

# Writing Skills for Academic Purposes

Thursday 3<sup>rd</sup> April 2014

Katie Mansfield

[ksmansfield@hotmail.com](mailto:ksmansfield@hotmail.com)

# 2<sup>nd</sup> April – Agenda

1. From high school to HE – bridging the gap (focus on academic vocabulary & AWL)
2. The key differences between written & spoken English
3. An introduction to genre analysis
4. Practical application of genre analysis in the classroom
5. Online academic tools for students

# 1. From high school to HE – bridging the gap (i)

- **UK Context:** All international students that enter Higher Education (HE) in the UK must have a specific level of English. Typically students enter university having taken the IELTS, FCE, CAE or CPE exam. Nevertheless, when studying at UK HE institutions, international students, whether studying at undergraduate or postgraduate level, often struggle during their first year with their academic writing.

# 1. From high school to HE – bridging the gap (ii)

**Discuss with a partner.**

- Can you think of any reasons why?
- Is it the same in your country?
- What English exams do students take/need to have in order to get into university in your country?
- Do you feel these exams prepare students for what you teach them? And what is expected of them?
- What do students find most difficult with writing when they enter HE in your country?
- As teachers, how do you support your students with their academic writing?
- Do you feel you offer your students enough support? If no, why not? If yes, how?

# FCE vs HE written tasks

We're going to start by looking at the key differences between the FCE written exam and a typical first year undergraduate HE written assignment.

- **Look at each task and make a note of the tasks most salient features.**

# 1. From high school to HE – bridging the gap (iii)

## **Discuss with a partner.**

- What are the main differences between these tasks?  
Are there any similarities?
- What type of vocabulary is needed in each case?
- How do the written tasks differ in terms of structure?

# Focus on Vocabulary (i)

**Discuss with a partner.**

- Can you think of other vocabulary areas that you commonly teach? Or that your students need to know in order to complete assignments?

# Focus on Vocabulary (ii)

**Discuss with a partner.**

- What problems do you have in teaching academic vocabulary?
- Do you find it difficult to identify which words will be useful for your students?

# Focus on Vocabulary (iii)

Academic vocabulary can be described as either '*technical*' or '*abstract*' in nature.

Technical academic vocabulary normally has a field specific meaning. It often needs to be defined and can be put in a taxonomic relationship with other terms in the same field e.g. *secondary school* – needs defining to distinguish it from other meanings of secondary (not as important), and is in a taxonomic relationship with *primary, higher* etc.

Abstract academic vocabulary can be described as referring to terms to do with meaning and thinking such as *idea, concept, theory*; or to non-specific concepts e.g. *problem*,

Parts of British higher education are pedagogically constrained by the marketisation that has accompanied its expansion

# The value of a university education

The role of **universities** in turning undergraduates into **critical thinkers** is being undermined by **marketisation**, **academics** have warned. **Intellectual development** is still a priority of the **elite universities**, says **the paper** in the **journal Teaching in Higher Education**. However, new **universities'** links to business via **vocational courses** and **industry placements** make them more likely to frame pedagogy purely in business terms, it adds.

Underlined = abstract (academic)

Red = technical (field specific)

# Focus on Vocabulary (iv)

**Discuss with a partner.**

Think about the course of study your students undertake at university.

- Do you think they will have more difficulty with technical or abstract vocabulary?
- Do the resources you use focus more on one kind of academic vocabulary?
- How can you, as their teacher, make the students consciously aware of the technical vocabulary used in their discipline?

## 2. The key differences between written & spoken English (i)

**Before we begin, discuss the following:**

- What do you consider the key differences between written and spoken English?
- Do you make your students aware of the differences? If yes, how?
- Do you think your students have more access to written or spoken English? Does this affect the way they write?

## 2. The key differences between written & spoken English (ii)

**Common classroom issues (due to written vs spoken English differences)**

**The following problems are common in UK HE classrooms:**

1. Students don't use enough academic vocabulary
2. Students write in an informal way (looks more like spoken English)
3. Students write down the main points but not in a logical way
4. Students don't plan before they write, therefore, their writing is not structured and confusing to read
5. Students don't use the correct punctuation
6. There are numerous spelling mistakes in the student's work
7. Their writing is littered with grammar mistakes
8. Students don't reference other author's ideas (not something they are used to doing)

## 2. The key differences between written & spoken English (iii)

### **With a partner**

- Look through each problem and discuss how serious the problem is.
- Do your students have the same issues?
- How do you overcome these issues? Or How could you overcome these issues?
- Do you have any further problems to add?

## 2. Possible solutions (i)

**Introduce students to the Academic Word List (AWL).**

**With a partner, discuss:**

- What is the AWL?
- How could it benefit your students?
- Do you make your students aware of it in your classrooms?
- How could you/do you incorporate it into your materials?

## 2. Possible solutions (ii)

**Factor essay planning into the scheme of work.**

**Two exercises I find work well with my students:**

1. I show students an essay plan template with things they could/should include. I then give students an essay title and ask them to plan the essay using the essay plan template.
2. Alternatively, I show students an essay and ask them to complete the essay plan based on the contents of the essay.

## 2. Possible solutions (iii)

**It is important to highlight the severity of plagiarism and its consequences. This should be done early on in the course.**

- It is important to carry out exercises which focus on quoting and paraphrasing and common mistakes.
- Are there any particular exercises that you find work well?
- Why do students often struggle with paraphrasing?

# Future consideration

- The key is to anticipate the problems and address the possible solutions before they come up. You should always factor reoccurring problems into the scheme of work or your lesson plans.

# 3. An introduction to genre analysis

## Defining Genre

### Discuss with a partner.

- What do we mean by 'genre'?
- How would you define genre?
- What different genres do you teach?
- How do you teach them?

# 3. An introduction to genre analysis

## **A definition of genre:**

According to Swales (1990:58):

“A genre comprises a class of communicative events, the members of which share some set of communicative purposes. These purposes are recognised by the expert members of the parent discourse community and thereby constitute the rationale for the genre. This rationale shapes the schematic structure of the genre and influences and constraints choice of content and style [...] In addition to purpose, exemplars of a genre exhibit various patterns of similarity in terms of structure, style, content and intended audience”

# 3. An introduction to genre analysis

## **Discuss with a partner.**

- What is meant by ‘communicative purpose’?
- What does the ‘communicative purpose’ determine?
- Do you agree with this definition?
- Think about a genre that you teach. What knowledge would you need to teach your students in order for them to become ‘expert members’?

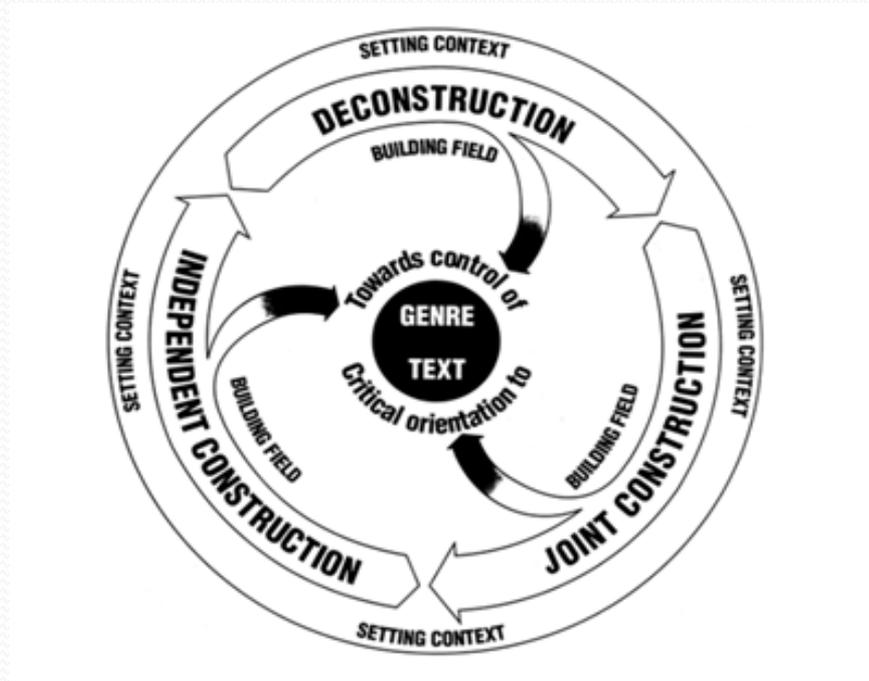
# 3. An introduction to genre analysis

## Genre-based approaches to teaching Academic Writing

- **Focus:** Explore genres students are required to write. Awareness that variations exist in different contexts of writing.
- **Aim:** to provide a contextual framework.
- **Pedagogic approach:** Genre-informed pedagogic framework (Tribble & Wingate forthcoming).
- **Role of teacher:** guide & support the learners (Vygotskian scaffolding).

# 3. An introduction to genre analysis

- **The Teaching-Learning Model**



(Rothery and Stenglin 1994:8 cited in Martin 2000:19)

## 4. Practical application of genre analysis in the classroom (i)

**Discuss the following questions with a partner.**

- What is a corpus?
- Have you ever used one?
- Do you know of any which are used to better understand academic writing?
- Have you heard of AntConc? Do you know what it does?
- Can you think of any ways in which concordance software programmes can help you analyse specific genres?

## 4. Practical application of genre analysis in the classroom (ii)

**Discuss with a partner.**

- How do you think you could use AntConc in the classroom?
- Do you think you could introduce students to it? How could students use it?

# 4. Practical application of genre analysis in the classroom (iii)

## Key information

*The following information has been adapted from 'A guide to using AntConc'.*

A **Concordance** is a list of target words extracted from a given text, or set of texts, often presented in such a way as to indicate **the context in which the word is used**. This format of presenting information is called 'KWIC': Key Word In Context. Concordance software can usually extract and present other types of information too, e.g. identifying the words that most commonly appear near a target word (its 'common collocates').

**AntConc** is a freeware concordance program developed by Prof. Laurence Anthony, Director of the Centre for English Language Education, Waseda University (Japan).

The AntConc programme is available from

<http://www.antlab.sci.waseda.ac.jp/software.html>

# 4. Practical application of genre analysis in the classroom (iv)

**Discuss with a partner.**

- How do you think you could use AntConc in the classroom?
- Do you think you could introduce students to it? How could students use it?

# 4. Practical application of genre analysis in the classroom (iv)

**Discuss with a partner.**

- How do you think you could use AntConc in the classroom?
- Do you think you could introduce students to it? How could students use it?
- **PRACTICAL ASSIGNMENT**

# Online academic tools for students

## General Academic English

The following websites can help students with their grammar, listening, developing academic skills and presentations.

- <http://www.prepareforsuccess.org.uk/> (Introduction to life at university – main differences between school and HE)
- <http://elc.polyu.edu.hk/cill/eap/> (General EAP skills + presentation skills)
- <http://www.uefap.com/> (General EAP skills)
- [http://www.bristol.ac.uk/arts/exercises/grammar/grammar\\_tutorial/page\\_41.htm](http://www.bristol.ac.uk/arts/exercises/grammar/grammar_tutorial/page_41.htm) (Grammar)
- <http://aeo.sllf.qmul.ac.uk/> (General Academic skills)

# Online academic tools for students

- **2. Focus on vocabulary**
- **2.1 Academic Word List (AWL)**
- Numerous exercises which focus on the Academic Word List can be found on the following websites:

<http://www.englishvocabularyexercises.com/AWL/index.htm>

<http://www.uefap.com/vocab/exercise/exercise.htm>

<http://www.nottingham.ac.uk/alzsh3/acvocab/>

# Online academic tools for students

## 2.2 AWL Highlighter

- With this tool, students can upload their written work and see how academic their vocabulary is as the tool highlights all of the words in the text from the AWL.

<http://www.nottingham.ac.uk/alzsh3/acvocab/awlhighlighter.htm>

## 2.3 Academic phrases & expressions

- Often students use the same expressions and phrases in their writing. This site introduces postgraduates and undergraduates to a whole range of phrases used in introductions, methodology sections, etc.

<http://www.phrasebank.manchester.ac.uk/>

# Online academic tools for students

## 2.4 Understanding key words in context

- The following Corpus can be used by teachers and students alike to see how words work in context:

<http://corpus.byu.edu/bnc/>

## 2.5 Word collocations

- If students are struggling with collocations (words that come before or after the target word), they can access the site below:

<http://wordtree.coventry.ac.uk/?BAWE>

# Online academic tools for students

## 3. Common mistakes in written work

### 3.1 Common Errors Detector

- With this programme, you can upload any written text and the program will output the text with the errors highlighted, give comments and explanations to help you solve the problems.

<http://www2.elc.polyu.edu.hk/CILL/errordetector.htm>

## 4. Referencing (Using the Harvard Referencing System)

### 4.1 Online reference guide

- For help writing in-text references of a list of references using the Harvard referencing system, students can go to:

<https://libweb.anglia.ac.uk/referencing/harvard.htm>

### 4.2 Mobile phone (iphone) app:

- *ReferenceME* (Students can scan the barcode of the book they want to include in their list of references and it will write it in the Harvard Referencing Style).

# Online academic tools for students

**Discuss the following questions.**

- What are your student's main weaknesses?
- Which websites do you think your students would benefit most from?
- Do you use others that are not on this list? If yes, which ones?
- How could you incorporate the new websites into your classroom?