Kapitel 2

Academic Writing as a Process

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Introduction

In a world where students are expected to write in English, it is important to master the conventions of academic writing in English. This is a process that is best facilitated by a communicative method that accommodates interaction on two levels: teacher/student and student/student (Björk & Räisänen 2003). The responsibility for the final product is ultimately the student's alone; it is, however, the teacher's task to ensure that the production process proceeds as smoothly and efficiently as possible (Watson 1987). As teachers, we must provide students with the knowledge and skills necessary to make wise decisions that lead not only to the achievement of a high grade but facilitate the adaptation of knowledge to new situations and demands.

The special content/structure and language of academic texts

The standard structure of essays, papers and reports, IMRAD (Introduction, Method, Results and Discussion) is a formula not only for writing up but also making the scientific enterprise appear logical (Hartley 2008). The language of a scientific article is designed to give the appearance of precision and objectivity. It is also the language of rhetoric and persuasion. As part of the writing programme, it is important to learn to avoid strategies that are misleading, such as jargon, so-called "straw-men arguments", omissions, overstatements and distortions (Woods 1999). Process writing enables writers to experiment with different strategies and test their objectivity while at the same time preserving the persuasive power of the text.

Academic writing constitutes a hierarchy of overlapping processes or levels. At the bottom level, students put pen to paper or their fingers to the keyboard. The second stage incorporates the thinking that enables the text to be written and revised. At the third stage, one must consider the social context of the paper, including its target group, purpose, and suitability for publication (Hedge 1993). At the bottom, keyboarding stage, it is useful for students to keep track of the changes they make and versions they produce. Earlier versions may not only contain important information but also mistakes and problems from which the student can learn. At the second, writing and thinking level, students should be encouraged to make notes on what they are writing and thinking about during the writing process (Cotton & Gresty 2006). In this way, they become conscious of the reasons for and nature of the decisions they make and can trace progression in their thinking and writing. Such notes are also helpful when discussing with their peer(s).

The social aspects of academic writing, the third stage, include the purpose of writing and can be divided into those that encourage (the desire, for example, to create new knowledge or gain approval), and those that impair progress, such as problems in getting started, revising the text, finding one's voice and feeling inadequate. Murray and Moore (2006) argue that factors that facilitate and inhibit writing are strongly influenced by environmental issues such as the time

available to write. By dividing the writing task into identifiable stages and specifying deadlines for these, students are given sub-goals, their work is marked at regular intervals throughout the writing process, and feedback is obtained from both the teacher and peers. In this way, students are better able to control the environmental factors that influence their work. At the same time, they receive intrinsic rewards such as personal satisfaction because they see that they are making progress. In addition, they receive extrinsic rewards as the teacher and peer(s) are able to point to important steps forward in the research and writing processes.

The IMRAD model is particularly helpful for non-native speakers of English as it provides a structure. It does not, however, alleviate the special problems of writing in a foreign language. While students are aided by automated grammar and style checkers, a good knowledge of grammar is necessary to judge the validity of many of the automated suggestions. The boilerplate described in chapter 9 of the present volume is an invaluable aid, which also works when the process writing method is adopted. Ideally, students writing at higher levels in English should have access to a native speaker, who is more aware of the subtleties and nuances that may not be noticed by non-native speakers. Such help can be given electronically, via e-mail and the Internet, and is easily incorporated into process writing.

Process writing and peer reviewing

Process writing has been defined as a series of "writing activities which move learners from the generation of ideas and the collection of data through to the 'publication' of a finished text" (Tribble 1996, p. 37). It incorporates such pre-writing activities as reading, brainstorming (Rao, 2007) and mind mapping (Eppler 2006), using a range of sources, planning the writing in accordance with the model required (IMRAD, for example), and drafting and revising (Goldstein & Carr 1996). In the model proposed here, students are given set tasks corresponding to the different stages and elements of the text, including thesis statement, introduction and method. These are among the most important so-called "threshold concepts" that students must master; they are explained and discussed in more detail in the final section of the present chapter. Progress is monitored throughout both by the teacher and peer(s). The deadlines given for each stage ensure that the text is completed on time.

It should be noted that while the writing process may appear to be neat and chronological, it is highly dynamic as the writer moves between writing and revision in accordance with the new directions of his or her thinking process and in response to feedback from both the teacher and peer(s). Process writing is acknowledged to be one of the most effective writing instructions available not only because it enables students to achieve the best results possible given the student's ability and situation but because it provides a useful knowledge base for future writing tasks (Björk, Bräuer, Reinecker, & Stray Jörgensen 2003; Gillespie and Lerner 2000).

Process writing presupposes that writing promotes language development, shapes our knowledge and "is an essential learning tool for any subject" (Björk & Räisänen 2003, p. 22). It also facilitates critical thinking by visualising the thinking process, "thereby making reflection and revision easier" (Ibid., p. 22). Process writing enables writers to move from description to analysis, taking advantage of the input of and support from the teacher and peer(s). At all stages, it is the writer who must decide what advice and critique to accept and what to reject; this is an important part of taking responsibility for one's work. As a result, the student not only becomes a more proficient and effective writer but also a more competent and confident reader.

Peer reviewing yields similar positive results: as writers review their peer's work, they become more critical of their own (Haley-James 1996). It is important to distinguish between academic and personal criticism; peer reviewing is concerned solely with the former. Writers at all

levels must be encouraged to provide constructive criticism, always beginning and ending with a positive observation. Peer reviewing focuses on four main areas: structure, argument (including conclusions and results), method and language/style.

All too frequently underestimated is the importance of the writer's language and style (Badger & White 2000). Peers must pay special attention to the adequacy of the language, and the conventions of academic English with respect to style, tone and vocabulary. This is often a more challenging task than critiquing the structure, method and argument of a text.

To ensure that process writing and peer reviewing function efficiently, it is necessary to adopt a suitable model, which is often a variation of the IMRAD one described earlier. The use of a model is a controversial issue within the field of academic writing. Some researchers, such as White and Arndt (1991), claim that what clearly differentiates a process-focused approach from a product-focused one is that the product – essay, report, or thesis – is not pre-conceived. To the contrary, I hope to show that process writing is in fact perfectly compatible with the use of a model. One useful model within the field of academic writing in English is that proposed by Bailey (2006), which is discussed below in a modified form.

A model for process writing with peer review

The model proposed here incorporates identification of subject, specification and evaluation of secondary material/data, selection and collection of key issues/data, note-taking, planning, conclusions, re-writing and editing. Linguistic and stylistic features are incorporated at every stage of the writing process, from draft to final version, although it is not until the final stages of writing that language and style become key issues. Above all, language and style must be consistent and appropriate to the task in hand.

The model discussed here assumes that pre-writing activities have been carried out, including mind mapping and brainstorming. Once the title of the text is established and the target group established students must identify the areas and perspectives to be covered. All terminology must also be defined and the method identified and justified. When these components are complete and have been discussed with the student's peer(s), the text is submitted to the teacher for comment. At this stage, the teacher is able to raise possible problems related, for example, to the breadth of the topic, availability of secondary sources and potential ethical issues.

With regard to the identification and evaluation of secondary material, students are required to submit titles at an early stage in the writing process. A range of sources is encouraged, including reports, reviews, articles and books. Internet sources are accepted where the academic affiliation of the writer is specified. Students are reminded that it is important to note the date of access of internet sites. They are instructed to keep an alphabetically arranged list of references from the very beginning. This should conform to the citing system specified and be complemented as the text progresses. At this crucial stage in the research process, writers should discuss all important choices with their peer(s) before submitting their material to the teacher. Individual tutorials are arranged to discuss secondary material. These are also attended by the writer's peer(s). During the tutorials, the teacher and students discuss not only the relevance of the chosen literature but its purpose; is it, for example, designed to inform, persuade, describe or even entertain? Students learn that the answer to this question determines how they should use their chosen material.

As the student reads the secondary literature, he or she should make notes to identify the key issues and sections for the chosen topic. It may be useful to paraphrase key sections. Where possible, students can take advantage of one another's sources and compare notes on, or paraphrases of, key issues to check possible differences in interpretation. After approximately three

weeks (depending on the scope of the topic and length of text to be produced) of assembling and evaluating secondary sources, students submit to the teacher a short written summary of the range of materials to be included in their text and a justification of their choices. At this point, students are beginning to acquire the conventions of writing in English in their particular discipline, including the level of language and style expected.

At the drafting stage, coherence is emphasised. Are the different elements of the text arranged logically, and do they contain information relevant to the topic? Depending on the level of the student, it may be necessary to remind him or her of the importance of topic sentences, the content and length of paragraphs, and transitions between paragraphs and sections. During the drafting stage, the student works closely with his or her peer(s). A deadline is set for submission to the teacher of a draft of the entire text and a brief review of the content of each section. While the teacher's advice is crucial, it is important to reiterate that it must always be the student's decision as to what shall be included or excluded. When the draft is complete, attention can be turned to the organisation of the main body and the internal organisation of paragraphs.

The introduction to the text is a vital component of the draft (Gustavii, 2000). At this point, students generally need a great deal of support from their teacher and peer(s). Process writing places considerable emphasis on a clear and authoritative introduction. This should establish not only the crucial elements of the topic and the theory on which it is based but give a clear indication of the writer's style and approach. It may need to be re-written several times as the writer becomes clearer about his or her approach. Once the introductory text is complete, it may be necessary to modify it again, as the writer's thoughts and perspectives may change. At this point, students may experience writer's block (Watson, 1987). It is, above all, the peer's responsibility, though even the teacher's, to help overcome this and enable the student to continue writing.

The main body of the text is completed in different stages, each of which is discussed with the student's peer(s) before it is submitted to the teacher for comment. At this point, much of the editing work can be done electronically, though the student may wish to meet the teacher now and then to discuss specific problems. When most students have completed approximately one third of their text (this varies depending on the length of the text), it is useful to call together the class to discuss common problems. Students must also be reminded about the importance of correct referencing. As they approach their conclusion, an additional meeting can be held, at which point students present their findings, discuss how they have used their secondary sources, and reflect on their conclusions. It is useful to remind students that readers may turn to the conclusion first to gain a summary of the main arguments or points.

The fear of writing a conclusion can to some extent be alleviated by encouraging students to return to the starting point, that is to say, the title and the introduction. The possibility of incorporating suggestions for further research in the field can also be discussed. The support of the peer is crucial at this stage if the conclusion is to be more than a mere summary of the findings. Issues such as the limitations of the research and possible practical implications and proposals can be usefully discussed at this point.

The final stage, re-writing and editing, is given a prominent position in the process-writing model proposed here. The student's work has already been submitted several times both to the peer(s) and teacher. In the final stage, the entire text is assessed on the basis of its structure, content, language and style. Writing schedules must leave plenty of time for this process. At this stage, the peer should focus on overall coherence as well as linguistic and stylistic appropriateness.

Peer review recommendations

The following selection of guidelines for peer reviewing relates to structure, argument, method and language/style. It is in the areas of language and style that peers are likely to face the greatest difficulty in giving constructive criticism because their knowledge and experience of reading academic texts in English may be limited. As already established, it is advantageous to seek the support of a native speaker, especially at the higher levels. University students may also wish to employ the services of a professional language corrector or copy editor.

Structure
- Has the structure been defined and presented in the introduction?
- Is the structure logically developed throughout the text?
- Do the paragraphs deal with one idea at a time, are they logically arranged, and do they vary in length?
- How effective is the use of headings?
- Are the introduction and conclusion consistent with each other?

Argument
- Is the argument firmly stated and logically developed?
- Has the argument been modified in the writing process?
- Does the conclusion support the main argument as specified in the introduction?

Method
- Is the chosen method the most suitable for establishing the veracity of the argument/hypothesis?
- Has the method been adequately explained to ensure the possibility of replication?
- Have its advantages and disadvantages been clearly stated and taken into consideration in the analysis of the results?

Language/style
- Has the writer used grammar and speller checkers?
- Are there any concord errors?
- Is there a consistent use of British or American English?
- Is the style sufficiently formal and correct for the target group and discipline? Is it consistent?
- Does the text contain repetitions and/or "pet" words and phrases?
- Is the length of sentences appropriate to the topic?
- Does the length of the sentences vary to avoid monotony and hold the reader's attention?
- Has the writer expressed him-/herself concisely or is there a tendency to verbosity?
- Is there any superfluous information?
- Is there an overuse of the passive form?
- Is the choice of tense appropriate and consistent?
- Is there an overuse of personal pronouns?
- Are contracted forms and jargon used?
- Are there any abbreviations that are not properly explained?

Two Level-III essays: English literature and English linguistics.

How process writing and peer reviewing work in practice is illustrated below.

The theoretical background for level-III essays (15 ECTS) on English literature and English linguistics at Kristianstad University is introduced in two 2.5-credit introductory courses on literary and linguistic theory (students study both, after which they select the kind of essay they will write). They explore basic theories that enable them to analyse texts in accordance with the accepted praxis in the chosen discipline. On completion of the two courses, students take a literary or a linguistic elective course (depending on their preference) that prepares them for writing their essay. For students writing literary essays, it is necessary to produce an argument based on the chosen fictional text; for linguistic students, a hypothesis is tested. For both disciplines, close attention is paid to the primary material discussed, a wide range of secondary literature is studied, and focus is placed on structure, language and style.

The literary essay discussed here is entitled "Through the Door: A Passage to a New World and an Entrance to the Heart" (hereafter abbreviated as "Through the Door"), is based on C.S. Lewis's *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe* (1950) and is 26 pages long. The linguistic essay, entitled "Meanings of the Verb Jump: A Cognitive Linguistic Study (hereafter abbreviated as "Meanings") is 37 pages long. The literary essay was written by a Chinese student, the linguistic one, by a Swedish student (the nationality of the writer is important, as seen in the section below on peer reviewing).

Both kinds of essay – literary and linguistic – involve the acquisition of the earlier mentioned "threshold concepts". These are different in the two different kinds of essay; in both, however, they constitute conceptual gateways or portals that lead to a particular way of thinking that was previously inaccessible (Meyer & Land 2003) and result in new ways of comprehending, interpreting or perceiving something (Meyer & Land 2005). By comparing the two essays, "Through the door" and "Meanings", I hope to demonstrate the differences between the two main thresholds, structural and methodological, which literary and linguistic students must cross.

Structural thresholds, as their name suggests, refer to the layout and sub-divisions of the text. The methodological thresholds, referring to the lines along which the investigation is conducted, are radically different in the two disciplines. Students' essays must demonstrate a good knowledge of the praxis within the discipline not only in terms of content but also presentation. In both literary and linguistic essays, a high standard of academic English is required, particularly with regard to accuracy and appropriateness of language and elegance of style.

A quick glance at "Through the Door" and "Meanings" reveals a fundamental difference in structure: while the latter has a table of contents and multiple headings and sub-headings, the former has none. While "Meanings" contains figures and tables, these are absent in "Through the Door". Unlike in "Meanings", there are no appendices. In a literary essay, students work with one or possibly two primary texts in the form of novels, short stories or poems. In linguistic essays, the object of investigation may be a grammatical feature, an idiom, or an aspect of punctuation in a variety of texts.

While the approach of the literary student is philosophical and involves discussion of an idea, character, setting or aspect of style, the linguistic student carries out a study that involves quantifying and analysing data. In both cases, the emphasis is on analysis, but what is analysed and how it is analysed are very different. The results of this process will now be examined in relation to "Through the Door" and "Meanings". This will be followed by a discussion of the students' assessment of the peer reviewing system and its contribution to both the writing process and the final product.

The first two pages of "Through the Door" are devoted to the presentation of the argument (opening the door to Narnia is a form of enlightenment which, for all four protagonists, involves a psychological journey) and the scope of the essay: each of the four occasions on which the door is opened is different, involves different protagonists and has different consequences for the actor(s) and the narrative. The student identifies the two theories that she will use: New Criticism and psychological criticism. The primary material is C.S. Lewis's *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe.*

In "Meanings", the "introduction" (one page long), provides a context to verbs of motion and identifies why the verb "jump" is particularly interesting. This is followed by a specification of the aim (to investigate the different meaning of the verb "jump") and the material (*Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English*; *British National Corpus*; *The Guardian*). The aim and material sections fill one page.

When it comes to the method, there is a significant difference between the two disciplines: in a literary essay, it is sufficient to specify one's theoretical stance at the beginning. The reader is expected to be familiar with the primary text, rendering an introduction to the novel unnecessary. In a linguistic essay, however, the method must be described in sufficient detail that the study can be replicated; the reader is not expected to be familiar with the material.

A linguistic essay also requires a detailed presentation of the theoretical background. In a literary essay, it is sufficient to present a few of the major researchers in the area and relate one's argument to their research. While the writer of "Meanings" devotes nine pages – in a separate section – to different ways in which to understand verbs of motion and an additional two pages to describing "previous research", the author of "Through the Door" integrates the views of other researchers into her argument from the very beginning (most pages have two or more references to secondary sources). There is no separate section describing previous research. For some students, and particularly Chinese ones, this presents a problem as their system of education favours a long introduction even in literary essays.

For both the literary and linguistic student, analysis is based on specific examples. The literary student must learn to keep quotations to a minimum and discuss specific features of each example, including word choice, devices such as metaphors and similes, and punctuation, style and tone. For the linguistic student, examples may be more detailed and be illustrated with the aid of figures or charts. For both the linguistic and literary student, it is important that examples are discussed with reference to other researchers. In discussing the kingdom of Narnia, for example, the author of "Through the Door" refers to two researchers, Downing and David; in discussing motion in the verb "jump", the writer of "Meanings" refers to Dirven, thereby adding validity to the analyses.

While the writer of a linguistic essay will provide both a summary of results and conclusion, the writer of a literary essay will provide a conclusion only; this is not a separate section. Students find writing conclusions difficult and need guidance from their peer(s) and tutor to ensure that the conclusion does not merely comprise a repetition of what has already been established but also demonstrates the significance of the findings. Ideally, the writer should also point to directions for future research, although this is not an essential feature of a level-III essay.

Peer reviewing in the two essays

Both students were asked to reflect on the value of peer reviewing in the essay writing process. The selection of a peer worked well in the case of the literary student, who explains that her peer (who was Swedish) regularly reviewed her work in terms of content, coherence and language, providing useful suggestions. She states: "I accepted most of my peer's opinions and modified my

essay" (e-mail 2 March 2012). She was particularly grateful to her peer for identifying problematical expressions, words and sentence constructions: Some sentences that I and my Chinese classmates understand totally but it does not make sense to her [peer] due to the different thinking logic and sentence-making rules in English and Chinese. It made me ponder on my expression and word selection and what I should do to master proficient English (e-mail 2 March 2012).

The English in which this comment is made is a measure of the scale of the problem. While the student's essay required considerable language input by the tutor, this was less comprehensive than would have been the case without the peer reviewing system.

For the linguistic student, peer reviewing was more problematical because her fellow students argued that they were "too pressed for time to act as peer reviewers" (e-mail 1 March). However, she selected a Swedish friend on the level-II course, who proved to be "very helpful" (e-mail 1 March 2012) because she enabled her to maintain focus and limit her work to key issues. A particularly important function of the peer was identifying omissions, particularly where the student's knowledge of the subject had led her to take certain facts and features for granted.

The linguistic student also acted as a peer for a fellow student. She states, "I remember I rewrote my aim after having read hers. Not that I copied it but I made corrections to her that made me think I could use myself". She goes on to explain that "Sometimes it is easier to focus on form and structure if you are not so consumed by the subject as you are in your own work" (e-mail 1 March 2012). She also adds that when it came to help with language, she still turned to her tutor. As already established, language is a major problem – and one where students are generally less able to help one another. The burden of language correction ultimately falls primarily on the tutor even where the peer is able to identify some of the more basic problems.

Conclusion

Writing and reviewing are complementary processes that must be practised if they are to be effective. The emphasis is on interaction rather than instruction. Process writing combined with peer reviewing assumes a high level of activity both on the part of the teacher and the student. Ideally, the system should be applied early on in a university programme in order to ensure the best possible results at higher levels. The method establishes a life-long process that equips the student for future challenges and makes him or her flexible, autonomous and reliable. While in no way denigrating the importance of the quality of the final product, it is clear that our attention as university teachers must be turned to the process by which this is achieved. Surely anything less is to sell students short if they are to perform adequately in the workplace and take full responsibility for their texts?

Summary

This chapter focuses on academic writing as a process as well as a product. Throughout the educational system, and higher education is certainly no exception, the focus has all too often been on the final product and the grade awarded rather than on what the student learns as part of the writing process. As a consequence, students' ability to write tends to stagnate once the basic skills have been mastered. Based on the view that the goal of higher education must be life-long learning, this article proposes a method of teaching writing in English that enables students to produce a variety of texts, from short essays to doctoral theses, using a concise and correct language and style (Giltrow, Burgoyne, Gooding & Swaatsky, 2005). The method, known as process writing, focuses attention on the different elements of a text, their mutual relations, and the language and style in which these should be expressed. Process writing can be usefully

combined with peer reviewing. Both methods are interactive: the teacher stimulates students to "perform and reflect on learning activities, which lead them towards independent thinking and writing" (Riljaarsdam, Couzijn & van den Berg, 1996, pp. ix-xviii); the writing task is divided into identifiable stages (process writing), and students critique other students' writing (peer reviewing). Process writing and peer reviewing take account of all capacities. More importantly, they facilitate students' ability to analyse their own and others' work. To illustrate the advantages of process writing and peer reviewing, the article concludes with a discussion of two level-III essays, one on literature and the other on linguistics. Both were written during the autumn term 2011 and received a high grade (B).

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Suggestions for further reading

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