Reading a research article: Using online corpora to develop students' writing skills (Answers)

This task will give you further practice at reading and understanding research articles.

1. Look at the title of the article and the abstract (in *italics*). What is the paper about? Who is the intended audience? What were the results of the exploratory investigation? Would it be useful for you to read the whole article? Why/why not?
   This paper describes how online corpora can help students redraft their essays and outlines an exploratory investigation which suggests that (a) students can improve the naturalness of their writing using online corpora, and (b) learners found them to be a helpful resource.
   The journal name is ELTJ (*English Language Teaching Journal*) so the intended audience is probably language teachers.

2. Appendix 1 (pages 370 to 372) provides the 'training materials' used in the investigation. Try these exercises with a partner, using the BYU online corpora BNC or COCA. Do you have a clearer idea what the paper is about now?
   The appendices provide extra information on the actual materials used in the class which help the readers better understand the context of this research.

3. Look at the conclusion section of the article. What are the suggested advantages of using online corpora for a) teachers and b) students? Do you agree with these conclusions?
   For teachers, online corpora have the potential to reduce workloads and to allow them to focus on correction of more global textual problems. For students, on the other hand, online corpora can allow them to improve the naturalness of their writing independently.

4. What does Table 1 (page364) show? Which option from 1 to 5 is the best in your opinion? Why?
   It summarizes the advantages and disadvantages of different types of feedback from detailed comments to nothing at all. The best option probably depends on the particular classroom context and variables such as learner proficiency level, length of the writing course, and learner motivation.

5. What does Table 2 (page 365) show? What are the main advantages and disadvantages of the two online corpora?
   It compares the characteristics of two of online corpora (BNC & COBUILD) that vary with respect to size, response speed and user-friendliness.
   N.B. Since this article was written, new corpora have become available – the BYU resources are superior to both of the examples given here.

6. Look at the introduction section of the article. Why do you think the author started with a quotation?
   The quotation provides a 'hook' to catch the reader's interest. It provides a humorous perspective on the difficulty of writing that relates to the central topic of the article.

7. Most of the references in the article come in the introduction, on pages 363 and 364. What idea are the citations supporting? Why are most of the references in this section?
   The references 'map out' the field of feedback on second language writing and suggest that researchers don't currently agree on the benefits of providing students with corrections or comments. This leads the author to conclude that teachers can't wait for empirical answers and should just get on with the job of teaching as best they can (for example by using online corpora). Most of the references are in the Introduction section because this 'sets the scene' for the research investigation.

8. Look at the references on page 364. What do we write when repeating a citation we have just mentioned?
   'Ibid.' is from the Latin word, *ibidem*, meaning 'in the same place'. It is sometimes used for in-text references to avoid repetition (where the previous reference is visible in the same paragraph or page).

9. Usually, introduction sections begin with a broad idea and then narrow down to a more specific question:

BROAD THEME
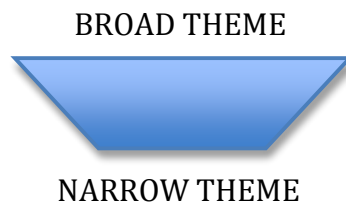
NARROW THEME

   What are the broad themes and narrower themes in this article?
   The broad theme is providing learners with feedback on their written work. This is narrowed down to the use of online corpora to help students develop their writing.

10. Look at the methods, results and discussion sections of the article. Are you convinced by the investigation? Can you see any problems with the methodology?
    Since the research has no 'control group', it is impossible to know whether the improvements noted in the students' 2nd drafts were as a direct result of the corpus training or not. This weakness is recognized by the author in the discussion section on page 368.

11. Look at the reference section of the article. What are the differences between journal references and book references?

With journal references, the journal title is in italics and volume, parts and page numbers are given. With books, the title is in italics and place of publication and publisher's name are provided.