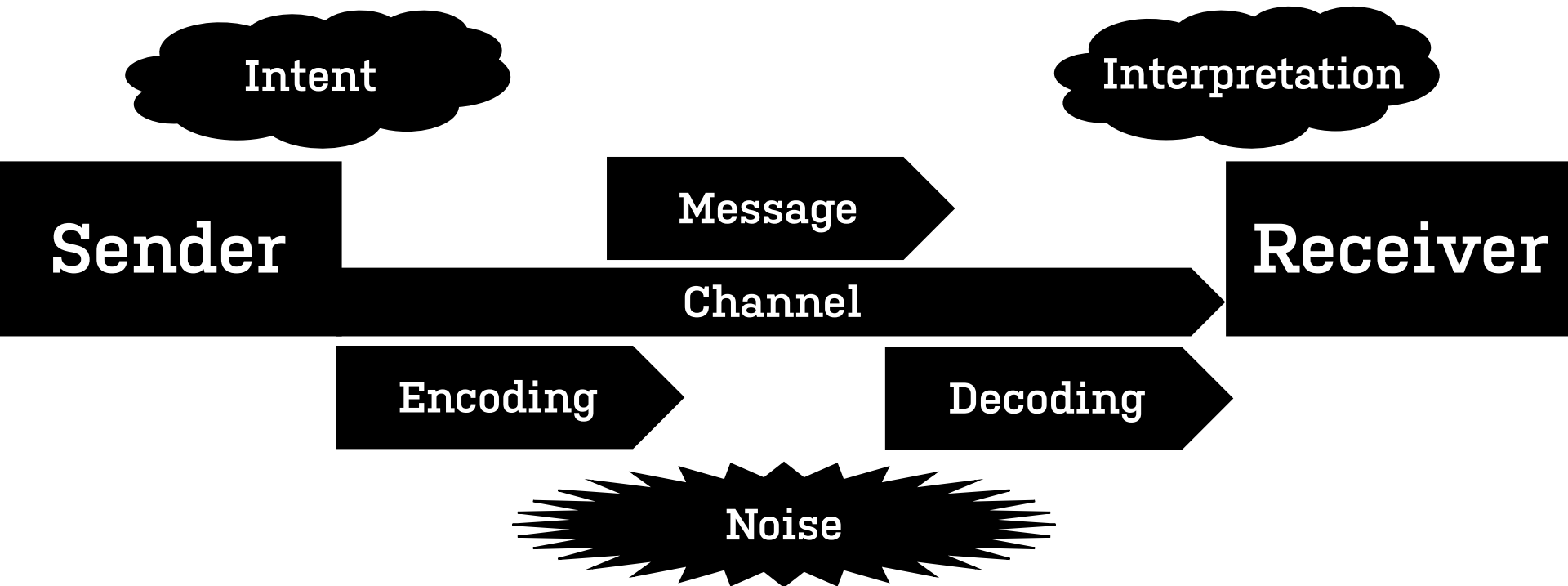# Honor thy reader

Better manuscripts through greater empathy
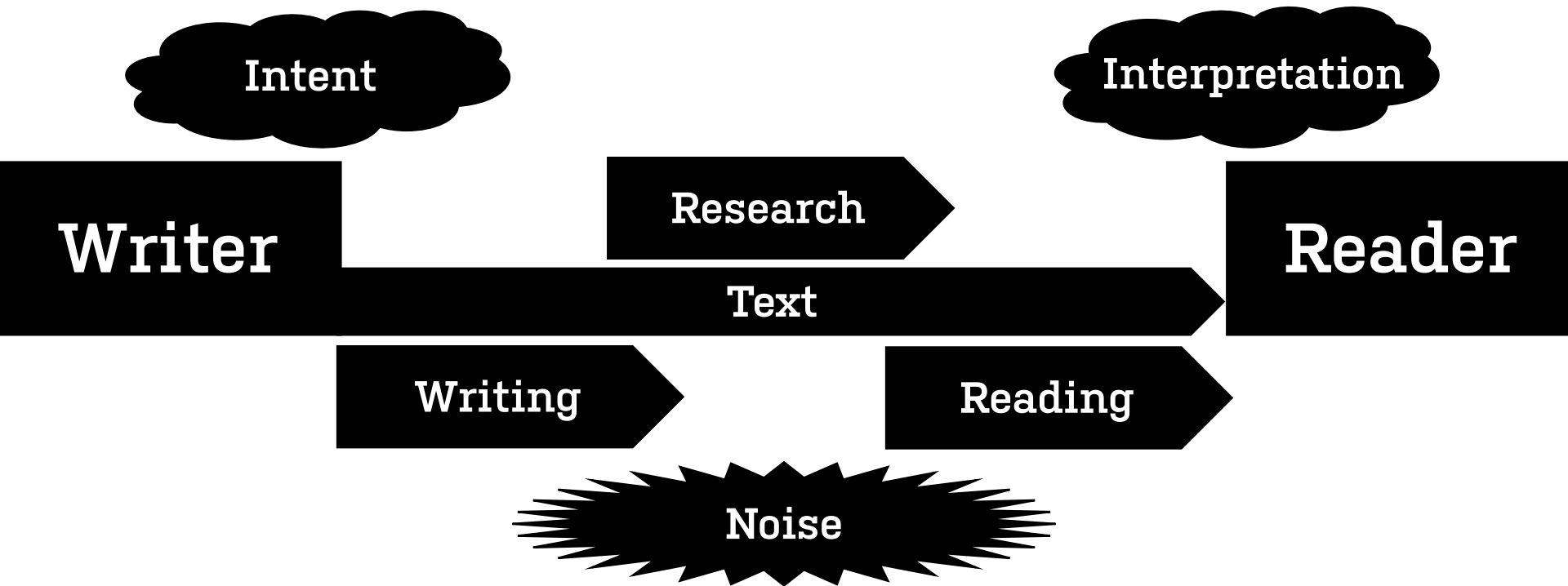
The single biggest problem in communication is the illusion that it has taken place.

G. B. Shaw

Communication

Communication

Mgr. David Konecny / RECETOX

Communication

Intent

Interpretation

Writer

Research

Text

Reader

Writing

Reading

Noise
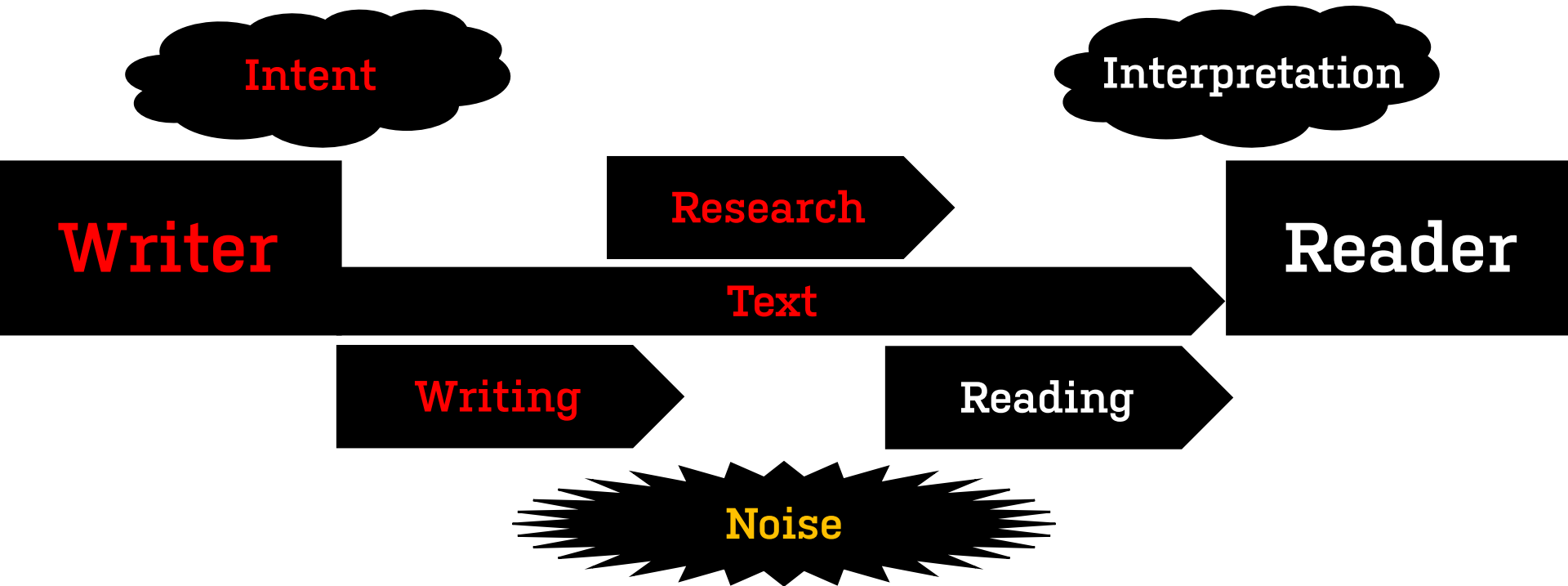
Communication

> Known factors

> Sender: you, the writer

> Intent: to communicate your findings

> Encoding: writing in L2 English

> Channel: research article

Communication

> **Unknown factors**

> > Reader: identity, educational background

> > Decoding: linguistic capability

> > Interpretation: research experience, knowledge of content and context

Communication noise

> Any interference introduced during communication which complicates the transmission of the message

> Psychological noise

> Information overload

> Preconceived ideas

> Semantic noise

> Lack of clarity

> Unknown terminology

Noise mitigation

> Consider your readers' needs

> Focus on your readers' expectations

> Refrain from making ungrounded assumptions about your readers' knowledge and experience

> **Produce reader-centered text**

Author vs Reader Behaviour

> **Author behaviour**

> **Want to publish more**

> Peer review essential

> Other journal functions crucial

> Wider dissemination

> **Reader behaviour**

> Want integrated system

> Browsing is crucial

> Quality information important

> **Want to read less**

Elsevier study of 36,000 authors (1999-2002) presented by Michael Mabe at ALPSP Seminar on "Learning from users" 2003; www.alpsp.org

- Read like a writer

- Understand structure

- Produce a coherent text

Prescriptive vs descriptive

> Prescriptive writing

> > Writing based on a set of predefined norms and rules

> Descriptive writing

> > Writing based on a body of observations

Reading like a writer

Mgr. David Konecny / RECETOX

Reading like a...

> Researcher

  > You read to obtain new information: **WHAT?**

> Writer

  > You read to learn about writing: **HOW?**

  > You read to identify, analyze and assess **writing choices** made and **techniques** employed by the author

  > You read to see how something was constructed so that you can construct something similar yourself

Reading like a writer

> Reading **can** make you a better writer!

> > Critical reading strategies

> > Analysis of choices and techniques
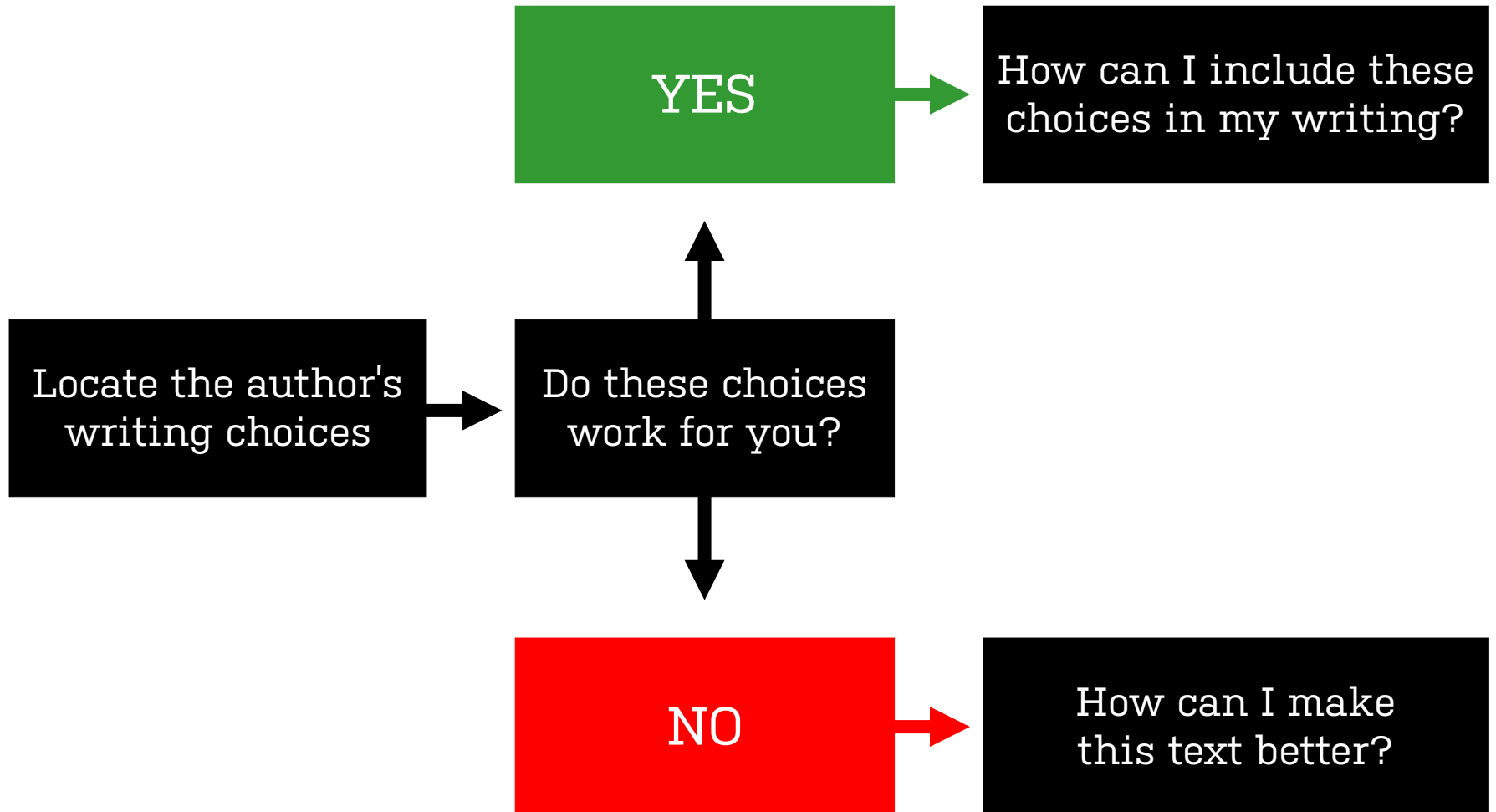
> > Genre analysis

> > Word choice

Critical reading strategies 1

> Previewing

>> Learning about a text before actually reading it.

>>> Do you know the author's purpose for this piece of writing?

>>> Do you know who the intended audience is for this piece of writing?

> Contextualizing

>> Locating a given text in relevant contexts.

> Questioning to understand and remember

>> Asking questions about the content.

Critical reading strategies 2

> Outlining and summarizing

>> Identifying the main ideas, restating them in your own words.

> Evaluating an argument

>> Testing the logic and argumentation of a text.

> Comparing and contrasting related texts

>> Exploring likenesses and differences between texts in order to understand them better.

Analyzing choices & techniques

```
                              YES  ──────▶  How can I include these
                                           choices in my writing?
                               ▲
                               │
Locate the author's  ──────▶  Do these choices
writing choices               work for you?
                               │
                               ▼
                              NO   ──────▶  How can I make
                                           this text better?
```

Genre

> Consider the so-called [duck test](#): *If it looks like a duck, swims like a duck, and quacks like a duck, then it probably is a duck.*

> Applied to academic writing: *If it looks and reads like an academic text, then it probably is an academic text.*

> In other words: as a scientist, you read texts which share certain characteristics. Collectively, these texts make up a distinct **genre**.

Defining genre

❯ 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 constrains 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.

❯ Swales, J. M. (1990). *Genre analysis: English in academic and research settings*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Defining genre

> Communicative event

  > A unit of information, presented in written or spoken form

> Communicative purpose

  > To inform/entertain/etc.

> Parent discourse community

  > Who is writing

> Genre rationale

  > What rules govern a particular genre

> Patterns of similarity

Deconstructing & reconstructing genre

> Deconstruction

1. Critical reading

2. Evaluating similar texts in search of patterns

3. Establishing genre rationale

> Reconstruction

> Genre-informed writing

Sample Genre Exercise

❯ Deconstruction

   1.   Read the first text

   2.   What genre is it? How do you know?

   3.   Read the second text

   4.   Is it the same genre? How do you know?

   5.   What patterns of similarity can you identify?

❯ Reconstruction

   ❯ Genre-informed writing

Once upon a time there were three little pigs. One pig built a house of straw while the second pig built his house with sticks. They built their houses very quickly and then sang and danced all day because they were lazy. The third little pig worked hard all day and built his house with bricks.

A big bad wolf saw the two little pigs while they danced and played and thought, "What juicy tender meals they will make!" He chased the two pigs and they ran and hid in their houses. The big bad wolf went to the first house and huffed and puffed and blew the house down in minutes. The frightened little pig ran to the second pig's house that was made of sticks. The big bad wolf now came to this house and huffed and puffed and blew the house down in hardly any time. Now, the two little pigs were terrified and ran to the third pig's house that was made of bricks.

The big bad wolf tried to huff and puff and blow the house down, but he could not. He kept trying for hours but the house was very strong and the little pigs were safe inside. He tried to enter through the chimney but the third little pig boiled a big pot of water and kept it below the chimney. The wolf fell into it and died.

The two little pigs now felt sorry for having been so lazy. They too built their houses with bricks and lived happily ever after.

One day, Little Red Riding Hood's mother said to her, "Take this basket of goodies to your grandma's cottage, but don't talk to strangers on the way!" Promising not to, Little Red Riding Hood skipped off. On her way she met the Big Bad Wolf who asked, "Where are you going, little girl?" "To my grandma's, Mr. Wolf!" she answered.

The Big Bad Wolf then ran to her grandmother's cottage much before Little Red Riding Hood, and knocked on the door. When Grandma opened the door, he locked her up in the cupboard. The wicked wolf then wore Grandma's clothes and lay on her bed, waiting for Little Red Riding Hood.

When Little Red Riding Hood reached the cottage, she entered and went to Grandma's bedside. "My! What big eyes you have, Grandma!" she said in surprise. "All the better to see you with, my dear!" replied the wolf. "My! What big ears you have, Grandma!" said Little Red Riding Hood. "All the better to hear you with, my dear!" said the wolf. "What big teeth you have, Grandma!" said Little Red Riding Hood. "All the better to eat you with!" growled the wolf pouncing on her. Little Red Riding Hood screamed and the woodcutters in the forest came running to the cottage. They beat the Big Bad Wolf and rescued Grandma from the cupboard. Grandma hugged Little Red Riding Hood with joy.

The Big Bad Wolf ran away never to be seen again. Little Red Riding Hood had learnt her lesson and never spoke to strangers ever again.

Genre-informed writing

> **Content knowledge**

>> Knowledge of the concepts involved in the subject area

> **Context knowledge**

>> Knowledge of the social context in which the text will be read, reader expectations, knowledge of co-texts alongside which the text will be read

> **Language system knowledge**

>> Knowledge of the aspects of the language system necessary for the completion of the task

> **Writing process knowledge**

>> Knowledge of the best way of approaching the writing task

Word choice

> How do you choose words when writing?

> What kinds of vocabulary do you use?

> General use

> Technical/field-specific

> Abstract/academic

Academic Language 1

- **Academic Word List**

  - List of 570 word families frequent in academic texts

  - Additional tools: AWL highlighter and gapmaker

- **Academic Collocation List**

  - 2.5K of the most common collocations in academic English

  - List for download in pdf

- **Just the Word**

  - Find out which words tend to stick together

  - General language tool, i.e. not limited to academic texts

Academic Language 2

- **Academic Phrasebank**

  - Structured list of phrases used in academic writing

  - Organized according to the main sections of your research paper

- **Hyper Collocation**

  - Search engine for finding example sentences

  - Analyzes ca 800K English papers stored in the arXiv repository

- **Sketch Engine**

  - State-of-the-art cloud tool analyzing authentic texts of billions of words (text corpora) to instantly identify what is typical in language and what is rare, unusual or emerging usage.

See you
next week!

See GC
for HW