year Program (FY), level (A) at University of Technology and Applied Sciences in Ibri - the Sultanate of Oman. What the researchers have reached is that there is a strong relationship between the two poles of writing: art and craft. Both complement each other to get an excellent piece of writing, though some slight differences appear here and there. Discussion, suggestions, recommendations, and implications will be highlighted throughout this paper.

Keywords: academic, art, complement, craft, creative, explore, teachers.

Introduction

Basically, all people can write, many can play music, design, paint, and do so many things in their daily lives. However, if there is no talent, experience, training, and inner motivation, things produced will have little value and less effect. Those who spend much time trying to hone their skills and practice patiently, learn from well-experienced mentors, will get high ranks in the field they are working on. Writing is different from all skills around us; sometimes it is considered an art, while some other times it is viewed as a craft.

When a certain piece of writing impresses the reader-- attractive stories, well written novels, plays, powerful academic papers; that is a kind of art: the writer has exerted all his/her efforts to create a very attractive piece of literature. This is not so similar as a craft.

Writing becomes a craft when the writer becomes skillful in using all available tools such as strong structure, eloquent rhetoric, and all necessary techniques and mechanics to produce something tremendous; both shape and content. Writers, in general, could be defined as people who have certain ideas and know how to introduce that in a simple style. It is not a merit or credit for writers to tend to use vague and complicated words so as to be called skillful and sophisticated. This paper highlights a very important issue: Is Writing an Art, or Craft?

Review of the Literature

In fact writers are expected to introduce valuable pieces of literature to their audience, bearing in mind that every word counts and must give a clear and direct meaning without vagueness. If, for some reason, the writer uses a number of unfamiliar words; puzzles, for example, he/she should explain that and make some clarification so as the readers do not get misled or confused. Moreover, they-writers- should spend enough time reviewing and editing their works to look acceptable for them first, and for their audience, next. Normally, writing a certain piece takes thirty percent of the writers' effort, while sifting, editing, and proofreading take seventy percent. Here comes the talent of the writer as he introduces a short story, a novel, an essay, etc.

If an essay or story makes no sense to you, or appears disorganized, how can you expect an outside reader to comprehend the material? Writing is a gateway, one where the author must communicate with the reader, and is tasked with doing so by best putting the puzzled words together (Kruize, 2016, Para. 5).

Writing is not only filling a piece of paper with words, it is not how much is written, but how well things are produced and introduced. The style and manner used reflect the richness of the material at hand. Here, therefore, emerges the ART of language that explores what is launched. A piece of art reaches perfection when the artist takes care of all tiny and minute items that shape the whole portrait, for example. In writing, the genre written should be stunning.

Writing is an art of language. Not only must an inspiring writer choose what to write about, but the writer must choose the manner in which to present the topic or information, as well as organize said information to best convey the message. That message can be for informative purposes, such as news, or for entertainment value, instructional purposes, historical value, or something else. (Kruize, 2016, Para. 1).

Sometimes well-seasoned writers volunteer to give new writers the gist of their experience focusing on the writing process which should be clear enough and to the point. Writers first have to worry about all words written, behave as if they were writing for themselves, before thinking

of their audience, which is as important as writers themselves. Narrating a story in a writing manner is so beneficial and rewriting it makes it so polished and well-honed for readers.

Stephen King, one of the most celebrated authors of the last half century, has often been asked about his writing process as well as tips he advises for a writer at any level. Whether one is a novice or professional, King has stated that any work is done “one word at a time” and you must first write for yourself before others. “First write for yourself, and then worry about the audience. When you write a story, you’re telling yourself the story. When you rewrite, your main job is taking out all the things that are not the story”. (Kruize, 2016, Para. 4).

In some cases writing is used as a means of making living; a craft. In order to be skillful in this field, writers have to keep writing on many subjects for diverse audiences. They write to technicians, engineers, carpenters, salesmen, companies, etc. Craftspeople should pay more attention to what they write and consider both: art and craft. To be a craft only is not enough unless it is introduced as a perfect monument. “Craftspeople need to write often and for many audiences. They create their story, shape their brand and communicate it to customers, retailers, wholesalers and other makers”. (Goodwin & Wilson, 2020, Para. 2).

There is a vigorous relationship between the skill of writing and any produced piece of craft. Showing how great a certain craft is needs a particular word- list composed in an astonishing and a mazing manner. They both- skill of writing and craft- complement each other. “Writing and craft go hand in hand, for as much as makers let their objects tell the story, their words help frame the image”. (Goodwin & Wilson, 2020, Para. 3).

Moreover, Goodwin & Wilson, (2020, Para.11) conclude that best craft writings normally tell something unique about the craftsman behind that production. The audience of a certain writer can distinguish his production from the first glance, and this is so with the work of craftsmen. “The best craft writing tells us something about the maker, the curater, the author or the critic”. Do both kinds of writing need something in common in order to develop and nourish?

Practice makes perfection, not to mention the proper period of time needed for accomplishing the mission. Any theoretical teaching does not fulfill any task unless there is much practice and study. To get a good idea about writing as an art and craft there should be a deep study of any related issues that sharpen both branches. “Writing is an art and craft that needs to be developed through deliberate practice and study over a long period of time”. (Leibowitz, 2017, Para. 2). Are writers of legal documents considered artists, craftsmen, or both?

Writers of legal documents have to think seriously about the issue they are tackling. Their work could be an art, as they are keen on getting a marvelous piece of writing, but Lawyers,

on the other hand, depend mainly on verbal speeches, skills of eloquence, etc., with less focus on writing flowery speeches. Therefore, it is unlikely to be considered pure artists of the word.

Although it's true that being a writer of legal documents is an art because you have to do some pretty deep thinking and produce watertight work, I doubt whether anyone would consider a lawyer to be an artist in the truest sense of the word. (Anonymous, 2016, Para. 4).

In the field of writing- any writing- quality emerges. No matter how much one writes: value counts at last. "Any kind of writing can be considered an art, but real creativity is what turns writing into something special. It's not what you have that matters, but what you do with it". (Anonymous, 2016, Para. 8). Ashton, ((n.d.), Para. 2) believes that the purpose of writing, whether an art or craft, is to convey a certain message in a clear, direct, and simple way to the audience. "I am to produce well-turned sentences that do not come under the heading of artistry, but serve a definite purpose: to communicate meaning clearly and simply while retaining a certain elegance". Could creative thinking play an important role in the field of writing?

An experienced writer normally produces fine pieces of literature that could be undoubtedly treated as an artistic work. What is beyond this is "creative thinking" which lies inside the writer himself; something inside him that struggles to get out and shape the content and frame of what is being written.

Any kind of writing can be an art, but creative thinking is the key. Whether you plan to immerse yourself in writing poetry, believe there's a novel in you trying to get out, or are simply tackling an essay or a blog post, your creative thinking and skill can combine to turn it into a work of art. (Anonymous, 2016, Para. 9).

As writers' experience accumulates and increases, their skill and production, both, become refined and perceivable. All good writings are similar provided that they bridge out the gap between the audience and the final production smoothly. As days go by, writers become more mature and more successful in doing their job well. The ultimate aim of writing is to give the audience a clear message regarding any feature of life.

"Good writing is similar. The final product is really not a road map for how to achieve high levels of craft. Rather, it is an exemplar that displays the refinement of skills writers have learned as they grow into their work". (Raphael, 2019, Para. 8).

Learning by heart is not learning and would never be. When teachers teach their students, they have to ask them to be as innovative as possible and not memorize others' strategies blindly. Every job has its own challenges and difficulties that should be tackled carefully. The teacher

might recommend some famous writers or books just to show his students how things are introduced. Writing students should discuss and negotiate all obscure and vague structure and manner of a certain genre. At University of Technology and Applied Sciences in the Sultanate of Oman- Ibri branch-, where the researchers teach, the writing skill, particularly writing “Term Papers”, is taught in a way that makes students feel they are part of the process: instructors discuss with students the topics they choose, highlight- together- possible questions that support their choice, although there are some helping clues given in advance in the instructions page. Students, themselves, start collecting information from references, websites, books, and other available resources. This task- writing a term paper- takes the whole semester, and finally it appears an excellent piece of writing with both characteristics: art and craft.

Along those lines, to teach students the craft of writing, you don’t ask them to simply memorize someone else’s strategies or the criteria in a scoring rubric; students must learn how to negotiate the myriad writing challenges they will face on their own, without always relying on a teacher-provided formula. (Raphael, 2019, Para. 10).

The more writers read, the better. By reading outstanding masterpieces by highly sophisticated writers, novice ones can see the manner, style, use of lexicon etc., and how things are utilized, provided that this is done in a critical way. Some writers affect and get affected by others, which is good for both, bearing in mind that plagiarism with no credit to the owner should be avoided. “By reading with a critical eye, writers can learn the elements and techniques that established authors use to meet reader expectation”. (Schmetzer, (n.d.), Para. 1). To quote an Arabic proverb, “one hand never claps”, but the other hand helps accomplish the mission--cooperation, sharing, and caring. “Sharing your work with your peers and getting feedback can go a long way in honing your craft”. (Schmetzer, (n.d.), Para. 1). Repetition, sometimes, works--the more writers write, delete, proofread, edit, the more they get a perfect final and publishable draft. The writing process sets a good example of this strategy: brainstorming, pre-writing, writing, checking, editing, peer editing, and finally a great piece of writing. This normally happens when writing is treated as “Trade”. “A trade often involves a great deal of repetitive work--in the case of writing, for instance, turning out copy, press releases, brochures, manuals, documentation, etc. that follow fairly predictable formulas”. (Allen, 2012, Para. 9).

Writing becomes a sort of innovation and rejuvenation once the writer initiates new things from nothing. It requires a smart one who feels involved deeply in what he is writing--a pure artist, indeed. “A writer who is an artist is one who not only creates something from nothing, but creates something *unique* from nothing”. (Allen, 2012, Para. 15). Moreover, when a piece of writing gets readers touched and amazed, that is a sign of dealing with an art. The smart writer is the one who, by his/ her talent and skill makes audience engage emotionally in his creation whether sorrow or happiness. The reaction of readers is important.

Art is what happens when a reader picks up your piece, is moved, touched and engaged by it in some way or another. Art is a subjective and emotional experience. Whether it is funny, romantic, or scary, the main goal is to engage your reader on an emotional level. Create the empathy, boost that visceral reaction. (Silva, 2017, Para. 20).

Writing is enjoyable, regardless of how difficult it seems. When the writer treats his piece as if it were a visual portrait that he polishes and paints, with some tinge of imagination and reality, the result will be so wonderful. Beautiful things are amazing and could attract the eye. It is, no doubt, an art and craft at the same times.

I believe that writing should be thought of as no different from the visual and performative arts. The writer-just like the painter- must create things with great skill and imagination. They must be adept at their craft in order to move people, to make them feel something. (Armitage, 2019, Para. 5).

Readers can tell whether a certain piece of writing is attractive, touching, or not. Once the reader feels he is dealing with the story in a good way as if he were telling himself, this is a good sign that the writer has fully succeeded in weaving the story with its characters, atmosphere, plot, etc.

When it comes reading a book-whether it happens be a novel or collection of poetry or non-fiction piece- the reader is the one who is telling the story to himself. Yes, it may have been written by somebody else, but it is up to the readers to center themselves and experience the art form. (Armitage, 2019, Para. 9).

Murphy, (2018, Para. 4) believes that in order to get astonishing production of writing, one has to write a lot with lots of editing. By doing so, he gets the (know-how) and becomes well skillful in both the art and craft of writing.

The key to an amazing statement is to write **A LOT**, then edit, edit, edit. You should go through at least 3 drafts. Spend a little time away from it, and then return with fresh eyes. This is not something you can do in an hour- it's going to take time.

There are a number of reasons that make excellent writings. Content, vocabulary, perfect structure and an attractive style. All that makes sense of the piece concerned.

In writing, both content and usage of words matter. Rich content is valued. It should be thoughtful and profound. Words too matter, and it is the style that makes your writing the best. Best writers anticipate the inquisitiveness of reader thus serves them with requisite answers. Such attempts make sense of writing. That is why the experts of this art say that good writer[s] are natural sceptics regarding their work. (Pen, 2019, Para. 10).

Recommendations

-promising writers should start with the basics and essentials of writing; good grammar, wide variety of vocabulary, sentence structure, etc.

-keeping writing on a daily basis overcomes writing phobia, and promotes a certain style of yours.

-it is recommended that beginning writers have model writers that makes them see how language is used and expressed well, and see the style followed by them; some writers have cynical or humorous styles that make them different.

-upon finishing your piece of writing, find a trustworthy colleague for editing. Don't hesitate to ask him/ her about any issue that you are not sure of.

-if possible, join writing workshops around to help you excel in this field on one hand, and explore your inner talents about writing on the other hand.

-refer to some masterpieces by some mature writers to see how they introduce and produce the content, structure, vocabulary, etc., and try to take them as good examples in your personal writings.

-before starting writing, plan your work, and work your plan; brainstorm, concentrate on the items you want to deal with.

-no matter if you feel you have failed; almost all writers faced this problem so many times during their career.

-be close to your audience and make things easy for them; use simple words, plain style, and avoid complicated usages that may give contradictory results.

Methodology and Procedures

To have a clear-cut idea about the dichotomy --writing as an art or craft -, the researchers have distributed a questionnaire among a group of twenty-one Foundation Year (FY) students at University of Technology and Applied Sciences in Ibri College- Sultanate of Oman They are between 18-19 years of age and were briefed in advance that this questionnaire is voluntary and will be used for academic purposes only.

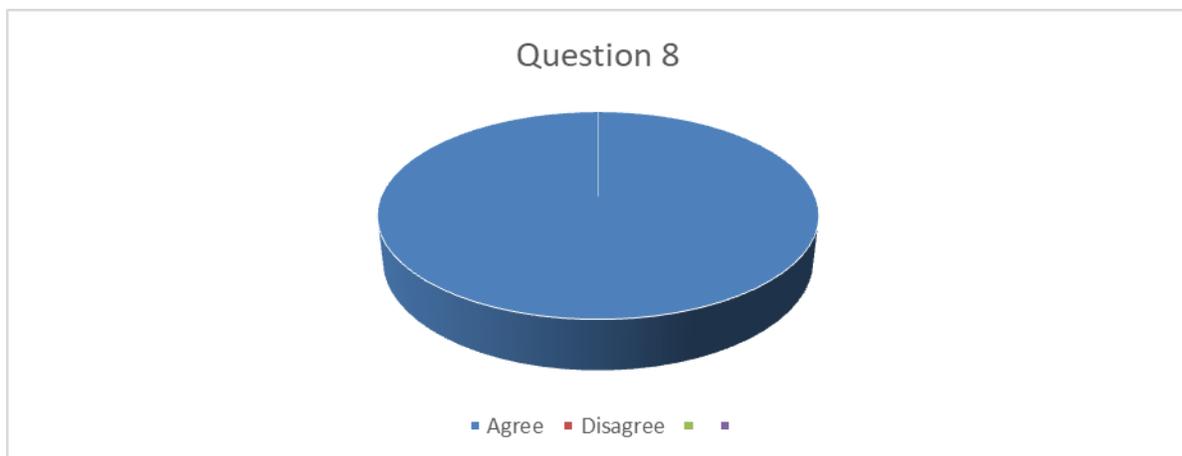
Results and Discussion

A survey was conducted among (21) students of level (A) in the Foundation Program at the College of Applied Sciences- Ibri. The purpose of the survey is to know if the skill of writing is an art or craft, or both.

The survey was conducted by means of a questionnaire given to the students to complete. It dealt with different types of questions: (Yes, No/ Agree, Disagree/ Always, Never/ Very much, Not much).

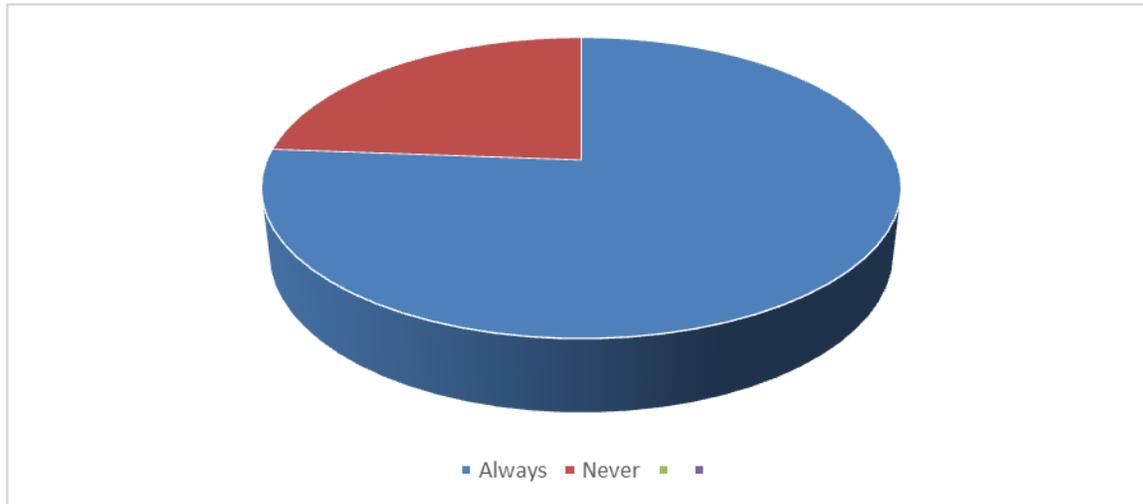
From the analysis, the most significant items for the (yes, no) questions are as follows. Question (1), all students (21) answered (yes) that they can write good sentences with no spelling or grammar mistakes. Question two, (20) students answered positively that they can write a good academic essay: good introduction body and conclusion, except for one student. However, for the third question, (11) students said when they write a piece of writing, they treat it as a piece of art: they use a plain style, clear vocabulary, and no grammar mistakes. For question (4), all students (21) answered (yes) that when they finish writing, they go back to check, edit, proofread, and revise organization, coherence and cohesion. For questions (6), (11) students believe that joining writing workshops helps them excel in writing, whether an art or craft. Question (7), almost (20) students said that when they write any piece of literature, they always consider their audience.

Chart 1: Shows students' responses to an (Agree or Disagree) questions.



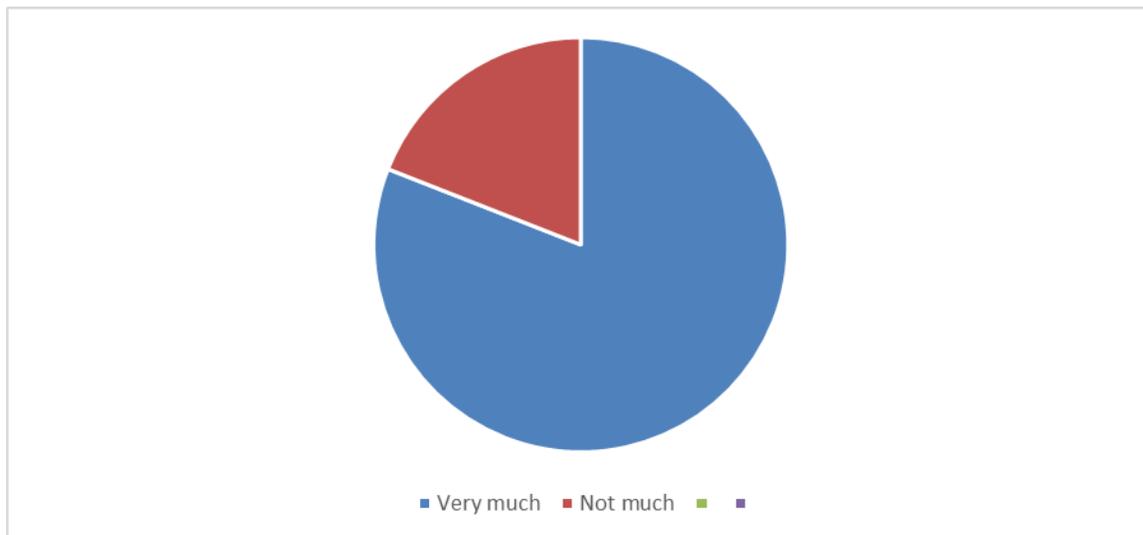
From the data of chart (1), the most significant items are as follows. This chart highlights question (8), where all students (21) said they believe that every piece of writing (art or craft), must convey a message to the audience; not just casting words on a blank sheet of paper. For question (5), (11) students prefer to study writing as a craft, so that they can utilize it in making living.

Chart 2: Shows students' responses to: keeping writing regularly hones and improves writing.



From the data of chart (2), the result states that most students (16), always prefer to keep writing regularly, as it helps and improves their writing.

Chart 3: Shows students' responses to writing skill as an art or a craft and whether it is essential for the future.



From the data of chart (3), the result clearly states that almost (17) students agree that though sometimes demanding, writing skill – art or craft- is very much essential for their future whereas only (4) said “not much”.

To conclude, students' responses are clear that excelling in writing is so essential in all aspects of life, especially in writing academic essays. Moreover, writing is not only an art, but also a craft, too. From the above analysis it's clear that students give equal importance to writing both, as an art or a craft. Having good writing skills is very important.

Conclusion

Teaching writing is the priority of all teachers in classrooms: they should teach their students all strategies and techniques concerning this skill, whether an art or craft. The class environment should concentrate on various topics that reflect students' efficiency regarding writing. As a kind of support, some universities have established "writing centers" where students write under the supervision of a skillful teacher. At University of Technology and Applied Sciences- Sultanate of Oman, where we teach, there is a section for "Diploma" students who take courses in writing, mainly a kind of Craft. They take classes on writing curriculum vitae, business letters, initiating job applications, checking and polishing pieces of writing, etc., which gives them the practical experience in dealing with stuff as a craft. On the other hand, all students in different majors, take academic writing with much focus on the art of writing. Students are really doing well in both branches. Here writing as a craft and an art go hand in hand in a very smooth way. Thanks to my colleagues in the Department of English for their hard work and dedication in honing and sharpening students' talents in producing marvelous pieces of writing, especially "Term-Papers". We should remember that **Writing**, as an art or craft, is demanding and needs ongoing training and practicing.

About the Researchers

Dr Mohammed Al Ghafri is a full-time lecturer in the Department of English at Ibri College of Applied Sciences- Oman. He holds a PhD in teaching English (TESOL) from the University of Leeds where he also got his MA in Education. He has had different positions: head of the English Department, assistant dean, English supervisor and head of follow- up and training in Oman. His research interest is classroom interaction and participation, identity, classroom context and teachers' supervision.

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Mr. Younes Audeh is the head of the translation committee and a lecturer at the Department of English at Ibri College of Applied Sciences - the Sultanate of Oman. He is an M.A. holder in Applied Linguistics from Indiana University of Pennsylvania- USA. He has been teaching English as an ESL/EFL for a long time. He has taught at a number of colleges and universities in different countries: Jordan, Kingdom of Bahrain, the United Arab Emirates, and the Sultanate of Oman. His research interests are many, but mainly “academic writing”

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Appendices

Questionnaire

This questionnaire aims to get some useful information for an article titled: Is Writing an Art or Craft? Feel free to express yourselves; this information is utterly for academic purposes and your names will not be identified. Thank you all in advance.

1. I can write good sentences with no spelling or grammar mistakes.

(A) Yes (B) No

2. I can write a good academic essay: good introduction, body, and conclusion.

(A) Yes (B) No

3. When I write a piece of writing, I treat it as a piece of art: I use a plain style, clear vocabulary, no grammar mistakes.

(A) Yes (B) No

4. When I finish writing, I go back to check, edit, proofread, and revise organization, coherence and cohesion.

(A) Yes (B) No

5. I prefer to study **Writing** as a craft, so that I can utilize it in making living.

(A) Agree (B) Disagree

6. Joining **Writing Workshops** helps me excel in my writing, whether an art or craft.

(A) Yes (B) No

7. When I write any piece of literature, I always consider my audience.

(A) Yes (B) No

8. I believe that every piece of writing (art or craft), must convey a message to the audience; not just casting words on a blank sheet of paper.

(A) Agree (B) Disagree

9. Keeping writing regularly hones and improves my writing?

(A) Always

(B) Never

10. Though sometimes demanding, writing skill- art or craft- is so essential for my future.

(A) Very much

(B) Not much