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Approaches to teaching writing

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Chapter 2

Approaches to teaching writing

The lecturer's dilemma

Iain, a psychology lecturer, became interested in the role of writing in his students' learning for 'selfish reasons'. When reading his students' writing, Iain found it difficult to distinguish between their understanding of the subject matter and their expression of ideas and arguments. This problem drove him to investigate how to improve his students' academic writing abilities. A key issue that he identified was the need for students to be able to argue and defend positions in the field of psychology in their writing. Currently, Iain and other lecturers in his department are working to build academic writing instruction into the structure of their psychology courses.

INTRODUCTION

At the university level, disciplinary knowledge and understanding are largely exhibited and valued through the medium of writing. Students can begin to understand the significance of writing by becoming aware that writing takes particular conventional forms in different contexts. How can both subject lecturers and writing specialists help students understand the issues related to academic writing, which include taking a stance, developing an argument, addressing a specific audience, and choosing the appropriate writing style? How can we help students in the often-difficult process of writing itself?

This chapter outlines many of the issues facing subject lecturers and writing specialists when considering how to help students improve their writing. We aim to:

- introduce text-based approaches to teaching general features of writing that characterise different text types, their structure and rhetorical purposes;
- consider the rhetorical purposes of text types, particularly the notion of 'argument' in relation to rhetorical purpose in academic writing,

and highlight the function of evidence and synthesis in building argument;

- look at aspects of writing that constitute register, including degrees of formality, the personal voice and linguistic accuracy;
- introduce process-based approaches to teaching writing, including the stages of prewriting, drafting and polishing a text; the use of peer review, and issues related to collaborative writing;
- discuss how to integrate the teaching of the writing process with teaching specific text types and disciplinary forms of writing.

THE PURPOSES OF WRITING

If you consider why you ask students to write, you may find a variety of reasons, including the following, discussed in Chapter 1: as assessment; as an aid to critical thinking, understanding and memory; to extend students' learning beyond lectures and other formal meetings; to improve students' communication skills; and to train students as future professionals in particular disciplines. This range of reasons for writing may not be so apparent to students, who may see writing as mainly an assessment hurdle. Below we outline an activity to help students explore these issues.

Activity 2.1 An introduction to the purposes of writing

1   Ask students to brainstorm individually all the types of writing they have done in the last few weeks (e.g. shopping lists, text messages, notes on lectures, experimental results, birthday cards, poetry).

2   In small groups have students put the different types of writing into some form of classification. You might want to suggest functional classifications such as *memory aids, social communication, learning about x, for assessment*. Some forms of writing will fall into more than one category.

3   In a whole-class discussion, narrow the focus to academic writing activities such as notes made on reading or in lectures, essay drafts, and laboratory reports. Discuss the purposes of the different types of academic writing students have done. Ask students to consider the different audiences for these types of writing, the specific rhetorical purpose of this form of writing, and the kinds of language, information, and evidence they will need to draw upon. Extend the discussion to include other types of writing students will do in the future.

In considering these purposes for academic writing and the usefulness of discussing them with students we take the position that certain *general* aspects of academic writing can be isolated and taught. In the next sections we outline the features of many types of academic writing that can usefully be made explicit to students; we then discuss different approaches to teaching the process of writing and finally look at ways of integrating a focus on the writing process with a concern for the final text.

TEACHING WRITING: FOCUS ON TEXT

In this section we look at some specific features of academic text including text types, rhetorical purpose, register and linguistic accuracy. While many of these features may seem obvious, often students, especially those just entering tertiary education, find it far from straightforward to know exactly what is expected.

Text types

Words such as 'essay', 'laboratory report' and 'case study' are problematic in that they denote a wide variety of types of text. For ease of reference in discussing text types we continue to use these labels, but we emphasise that you cannot assume that the knowledge of what to expect in a certain text type is shared by students. The essay, for example, may contain different elements depending on whether it is framed as a critical review, a discussion, a personal response or an exposition. Our implicit knowledge of what to expect from text types in response to certain prompts, such as 'discuss', 'critically evaluate', 'compare and contrast', informs the judgements that we make about the success of students' texts as a whole. The way we can generalise text types enables us as teachers to isolate certain traits and make them explicit to students, but we need to bear in mind that text types vary in response to the function that a text performs, which is not always reflected in the descriptive term applied to it.

Consider the types of writing that you ask your students to do. Would you classify them as essays, reports, reviews? Do you think your students are clear on what they are required to do in each of these text types?

Probably the most commonly labelled text type is the essay. Most students will have been taught a basic essay outline – introduction, body and conclusion – at school. This linear structure represents a particular preference of Anglo-American academic writing (Reid, 1984) that students from other cultures may need to be made aware of. The alternative title of 'argument essay' highlights one of the reasons for the pre-eminence of this text type in academic writing. It has evolved as a vehicle for synthesis, opinion, and theory, all of which may imply argument of different sorts and which help to account for the disparate nature of what is known as an essay. In Figure 2.1, we present two text types, an argument essay (in this case in the form of an *exposition*, that is, with arguments presented both for and against) and a project report, with their functional stages labelled on the left and a more explicit description on the right. If your students write texts using similar formats you may want to adapt these outlines to make clear for them what the

Figure 2.1 Two typical text types and their functional organisation

The argument essay outline

Functional stages	*Description*
(Introduction) Overall position/ argument	Here you usually indicate how you will approach the topic, and provide a statement of the main argument (thesis statement/point of view).
(Body) Sub-arguments and supporting evidence	Here you put forward sub-arguments with each one linking (explicitly or implicitly) to your overall position. Evidence to support main and sub-arguments is presented and evaluated. Further arguments and evidence may then be presented and evaluated. Counter-evidence may be presented and evaluated, usually negatively. This process continues until the case for your main argument is strong.
(Conclusion) Reinforcement of overall position/ argument	Here you provide an overall summary of the arguments and evidence together with a final evaluation. This reinforces the position you took in the introduction.
References	List the works you have mentioned in the text.

Figure 2.1 continued

The investigative project report outline[1]

Functional stages	Description
Aims	This stage is a full account of what you were trying to find out and why it was important. If a project proposal was written, then any subsequent changes should be noted and briefly explained.
Literature review	Here you discuss the ideas which are relevant to your project. This should show that you understand the background issues and theories relating to the project.
Methodology	This should be a description of the methods used and will include any alterations that became necessary during the conduct of the investigation. Your choice of method should be drawn from or build upon the literature review.
An account of your conduct of the investigation	Here you should describe the context in which the work was carried out and give a concise account of what was done. Explain how you addressed any critical issues. It may be written as a first-person narrative or more formally.
Findings	In this stage give the results of the investigation. How do these relate to issues in the literature? Present examples from the evidence collected to illustrate the points being made.
Evaluation	Here you need to consider the outcome of the project in relation to the initial aims and questions. Are there ways in which it could be changed and improved if carried out again? What kinds of further investigation could be made to follow up the results or extend the work started?
References	A list of all sources of material quoted or drawn upon in the project.
Appendices	Additional data or analysis that supports your aims and findings.

expectations of these text types are in your disciplinary area. You will find outlines of other text types in Chapter 3.

These broad outlines offer a first step in making writing expectations explicit. The conventions of particular text types and disciplines may be best demonstrated using example texts. Whole texts or sections of texts that exemplify good practice can be culled from the work of previous students and even made available on-line, as some university departments are doing (see Chapter 6).

Signposting text structure

While the writer of a text may have an overview of its basic text type structure, it is still necessary to alert the reader to its elements. Student writers often need to learn how to use aspects of *metadiscourse*, that is, language that refers to things happening in the text itself (Brandt, 1990) to 'signpost' their movements through the structure of their writing. At the later stages of writing students can add signposts such as transitional words or phrases that help guide the reader from one section to another; sentences that recap the main idea of the preceding section, or words that signal agreement, extension, qualification, or objections to previously stated ideas. You may find it useful to discuss or provide students with the list in Figure 2.2 on the different kinds of meaning relations signalled by different conjunctions. You could ask students to identify several conjunctions they have used in a recent piece of writing and to check, using Figure 2.2, whether they think they have chosen the most appropriate one. You might also encourage students to add to the list.

Rhetorical purpose

In Chapter 1 we discussed rhetorical purpose in terms of the overt communicative purpose of a text. Text types such as laboratory reports have

Figure 2.2 Signposting conjunctions

Conjunctions to express different kinds of meaning relations

Temporal: when, while, after, before, then
Causative: because, if, although, so that, therefore
Adversative: however, alternatively, although, nevertheless, while
Additive: and, or, similarly, incidentally

(Love, 1999: 202)

as their overt purpose to report on experiments, while case studies text types report and make recommendations. However, there are also implicit purposes which may not be clear to students and to illustrate what we mean we look here at the use of the term 'argument'. In some instances lecturers use 'argument' almost synonymously with the organisational structure of the text type – which section should come first, second, etc. It is also used to emphasise the linking of ideas at a 'local' or sentence and paragraph level, as this marker's comment indicates: 'Too many unlinked facts here. I can't see any argument' (Lea and Street, 1998: 166). The notion of argument is also used when lecturers demand that students provide greater referencing to source material both to 'prove' a particular point (e.g. 'Where is your evidence?') and to demonstrate understanding. Argument may also mean a perspective, a position or stance on something. The list in Activity 2.2 includes a variety of conceptions of what is meant by argument.

It may be your conception of argument is different. However you use the term, it is important to explain what you mean to student writers, not least because the model of argument that many student writers bring with them from school is a 'for and against' debating model in which points for and against a particular position are listed, with a brief conclusion outlining the student's perspective. Activity 2.2 is a way of asking students to consider what is implied by argument in academic writing. The activity equates argument with taking a stance or position on what is being written about. It identifies some of the ways in which the concept of arguing in academic writing is presented.

The advantage of using an abstract such as this is that it contains many of the elements students need to identify in a short piece of text. For example, in responding to the question, students should note that Shields gives us his view of a nineteenth-century model in the first sentence then asserts that it is not applicable today in sentences two and three. He offers a new approach in sentence four. He thus argues that his new approach deals better with contemporary realities than an old approach. His argument rests on an acceptance that the old model is flawed and that his new approach overcomes its shortcomings. This is a version of the common technique of reviewing past literature and finding weaknesses or areas for development, then proposing new ideas to deal with them. You could follow up this analysis by asking students to write a similar abstract or assignment which outlines the stance that they are taking.

Activity 2.2 Argument and academic writing

Students are commonly told to:

- take up a position
- adopt a particular perspective
- put forward points for and against a particular position
- explore possible positions
- link theory and evidence
- draw a conclusion
- analyse
- be critical
- develop a central idea
- use evidence to support an argument
- express personal opinions
- use personal interpretation.[2]

1   In groups or pairs ask students to discuss one or two of these expressions in relation to a recent or forthcoming piece of writing. Do they see their own writing as putting forward an argument or stating facts? How can they evaluate the status of the 'facts' they are writing about?

2   With more advanced students, use an abstract such as that below, or an actual assignment from your discipline to identify the argument being put forward and the textual strategies used.

A division of social processes into different, mutually exclusive 'value spheres' such as 'cultural' or 'economic' derives from a nineteenth-century, European model of civil society. This model cannot respond to current political demands for cultural recognition and redistributive justice which characterise multi-cultural societies. It does not acknowledge the economic importance of knowledge work. Spatially located analyses, such as in urban and regional research, offer an ideal opportunity to marry analytical approaches to capture the convergences of cultural and economic processes in given localities. Attempts within political economy to integrate culture as a force of governance have tended to oversimplify the cultural aspects of economic activity as, for example, discourse. A 'cultural-economic' approach emphasising place and context is proposed.

(Shields, 1999: 303)

This activity highlights the often covert function of academic texts; that is, to persuade readers to your point of view through a well-constructed argument which lays out logical reasoning and evidence. It

is often not obvious that a research report in science is a text designed to convince the reader that the experimental method and results are valid, in the same way that an essay in literature may be designed to persuade the reader to a new view of a fictional character's motivation.

Much of the persuasive purpose of academic argument is accomplished through synthesising past research and presenting evidence to back up claims or points of view. However, students may not understand this particularly if in school they used textbooks or notes prepared by teachers. Understanding that academic writers often summarise and synthesise the work of others will help students overcome the idea that citing sources is tantamount to admitting that the work is not their own. Students may then appreciate the dual importance of referencing their sources: a) to give credit where it is due to the work of others; and b) to enable readers themselves to find these sources.

What counts as suitable evidence to support an argument is governed by the *epistemic conventions* of a discipline. Epistemic conventions refer to the means of establishing 'truth' as based on accepted forms of evidence. The nature of the evidence may be qualitative, quantitative or both. It can include empirical research done by the student or drawn from readings, statistical data, examples or illustrations. Again, students should be aware of the existence of cultural preferences for sources of evidence. For example, Western academic writing does not usually accept religious scriptures or personal anecdotes as compelling evidence. You can help students support their arguments by discussing the types of evidence valued in their particular field and how to present it. They also need to understand how to evaluate their sources of evidence. In the field of history, for instance, if students are using primary sources (that is, documents from the historical period), they need to consider the reliability of such documents, as, for example, with the personal nature of any observations. In the sciences, it is particularly significant to know how up-to-date sources are. Thus, to stress the importance of new research, one biology lecturer insists that students include references to at least three recent journal articles in their essays.

This section has introduced the problematic nature of specifying rhetorical purpose, particularly with reference to the lack of explicitness over terms such as argument. As argument is such a central concept in academic writing, we will return to it throughout the book. We next move to consider how to help students understand the characteristics of academic register.

Register

Register, as mentioned in Chapter 1, includes a range of linguistic aspects that are related to the contexts in which authors write. Among others, these include formality, sentence structure, specialist terminology, and the personal voice. By *formality* we mean the use of technical, elevated or abstract vocabulary, complex sentence structures and the avoidance of the personal voice (*I, you*). If we think of formality as a cline from the most formal (e.g. the language of legal documents) to the most informal (e.g. electronic mail between friends), most academic writing falls nearer to the legal documents than the friendly email.

Register is perhaps most easily explained to students by discussing some of the differences between informal speech and formal writing, for example, a conversation between friends compared with a job application letter. In spoken language the grammar or the ways in which ideas are linked together is complex or intricate. In writing, in contrast, many ideas get packed into fewer words, primarily through a greater variety of *lexical items*, or vocabulary. It may be useful to explicitly compare spoken with written language as part of your teaching or in making comments as feedback on students' writing. You could use Activity 2.3 with students to raise the issue of academic register.

In answering question 4 you could discuss typical features of the academic register such as:

- *High lexical density*: Large number of vocabulary items other than verbs per clause (e.g. 'A significant commitment of time must be made in the production of a lengthy work').
- *Highly nominal style*: Greater use of nouns than verbs (underlined below) to construct meanings and make them compact (e.g. 'The production of a manuscript necessarily <u>involves</u> issues of time management', rather than 'To <u>produce</u> a manuscript you <u>need to</u> <u>consider</u> how to <u>manage</u> time efficiently').
- *Impersonal constructions*: Subjects or agents of clauses often backgrounded (e.g. 'It is often difficult to incorporate an additional workload into an already heavy agenda', rather than 'You may find it difficult to …').
- *Hedging and emphasising*: Verbs and phrases used to modify statements made (e.g. *may, might, must, need to, it seems that, possibly, probably*).

Activity 2.3 Formality in writing

The following two extracts both introduce the problem of how to plan a schedule when working on a manuscript. There are, however, major variations in register between them. Your task is to analyse the selections by answering the following questions.

1   Who is a likely audience for each selection?
2   Why would one selection be preferable over another?
3   What argument would the author give for choosing one over another?
4   What aspects of language are involved in achieving the different registers?

A. Looking ahead and planning your schedule

So, you have a manuscript in your life? As demanding as a jealous lover and as burdensome as unpaid debts, the weight of this new presence can be difficult to cope with when you may already be juggling family, a job, studies, friends, and perhaps a hobby or exercise programme. A little planning can make the load easier to bear …

B. Time management and manuscript production

The production of a manuscript necessarily involves issues of time management. A significant commitment of time must be made in the production of a lengthy work therefore several factors should be considered from the onset. It is often difficult to incorporate an additional workload into an already heavy agenda, and so, time management planning is essential to successful completion of the project …

(Zuengler, 1999)

How far these features of register are characteristic of the writing you expect from students will depend partly on your discipline specialism; register is by definition dependent on the context in which writing takes place. Hyland (2000), for example, noted at one extreme an average of 0.7 occurrences of personal pronouns per 1,000 words in textbooks in biology, in contrast to 5.7 occurrences per 1,000 words in philosophy. For much of the twentieth century, particularly in the sciences, the notion of objectivity meant that there was no place for a personal voice. This tradition continued into advice for student writers, particularly in scientific fields, until quite recently:

Scientific writing is not of a personal or conversational nature and for this reason the third person is commonly used. As a general rule,

personal pronouns such as *I, we, you, me, my, our* and *us* should not appear except in quotations.

(Anderson and Poole, 1994: 6)

Activity 2.4 The use of personal voice in academic writing

1   Read students the quotation from Anderson and Poole above and ask them to consider whether they think this advice holds true for their disciplinary area.

2   Provide examples from your own discipline and ask students to note references to the writer. In some disciplines and in some types of writing, there is often a shift back and forth between a depersonalised style (*It is argued that … Readings were taken at five-minute intervals …*) and greater writer visibility (*I have argued that … I consider that future work in this area …*).

3   Using the same disciplinary texts as in 2, ask students to look specifically at ways that writing is depersonalised, for example, with the use of passive voice (*The participants were given questionnaires …*), the use of *one* or *it* as subject (*One might question whether …*), the placing of processes instead of active participants at the beginning of the sentence (*Observation of the rats over a three month period allowed …*). Discuss what happens in the text with such depersonalisation in terms of, for example, how the passive can obscure who is taking responsibility for the actions described in the text, and what kind of emphasis the use of these techniques gives to aspects of the text. Ask students to consider the effects of using such strategies in their own writing.

In the interests of making science writing clearer and more accessible, references to *I* and *we* are increasing, though how acceptable they are to you as the reader and marker of your students' work needs to be made explicit. Activity 2.4 provides ways which can be used separately or together to explore with your students the conventions within your discipline that relate to using a personal voice.

Linguistic accuracy

Complaints about students' spelling and grammar often figure in press reports, with headlines such as 'It's official: grammar's gone downhill, and 'Oxford undergraduates can't spell' (*The Times Higher Education Supplement*, 13 February 1998, quoted in Crème and Lea, 1999). Whether or not such reports are justified, errors in spelling and grammar certainly

Figure 2.3 Patterns of spelling error

Substitution e.g. s for c, y for i (*absense, arbitraryness*)
Omission e.g. single consonant for double, omission of vowel, consonant or syllable (*accomodate, unhinderd, condem, expement*)
Reversals, delays, anticipation e.g. reversal of vowels or consonants; delays or anticipation of consonants (*recieve, perscriptive, regconise*)
Homophones i.e. using words that sound the same but are spelt differently (your/you're, their/they're/there, hear/here, illicit/elicit, principle/principal; practice/practise, two/to/too)
Other e.g. likely typographical error or slip, archaism

(Based on Wray, 1996: 99–100)

generate strong feelings, with lecturers often becoming frustrated at what they feel are 'basic' errors. If spelling and grammar are areas in students' writing that you want to respond to, it is important to do so in ways which will help students to improve. For instance, if you notice that certain words are commonly misspelt by your students, you could compile a list of the relevant correct spellings and distribute it before students do their written work.

You may find the classification of spelling errors in students' essays in Figure 2.3 useful when identifying and making comments on students' spelling. Students could be introduced to the main category headings in the table and encouraged to record their patterns of errors with your help.

Spelling and grammar errors combine in the case of the apostrophe in English. Much confusion is caused because the usage of 's in everyday contexts (such as shop signs) is changing. Students may not be familiar with the rules governing the use of specific elements, for example where the 's/s/s' should be used. It would be useful to provide students with patterns of standard usage, as in Figure 2.4.

If you are concerned about spelling in students' writing, consider directing them to specific resources such as spelling dictionaries and other reference works such as *Collins Cobuild Guide 6: Homophones* and Payne (1995) on *Spelling*. Most importantly, if spelling is part of your assessment criteria, you need to make sure that students know this.

So far we have concentrated mainly on spelling accuracy, but errors of grammar are also something that you may want to help students with. In the same way that we advocated drawing students' attention to

Figure 2.4 The apostrophe

The apostrophe 's': when to put 's and when not to The basic rules of use are as follows:

1   Put an apostrophe before the 's' to indicate singular possession (except with 'its') and after the 's' to indicate plural possession, for example: *The student's* (one student) *essay was very good*; *The students'* (more than one student) *essays were very good*.
2   There is no apostrophe in a plural, for example: *Philosophers have studied* … ; *Different conclusions have been reached*… .
3   Put an apostrophe before the 's' in abbreviations of the verb forms is/has, for example: *It's (it is) a well established fact that* …; *She's (she has) had many books published on this area*… . The ' indicates that something has been removed.

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common errors and correct spelling patterns, you could use Figure 2.5 to alert students to the problems you as a marker often observe.

Students whose first language is not English often have significant difficulties with some aspects of English grammar that are distinct from the problems that native English speakers have. These include: choice of article, *a*, *an* or *the*; word order; prepositions, *on*, *at*, *in*, etc. Often universities provide English language support for them and you may be able to arrange 'team teaching' if you have large numbers of international students. Team teaching is when language specialists, for example, record lectures and then work with the subject specialist to design materials to support students in their learning of both the language and the content. It is beyond the scope of this book to examine the writing problems of international students in detail. However, in addition to seeking help within your institution there are many texts at various levels useful to students.[3]

In dealing with text types, rhetorical purpose, register and grammatical accuracy we have focused on features of the final written text. We turn now to ways of helping students with the process of producing that writing.

TEACHING WRITING: FOCUS ON PROCESS

In the history of writing instruction, as Chapter 1 discussed, researchers and teachers have oscillated between focusing on the written product

Figure 2.5 Some common grammatical errors in student writing

1   Not putting a main verb in each sentence
    Example: Considering all positions.
    Alternative: All positions are being considered. *Or*: Having considered all positions, the most convincing is that advanced by Thomas (1983).

2   Lack of pronoun agreement in sentences
    Example: The teacher has a responsibility towards their students.
    Alternative: The teacher has a responsibility towards her/his students.

3   Unclear use of indefinite reference words – pronouns such as *it*, *they*, *that*, *those*
    Example: This is an important area to consider. (Unclear what 'this' refers to.)

4   Inconsistent use of tenses/modes
    Example: Pupils must have confidence in their ability before they could actually succeed in examinations.
    Alternative: Pupils must have confidence in their ability before they can actually succeed in examinations.

5   Influence of speech on writing
    Example: He could of examined the situation more carefully.
    Alternative: He could have examined the situation more carefully.

(Based on Lillis, 1996: 97)

that students are meant to produce, and focusing on the creative processes of writing, the role of the individual in the act of writing, and the social aspects of writing, including students' identities, disciplinary conventions, and the larger social context (Galbraith and Rijlaarsdam, 1999). Our view is that all these aspects need to be taken into account in teaching writing. In this section we look at the processes involved in academic writing, including process approaches, collaborative writing, and using peer review (see Elbow, 1981).

Whether students write in response to a set assignment or are asked to develop their own topics, many students are daunted by the act of writing itself. Process approaches focus primarily on what writers do as they write rather than on textual features, but depending on the writer's immediate task, these approaches may also consider text features. As Figure 2.6 shows, the process approach includes different stages, which can be combined with other aspects of teaching writing, for example,
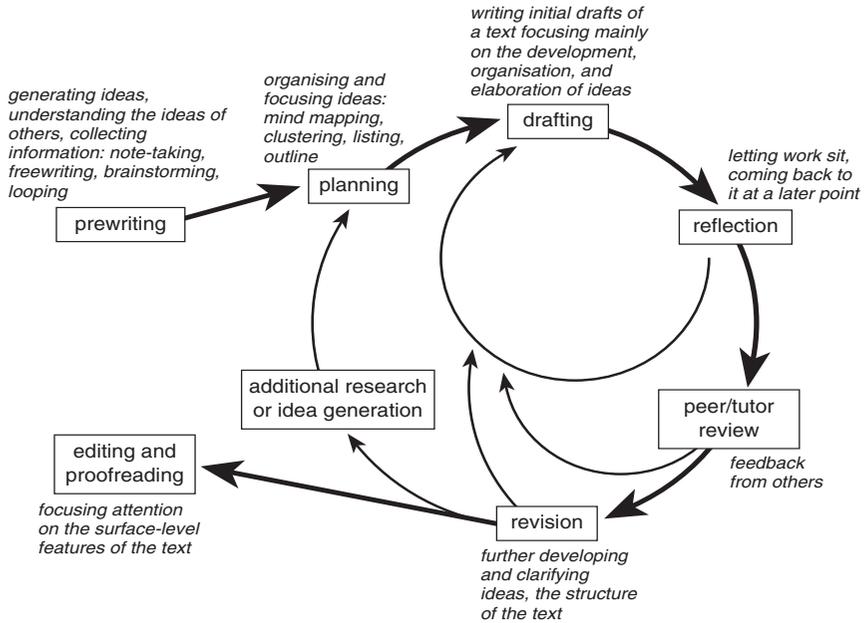
*writing initial drafts of
a text focusing mainly
on the development,
organisation, and
elaboration of ideas*

*generating ideas,
understanding the ideas of
others, collecting
information: note-taking,
freewriting, brainstorming,
looping*

*organising and
focusing ideas:
mind mapping,
clustering, listing,
outline*

drafting

planning

prewriting

*letting work sit,
coming back to
it at a later point*

reflection

additional research
or idea generation

editing and
proofreading

peer/tutor
review

*feedback
from others*

*focusing attention
on the surface-level
features of the text*

revision

*further developing
and clarifying
ideas, the structure
of the text*

Figure 2.6 The writing process approach

the study of textual features. Not all writers move through the stages included in process approaches; some stages may be helpful and others superfluous to any given writing task. However, many students carry the notion that the writings of published authors have sprung fully formed from their heads.

Process approaches are premised on the notion that writing is an iterative process, as shown in Figure 2.6, involving the techniques described below (Murray, 1987). Stages of the writing process can happen in various orders at different points. Lecturers can help clarify students' misconceptions about writing by explicitly teaching the stages of the writing process as described in Figure 2.6 (Curry, 1996).

Prewriting techniques

Prewriting strategies such as brainstorming and freewriting (explained below) can help writers find ideas, collect information, activate tacit knowledge, and organise their thoughts. In describing these strategies here we do not mean to downplay the important work of discovery that often occurs while drafting. However, although experienced writers may

identify, invent, and refine their ideas while they are writing, students often find it helpful to think about ideas before trying to create a formal text. Some of these strategies can be used well by the writer alone; others work better in pairs or in small groups.

In *brainstorming* students spark ideas off each other after a discussion or reading. Ideally, students throw ideas into a non-judgemental forum, with the goal of generating multiple ideas on a topic without immediately evaluating their suitability for development. The lecturer or a student lists the ideas generated by the group on the blackboard to create a record. An individual writer can also brainstorm about a topic, although input from others will be missing. Figure 2.7 illustrates a brainstorm for a social sciences essay.

In *freewriting* an author writes literally without ceasing within a set time limit of, for example, ten minutes, starting with a particular topic related to the subject under study (for instance, immigration in Figure 2.7). Freewriting is messy, unplanned, and unpredictable but students find it useful for activating often-tacit knowledge on a topic, identifying

Figure 2.7 Brainstorm on 'issues related to immigration'

Brainstorm: issues related to immigration

Add to labour force
Skills shortages in industrialised countries, e.g. teachers
Low-level jobs – agriculture, cleaning, service work, etc.
High-skill work – information technology, other occupations
Declining populations of industrialised countries
Need to support ageing populations
Immigrants pay taxes on earnings and investments
Entrepreneurs bringing energy, new skills
Higher fertility rate among many groups of immigrants
Benefits of multiculturalism: arts, religion, food
Greater demands on educational system
Bring new ideas to workplace; new views on old problems
Bi/multilingual education
Cultural issues in education, e.g. Muslim girls wearing headscarves
Discrimination/racism against immigrants
Don't share local prejudices
Fears of native population about job loss
Issues of learning language, new culture
Hard working, need to 'make it'

paths for exploration, and for quieting the 'editor' that scrutinises every word we write. Lecturers can even take some lecture time for a brief session of freewriting on a topic related to course material as a way to warm students up to writing and thinking. Usually lecturers do not evaluate or even collect freewriting. With practice (and enforced discipline from the lecturer), students learn that freewriting can be a low-pressure strategy for writing without worrying about the quality of the output. Freewriting reinforces the principle that it is possible to separate the idea-generating phases of writing from more critical editorial stages.

Journal writing

Alongside brainstorming and freewriting the keeping of journals can also constitute another form of prewriting. Student journals can serve multiple functions and take various forms, from bound notebooks to electronic mail entries. Journals provide an opportunity for an informal, personal type of writing in which students can make observations, reflect on questions set by the lecturer, respond to course materials, and ask questions without the constraints of creating a formal text. In this case journals can be used as vehicles for student learning and include both their preliminary responses to set assignments or questions as well as students' own explorations. Students can draw on the ideas they develop in journal entries as they craft their more formal, assessed texts. Many students, including non-native English speakers, benefit from the frequent practice that writing regular journal entries can provide.

   Although it is time consuming, when lecturers can review and respond to students' journals it may be a rare opportunity to engage in one-to-one dialogue. Some lecturers collect and respond to students' journals once or twice a term; others with smaller groups may review journals on a weekly basis. Ideally lecturers' responses will attend to the content of the journals and not to errors in linguistic accuracy. Such responses can stimulate students' thinking and help them focus their ideas for writing. Lecturers can promote dialogue by requiring students to respond in subsequent journal entries to the comments and questions that lecturers make. Chapter 4 discusses the assessment of journals and reflective writing that asks students to consider their learning process as a formal part of a course, often in applied areas such as health and medicine. In these cases, the rhetorical purpose of journal writing

expands to include reflection for assessment purposes as well as personal academic development.

From generative techniques such as brainstorming, freewriting and journals, the next stage is for the writer to begin to organise and order ideas. The terms *mind mapping, clustering,* and *branching* describe graphic organising techniques. Many writers find it helpful to see a visual representation of ideas at the early stages of organising. As an example, Figure 2.8 takes the brainstorm on immigration from Figure 2.7 and begins to organise the ideas by mapping them out. Students can review the ideas resulting from prewriting for those that fit together, those that may be extraneous to the task, and those that need further investigation or development.

Some writers move from graphic representations to use more formal organisational techniques such as writing a *list* or an *essay plan* (outline). These plans or outlines may be drawn up to match the expectations set by certain text types, such as an argument essay in social science, for example. For inexperienced writers such plans can help identify gaps in the development of ideas, arguments, and sources of evidence. Plans can be written according to the pattern that combines Arabic numerals, upper case letters, and Roman numerals, lower case letters (e.g. 1, A, ii, a) or by using the 'scientific' pattern of Arabic numerals and full stops (e.g. 1.1, 1.2). Outlines can be especially helpful in organising one's thoughts for an extended piece of writing; when drafting (see below) begins, some writers prefer to start in the middle of a plan rather than with the introduction to the text. Figure 2.9 develops an outline for a social sciences expositional essay from the cluster diagram in Figure 2.8. Note the shift from clustering ideas to building an argument.[4]

Drafting

As noted, a fundamental principle of process approaches is that writing is an iterative process. Thus, where possible, writing assignments or tasks should build from opportunities for students to revise a piece of work in response to feedback from peer reviewers (see below) or the lecturer (see Chapter 5).

Indeed, one-off, assessed tasks tend to limit possibilities for growth in the writer's ideas and modes of expression. Students are more likely to attend to feedback from lecturers about their writing if they will have an

Demographics

declining populations of industrialised countries → need to support ageing populations

immigrants add to labour force

higher fertility rate among many groups

new skills

new ideas to workplace

entrepreneurs– bring energy, etc.

new views on old problems

pay taxes on earnings & investments

Economics

fears of native population about job losses

skills shortages, e.g. teachers, nurses

high-skill work: IT, other occupations

low-level jobs: agriculture, cleaning, service work etc.

IMMIGRATION ISSUES

hard working, need to 'make it'

discrimination/racism against immigration

Culture

don't share local prejudices

benefits of multi culturalism: arts, religion, food...

cultural issues in education e.g. Muslim girls and headscarves

issues of learning language, new culture

Education

bi/multilingual education
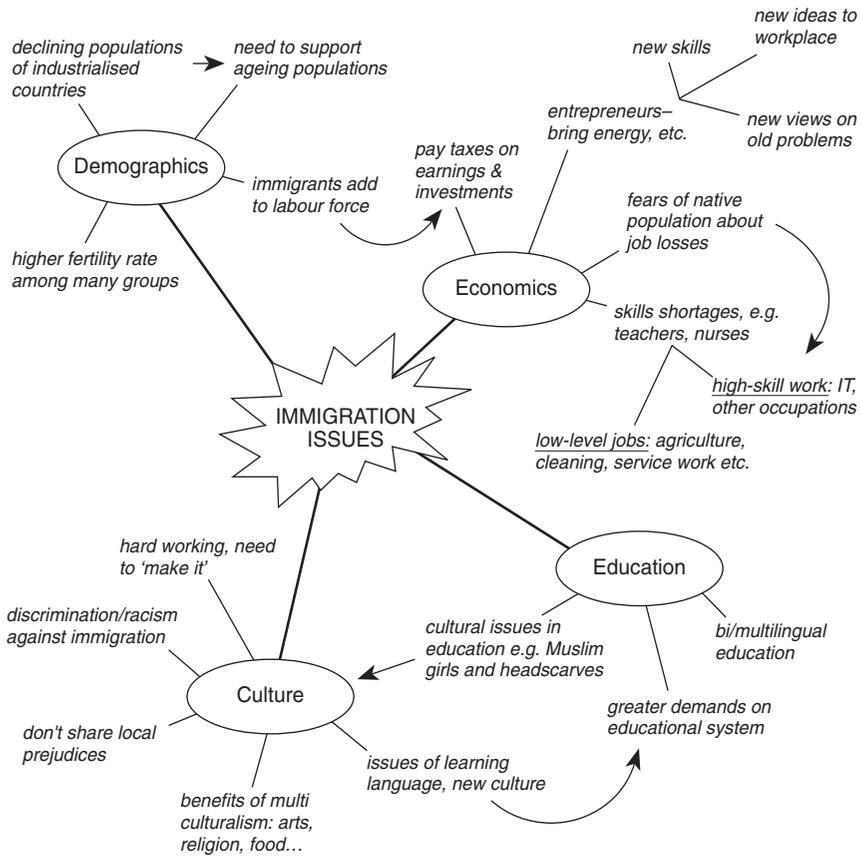
greater demands on educational system

Figure 2.8 Cluster diagram on issues of immigration

opportunity to re-work it. Furthermore, students who write and re-draft their work have less opportunity to present plagiarised work as their own, since the lecturer may have seen earlier versions of it (see Chapter 4 for more on plagiarism). Of course students who must write tests in an examination have only one opportunity to write. But when writing essays, reports, or other texts outside an exam, students often benefit from the opportunity to revisit and resubmit pieces of work.

In an initial draft, the writer's focus should be on developing meaning, using ideas gathered in prewriting strategies. Topic development may involve narrowing down a broad focus, or removing or adding information where appropriate. At this stage writers, including non-native speakers of English, should try to avoid being overly concerned with linguistic accuracy unless it interferes with making meaning. Once students have completed a first or second draft on their own, the next

Figure 2.9 Outline on the economic benefits of immigration

Outline: 'The Benefits of Immigration to Industrialised Countries'
Position/argument: immigrants provide net economic and cultural benefits to
industrialised countries.

I   Background: industrialised countries
   A.   Demographic changes
      1.   ageing population
         (a)   (evidence)
         (b)   (evidence)
      2.   zero or negative population growth
         (a)   (evidence)
   B.   Changes in labour force
      1.   reduced work force, especially in low-level service and
         agricultural jobs
      2.   ageing work force may lack contemporary skills
      3.   new ideas needed for old problems

II   Benefits of immigration
   A.   Demographics
      1.   higher birth rate among many immigrant groups
      2.   younger average age of immigrants
   B.   Labour features
      1.   hard workers willing to do many jobs native-born population
         eschews (e.g. agricultural and service work)
      2.   entrepreneurs with particular skills, knowledge and drive
      3.   pay more in taxes than receive in social services

III   Cultural issues
   A.   Benefits of multiculturalism
      1.   bring diversity in an increasingly global world
      2.   retain connections with people in other countries
   B.   Difficulties related to immigration
      1.   immigrants may face discrimination and racism
      2.   immigrants face issues of adaptation/acculturation (e.g.
         Muslim schoolgirls who want to wear headscarves)
      3.   immigrants may need to learn a new language
      4.   require greater government provision of bi/multilingual
         education

IV   Conclusion
   A.   Challenges for both immigrants and the industrialised countries
      1.   challenges for immigrants: language, work, education, culture,
         etc.
      2.   challenges for countries: education, discrimination, etc.
   B.   Advantages of immigration outweigh the disadvantages
      1.   some disadvantages
      2.   economic advantages
      3.   cultural advantages

stage calls for review by peers or the lecturer.[5] Structured opportunities for revision help develop students as writers, as ideally they internalise the sorts of responses that readers make to their work.

Peer review

A key aspect of writing process approaches is the importance of seeking and responding to the feedback of others while a text is under development. Feedback on students' drafts may take the form of oral or written comments by peers or the lecturer designed to guide students in their revisions (Chapter 5 focuses on providing such feedback). Students may feel that lecturers' feedback is most important because of lecturers' expert knowledge of the topic. They also may not feel competent to provide useful advice to each other. However, relying entirely on lecturer feedback can bring certain disadvantages for students' intellectual development. Because of lecturers' power to mark assignments, students may feel compelled to incorporate lecturers' suggestions (or directives) in subsequent revisions even if they disagree or do not understand them. With training and practice, students can fruitfully engage in peer review, which can help them develop their critical faculties and understand how other readers respond to their writing. For advanced or postgraduate students, engaging in peer review can function as a rehearsal for the peer review that occurs in professional academic settings. In order for peer review to be successful, lecturers need to explain and ideally model it, whether students engage in peer review during lecture time or on their own (Berg, 2000).

Peer review can occur within pairs or small groups that may be set up to do one assignment or to work together over an extended period. These groups or pairs could also work together throughout the prewriting and organising stages of writing to help each other develop plans for writing. In any case, students should provide each other with copies of the text for peers to review in advance (such drafts may be circulated electronically via electronic mail or conferencing, as Chapter 6 notes). If peer review occurs during lectures, a fair amount of time should be allotted for the process, as it is time-consuming. One option is to go through the process once during a lecture and subsequently for students to meet informally for peer review sessions. The guidelines in Activity 2.5 can support students in effective peer review.

Activity 2.5 Student guidelines for peer review

1   Before the meeting: in a covering note or email to members of the review group, the author should explain the purpose of the text and how it relates to the assignment (e.g. if a choice has been possible among various questions). If the lecturer has distributed assignment criteria reviewers should use these as well in responding to the draft. Next the author should focus the peer reviewers on areas of the text that have been difficult to write. While reading the text, peer reviewers should make written comments on a copy of it that they will later give to the author.

2   In the peer group meeting, the author listens and takes notes while the reviewers respond to the content, structure, argument, use of evidence, etc. Reviewers should not pay much attention to errors of linguistic accuracy unless they interfere with understanding the meaning of the text.

3   After peer reviewers respond, the author may ask clarifying questions or try to reconcile conflicting comments or suggestions with the help of the group. Finally, the author should try to summarise a strategy for responding to the reviewers' comments in subsequent revisions.

Chapter 4 discusses some assessment issues related to group work, including how to assess individual contributions to a collective endeavour. However, one way to assess whether the process (apart from the final product) of peer review is working well is by students submitting their various drafts of a text along with the written comments of the peer reviewers. Students may not have revised their texts in accordance with the suggestions of peer reviewers, but there should be some evidence that they have considered reasonable suggestions.

Reflection

In the iterative cycle of process approaches delineated in Figure 2.6, *reflection* means letting a piece of writing sit before coming back to it with a fresh pair of eyes, and perhaps with feedback from peers or the lecturer. Even without input from others, reflection time can allow writers to see gaps in their text structure, use of evidence, etc., and to note infelicitous phrasings.

Editing and proofreading

Finally, an author must let go of a text and make it public. The final stages of writing consist of editing, proofreading, and polishing a text.

Here students should attend to the mechanics of writing, including formatting, references and footnotes, and issues of linguistic accuracy. Again students can work in pairs to review each other's work. Students may be encouraged to use computer spelling check programmes but not to limit their review of errors to those noted by the computer. All students may benefit from the information and examples of usage given in dictionaries and reference books written for non-native English speakers (e.g. *Collins Cobuild English Dictionary, Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English, Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary*). Chapter 4 provides a student checklist for self-assessment that you may wish to modify for your context and students, and supply as part of the drafting and editing/proofreading stages.

Collaborative writing

Our discussion above of the benefits of peer review to student writing assumed that each student writer would be responsible for 'authoring' the text, and that any assessment and marking would consider the work to be entirely by one student. Increasingly students are being asked to engage in collaborative writing, especially as part of projects in courses in applied disciplines such as business studies. In such cases, writing process approaches may be adapted to incorporate the contributions of a pair or group of students. In many ways process approaches work best in collaborative settings, that is, prewriting strategies such as brainstorming are highly effective in groups, and feedback on student writing may come as the result of peer review alone. When it comes to drafting texts collaboratively, students may be responsible for drafting different sections of the text and then combining them as versions of the text proceed. Chapter 4 discusses issues related to the assessment of collaborative writing. Chapter 6 notes that collaborative writing may be best achieved using technologies such as electronic mail and conferencing programmes.

In concluding this section we should reiterate that not all stages will be necessary for all students or in all contexts and that some of the stages can occur simultaneously. Students may need help in learning about these stages and practising them, but after such scaffolding, students may internalise them and no longer need you to formally review the stages.

In this section we have focused on ways of helping students with the process of writing in contrast to the text focus of the previous section.

However, we consider that they should not be seen as alternative approaches. You can mesh process with the textual and disciplinary concerns of subject lecturers. You can scaffold students learning to write in your academic disciplines by demonstrating the stages of the writing process that specifically relate to their context; that is, by using the stages to assist towards writing the text types that they will need most frequently. Students can then frame their drafts within the textual conventions of, for example, a case study in a business course, rather than a traditional essay. Students may still go through the initial stages of the writing process (prewriting and planning), but when they arrive at drafting, they would consider the conventions of the appropriate text type. The subsequent stages of the writing process could then continue. You may wish to introduce these notions in relation to a particular assignment you set within a course. Some of the stages will prove useful to students in preparation for traditional assignments including essay examinations; for others, such as re-drafting texts, to be most effective you may wish to reconsider how you set writing assignments.

INTEGRATING THE PROCESS APPROACH WITH TEXT ANALYSIS

In this final section we focus on one approach to integrating text and process in helping students write. In the *Teaching and learning cycle*,[6] lecturer and students work through phases which can be repeated as necessary. In the first phase – *Building the context* – activities to raise students' awareness of a topic and knowledge about it precede writing and can be linked to the prewriting techniques discussed above. The second phase – *Modelling and deconstruction* – is an opportunity for students to examine example target texts and identify specific aspects such as text type and register. *Joint construction* – the third phase – is a form of collaborative writing with the lecturer playing a key role in scaffolding students' writing by guiding the joint construction of a text type (on an overhead transparency or projected computer screen). The fourth phase – *Independent construction* – is where the scaffolding of the earlier phases is withdrawn and students write final texts on their own or within groups, frequently participating in a form of peer review. These stages simultaneously integrate developing awareness of text and process to help students see how particular uses of language contribute to building an effective piece of discipline-specific writing. Once internalised, students can use

strategies learnt through the process approach or the teaching and learning cycle to analyse academic texts, or to review their writing approaches. In this way they are helped to envision the shape and structure of their texts and the linguistic choices they make in their writing and thereby become more accomplished and autonomous writers.

CONCLUSION

This chapter started with some of the issues related to teaching student writing that university lecturers might face, as in the case of Iain, the psychology lecturer. We have presented easily generalised aspects of teaching writing which can be adapted for use by subject specialist lecturers with or without the help of writing support tutors. Attention to features such as text type, rhetorical structure, register, and linguistic accuracy preceded a discussion of ways in which to encourage the writing process. Adapting the ideas to suit your students and the time you have available should ultimately result in students requiring less intervention from you on writing matters. Chapter 3 moves on from this 'general' focus on writing to examine in more detail the conventions and require-ments of writing within particular academic disciplines.

NOTES

1   Based on the Open University publication: *E300 Assignment Book and Project Guide*, 2002b: 15.
2   This list is an adapted and expanded version of Crème and Lea, 1997: 34.
3   For general help with grammar at an advanced level they could consult, for example, Hewings, 1999a or Swan, 1995. More specific work on academic writing is provided by Swales and Feak, 1994 and 2000.
4   For space reasons we have not specified the evidence to support the argument, which would come at the next level down in the outline.
5   With large writing projects it can also be fruitful for lecturers to review students' detailed outlines or essay plans even before they begin to draft their texts, in order to focus on the development of ideas and arguments.
6   Rothery, 1996 gives a detailed explanation in the context of school education; Feez, 2001 discusses the teaching and learning cycle within the context of migrant education in Australia.