

Issues in academic writing in higher education

AIMS OF THE BOOK

Teaching Academic Writing is an introductory book on the teaching of academic writing in higher education. It is aimed at higher education lecturers and writing tutors who wish to help undergraduates improve their academic writing in both discipline-specific and writing/study skills contexts. The book raises issues about the teaching of academic writing and offers many practical suggestions about how academic writing can be taught. Some suggestions are meant for lecturers to implement as part of their subject teaching; other ideas will work better in collaboration with writing or language specialists who work alongside subject specialists to help students with their writing. The book will also be useful for people who work in contexts where writing support is offered as a separate provision, for example within study skills and EAP courses (English for academic purposes). Whilst the book is aimed principally at lecturers and tutors working with undergraduate students, it raises many issues which are relevant to those who teach postgraduate students, particularly those students who are returning to higher education after a break from academic study.¹ The aims of the book are:

- to identify and demystify the conventions and practices associated with academic writing so that both subject specialists and writing support staff can better advise and help students to construct their written work
- to discuss ways that lecturers can address the needs of a variety of students, including those with little experience in academic writing and those whose primary language is not English

- to enable lecturers in a range of contexts to adopt and adapt various teaching strategies to the teaching of academic writing for different purposes
- to combine a practical orientation to teaching writing with a grounding in current theories of writing instruction.

STUDENT WRITING IN A CHANGING HIGHER EDUCATION CONTEXT

Student writing is at the centre of teaching and learning in higher education, fulfilling a range of purposes according to the various contexts in which it occurs. These purposes include:

- *assessment*, which is often a major purpose for student writing (see National Committee of Inquiry into Higher Education, 1997). Students may be required to produce essays, written examinations, or laboratory reports whose main purpose is to demonstrate their mastery of disciplinary course content. In assessing such writing, lecturers focus on both the content and the form of the writing, that is the language used, the text structure, the construction of argument, grammar and punctuation.
- *learning*, which can help students grapple with disciplinary knowledge as well as develop more general abilities to reason and critique (Hilgers *et al.*, 1999). Separately from or simultaneously with writing for assessment, students may also be asked to write texts that trace their reflections on the learning process itself, as with journals where they record thoughts, questions, problems, and ideas about readings, lectures, and applied practice.
- *entering particular disciplinary communities*, whose communication norms are the primary means by which academics transmit and evaluate ideas (Prior, 1998). As they progress through the university, students are often expected to produce texts that increasingly approximate the norms and conventions of their chosen disciplines, with this expectation peaking at the level of postgraduate study.

Students and lecturers alike recognise the necessity for good communication skills both within the university and in the larger world. Whilst some research signals that an ever-increasing range of writing demands are being made of students (Ganobcsik-Williams, 2001), evidence also

indicates that the most traditional of practices – that of essay writing – continues to hold sway across many disciplines (see National Committee of Inquiry into Higher Education, 1997). Whether the essay should continue to be the main type of writing that students produce and whether students know how to successfully engage in this and other writing practices are questions being voiced more and more frequently.² In this book, whilst our main focus is on essay writing, we also deal with other kinds of writing such as laboratory reports, project reports, case studies, and reflective journals.

Student academic writing continues to be at the centre of teaching and learning in higher education, but is often an invisible dimension of the curriculum; that is, the rules or conventions governing what counts as academic writing are often assumed to be part of the ‘common sense’ knowledge students have, and are thus not explicitly taught within disciplinary courses. If students lack familiarity with these conventions, the assumption is often held that they will ‘pick it up’ as part of learning their subject knowledge. Although this position might have been understandable within the context of a small and predominantly homogenous higher education system, it is no longer justified within current contexts where significant changes are affecting all aspects of teaching and learning, including student academic writing. These changes include:

Increasing student numbers. The growth of student participation in higher education signals a shift away from a small, highly elitist provision of higher education toward policies and practices aimed at widening access to more of the population. In the UK at the end of the 1930s only some 2 per cent of the population took part in higher education, compared with some 10 per cent in the 1960s and some 30 per cent by the late 1990s. The UK government plans to increase this proportion to up to 50 per cent of the 18- to 30-year-old population by the year 2005 (HEFCE, 2001). Policies of widening participation have been a driving force behind a heightened interest in teaching and learning, including student writing, in many parts of the world. The growing UK interest in teaching writing thus mirrors trends in South Africa, Australia, and the United States.

Increasing diversity of the student population. The student population is not only larger and still growing but significantly more diverse than previous generations of students. Increasing numbers of ‘non-traditional’ students,

that is, students from social groups historically excluded from higher education, are now present. These include students from working-class backgrounds, those who are older than 18 when they start university, and students from a wide range of cultural and linguistic backgrounds (HEFCE, 2001). There are also large numbers of international students who have been mainly educated in countries other than the UK. Educational background, ethnicity, cultural expectations and gender all influence how students read academic texts and respond in writing (Lillis, 2001). Students new to higher education may not feel at ease with academic writing conventions or with staking claims for knowledge about which their lecturers have greater expertise, necessitating more explicit instruction about writing.

Complex patterns of participation in higher education. There are complex patterns of participation including greater numbers of part-time students in higher education, in contrast to the traditional, full-time model. In the UK, part-time participation has been steadily on the increase and has been taken up particularly by women (see Blackburn and Jarman, 1993; HEFCE, 2001; Ramsden, 2001).

Curriculum changes. There have been significant curriculum changes, not least in shifts towards modularisation and interdisciplinarity. Modularisation, whereby teaching and learning are structured around short courses rather than over a whole academic year, has grown substantially in the past ten years. By 1994 it was estimated that more than half of UK universities had moved to semester provision, which was linked in many cases to modularisation of the curriculum and delivery (Schuller, 1995). Interdisciplinarity, whereby a growing number of courses offer modules in a wide range of subject areas, happens within particular interdisciplinary degrees such as communication studies and women's studies, but also in routes through more traditionally demarcated subject areas. There has also been growth in vocationally and professionally oriented higher education courses that cross academic boundaries, for example, nursing and social work studies.

Diverse modes of curriculum delivery. The introduction of a range of modes of curriculum 'delivery' has been profoundly shaped by developments in information technology. The most notable shift has been away from conventional face-to-face teaching and learning modes and toward the use of computer conferencing systems and web-based materials, both as part of campus-based provision and increasingly in distance courses.

The impact of such changes on traditional practices of teaching, learning and assessment is only just beginning to be explored (see e.g. Richardson, 2000).

Contexts for teaching and learning. The increase in student numbers has not been matched by an equivalent increase in funding. Many institutions have larger class sizes, fewer opportunities for small group teaching (such as seminars and tutorials) and – of specific relevance to student writing – little time for lecturers to comment on students' written work. Whilst the nature of the material conditions for teaching and learning varies immensely across institutions, a notable difference frequently emerges between the 'old' and 'new' universities.³ The 'new' universities often have larger classes compared with 'old' universities such as the prestigious institutions of Oxford and Cambridge, where a highly personalised teaching and learning context prevails in the form of the tutorial system. Nonetheless, many innovations in pedagogy are taking place at new universities in response to these changing contexts and at national levels in many parts of the world there is unprecedented interest in teaching and learning in higher education. In the UK the recent establishment of the Institute for Learning and Teaching (ILT) placed teaching in higher education firmly on the political agenda, thus mirroring current and historical developments in similar contexts elsewhere. (For a current parallel, see the white paper on higher education in South Africa at <http://196.14.128.104/Deptinfo/highereduc/hewp1.html>; for historically similar developments in the United States, see Crowley, 1999; Horner and Lu, 1999.)

This book's focus on the teaching of academic writing is therefore part of a current interest in teaching and learning in higher education more generally. Questions, and possible answers, about how best to support students' academic writing are relevant to all those committed to enhancing successful teaching and learning in higher education.

INSTITUTIONAL PROVISION OF WRITING INSTRUCTION

A range of approaches to teaching writing has developed in different geographical contexts and for different historical and socio-political reasons. In Australia, pedagogical models designed to foster students' awareness of academic conventions and practices have emerged from the study of disciplinary genres and the field of systemic functional

linguistics (see e.g. Martin and Veel, 1998). In the United States, for decades courses in ‘freshman composition’ have taught the presumed generic skills of academic writing to first-year students as well as non-native speakers of English (Leki, 2001; Zamel and Spack, 1998). Recently interest has grown in teaching writing in the disciplines or across the curriculum, in recognition of the discipline-specific nature of much of academic writing and the usefulness of writing to the learning process. In South Africa, where fundamental changes in higher education are taking place, teachers and researchers are critically reconceptualising the purpose and nature of student writing in the academy (see e.g. Angelil-Carter, 1998; Thesen, 2001).

Institutional structures around the world tend to include any of four main locations for the teaching of writing: dedicated writing courses, disciplinary subject courses, English for academic purposes/English for speakers of other languages departments, and study skills or writing centres. In addition to these face-to-face venues, on-line writing instruction has recently added another dimension – or at least the possibility for it – to all of these domains.

Dedicated writing courses

First-year writing, or ‘freshman composition’, is usually a required course at the beginning of university study in the United States. Depending on university policy, first-year students may take remedial/basic writing courses, freshman composition, or more advanced writing courses. As the provision of writing instruction has increased, higher level courses in academic writing have been developed. In some cases these courses link disciplinary lecturers with writing specialists to focus on disciplinary forms of writing, as in ‘learning communities’ (Grubb, 1999). The development of the academic field of composition studies in the United States in the past 35 years came about partly as a response to increased numbers of non-traditional students entering the academy. Veterans of the Second World War, greater numbers of racial and ethnic minorities, women, and disabled students all changed the face of the student population in higher education. The needs of these students to acquire academic literacy functioned to expose some of the hidden assumptions and practices of the academy. The growth of composition studies also came from increased

attention to theories of teaching and learning writing. For many of the same reasons, UK universities have also recently begun to provide courses dedicated to teaching academic writing.

Disciplinary subject courses

With the increasing recognition of the centrality of writing to learning and assessment in higher education, the movement to include writing across the curriculum (WAC) and writing in the disciplines (WID) has grown (see e.g. Bazerman and Russell, 1994; Fulwiler, 1986). The WAC movement is premised not only on the notion that writing is a tool for learning but also that because academic writing happens in specific disciplinary contexts, instruction in such writing should also be located in these courses. One benefit of incorporating writing in the disciplines is that students can see how different forms of writing occur in different contexts. WAC/WID pedagogy also emphasises the sequencing of writing tasks throughout a course so that students build gradually into particular forms of writing.

Study support centres and writing centres

Within many higher education institutions, writing instruction has often been located in departments or centres that offer support in study skills. Because such centres are frequently situated outside academic departments, study skills specialists have offered the ‘service’ of helping students with their written work. In many cases these services are provided to students referred to study skills centres because their lecturers deem their work to be deficient. Like EAP lecturers (see below), study skills specialists may have little subject-area knowledge; they may also not have much communication with the lecturers who set writing assignments, provide feedback, and assess students’ written work.

Writing centres have often evolved from study skills centres. In some cases, writing centres have assumed a higher-status role as their functions have broadened to encompass offering mini-courses on specific aspects of academic and other types of writing. The most recent development in writing centres has been the addition of on-line writing support (see below).

English for academic purposes

A large number of non-traditional students in higher education are international students and other non-native speakers of English. To cater for their needs, academics in the fields of ESOL (English for speakers of other languages) and EAP have often combined writing instruction with language teaching and learning. The experiences, backgrounds, and needs of non-native English speakers vary considerably. Immigrant or 'home' students may have different English language learning and writing experiences than those of international students studying in the UK and other English-speaking countries. ESOL/EAP lecturers who teach second language writing often have been trained in applied linguistics or language teaching; thus their expertise may be in different subject areas than those of their students. Many, however, work together with subject lecturers or make themselves familiar with the writing needs of their students (Graal and Clark, 2000; Johns and Dudley-Evans, 1981). As a result non-native speakers of English often obtain much of their knowledge about academic literacy in Western universities from their EAP courses. The knowledge of different academic text types and disciplinary variation is less frequently shared with 'home' students, who may not take such courses.

Writing on-line

The on-line teaching of writing covers a range of activities, from electronic mail to websites to synchronous and asynchronous conferencing, as Chapter 6 discusses. Electronic mail can be used to maintain communication between lecturers and students as well as among students on a course, as a venue for student journals, and as a means of transferring student texts to the lecturer or peer readers. Websites connected to writing centres offer round-the-clock access to writing guides, style manuals, course materials, and in some cases, feedback from writing specialists. The most interactive forms of electronic communication are conferencing systems that allow students to post their texts in public and engage in public dialogues with other students and the course lecturer.

The range of institutional provision outlined above has developed in response to local circumstances and contexts. What these structures share is an assumption that students should be taught how to improve their academic writing. Exactly what constitutes such teaching varies. In some

contexts writing or study skills tutors work with individual students; in other settings tutors work as partners with subject lecturers in order to integrate approaches to the teaching of writing within the teaching of discipline-specific content areas. Throughout the book we suggest ways in which such tutors and lecturers can work to support students' writing.

APPROACHES TO STUDENT WRITING

Exactly how individual tutors support students' writing varies across, and indeed within, the range of institutional provision outlined in the previous section. However, there are three influential approaches to the teaching of student writing that it is useful to consider. We refer to these approaches in the following way: *writing as text*, *writing as process* and *writing as social practice*. Such approaches have developed over time and often in distinct geographical contexts but to a greater or lesser extent they inform how writing is currently being taught.

Text approaches

Historically, when writing has been explicitly taught in higher education, the emphasis has been on students' writing as final texts or 'products'. Teaching writing – whether in formal writing classes or as an activity within discipline-based courses – often entailed presenting students with 'models of good writing', and asking them to imitate these exemplars. Often, little analysis occurred of the various rhetorical aspects of the texts or the social contexts in which the texts functioned. The focus instead was on specific features of the written texts, for example, spelling, text structure, vocabulary, style. In addition, little attention was typically paid to the process of writing, including the conscious and unconscious decisions that writers make in order to communicate for different purposes and to different audiences. In an era in which students may have been more homogenous and shared previous educational experiences and social backgrounds, the assumption was again often made that students could pick up how to do academic writing through this process of imitation.

More recent textual approaches to writing have focused on genres, or text types, such as essays, and project and laboratory reports. These are identified and explicitly analysed with students.⁴ Such a discussion often includes larger dimensions of writing such as the rhetorical purposes of

particular text types within disciplines and the relationship between author and audience, or more local concerns such as how to set out a discussion of results in a report on an experiment. The move toward making explicit to students the requirements of different text types has highlighted how apparently universal text types such as the essay vary in purpose or function and in different disciplines.

Process approaches

Attention in process approaches to writing is paid to the steps and stages of writing that an individual writer might work through. Process writing emerged from the individualist, expressivist impulse popular throughout education in the 1960s and 1970s, and parts of it retain much currency today. Following the notion of the discrete, isolated individual, the emphasis in process writing was chiefly on how students could express their identities, rather than on writing as something that occurs in a social context. Critics of process approaches (see e.g. Delpit, 1995) have argued that explicit teaching of the forms and conventions of academic writing must accompany any focus on process in order for students to gain control of dominant academic forms.

Writing as a social practice

Here the focus is on writing as an activity that always occurs in a social context, at both a more local, immediate level and at a broader social and cultural level. In the context of higher education, there are different ways in which student writing can be understood as a 'social practice'. First, student writing is always embedded within relationships around teaching and learning and these relationships influence, not least, the extent to which students come to write successfully in higher education. Second, the conventions governing exactly what constitutes 'appropriate academic writing' are social to the extent that these have developed within specific academic and disciplinary communities over time. Third, student academic writing is a social practice in that the writers, students, are learning not only to communicate in particular ways, but are learning how to 'be' particular kinds of people: that is, to write 'as academics', 'as geographers', 'as social scientists'. Thus academic writing is also about personal and social identity. Some students may find it harder or less comfortable to take on these identities than others. This focus on identity

in academic writing has been emphasised in recent times; educational background, ethnicity, cultural expectations and gender have all been shown to influence how students read academic texts and respond in writing (Ivanic, 1998; Lillis, 2001).

In offering ideas for teaching student writing in this book, we draw on elements from all of these approaches, with some chapters focusing more closely on some approaches than others. Chapter 2 discusses the writing process and some generic features of student academic writing. Chapter 3 offers a textual approach focusing on a linguistic analysis of text types. Chapters 4 and 5 take a broader perspective by examining key moments of student writing within higher education: assessment and feedback. Chapter 6 addresses key issues arising out of the growing use of information technology in teaching writing.

WHAT THIS BOOK OFFERS: A 'TOOLKIT' APPROACH TO TEACHING WRITING

In calling this book 'a toolkit' to teaching writing, we are using the term 'toolkit' in two ways: first to signal our theoretical stance on language and learning, and second to indicate that our main purpose is to provide a range of practical ideas for teaching student writing – and reflecting on the purposes of such writing – in higher education.

Language as a cultural toolkit for learning

Our approach to writing involves a theory of language and learning which can be broadly referred to as 'sociocultural'. This means that rather than viewing language as a system of signs or symbols independent of social context, we view language as a culturally shaped resource for making meaning. Language within this frame refers not just to words and sentences (if we're thinking about written language) in isolation, but to the ways in which such words have come to be used and the social conventions governing their use. Language as a cultural resource that we all use can, to a certain extent, usefully be conceptualised as a number of tools or as a toolkit that we draw on to make meaning in different contexts, in different ways (see Wertsch, 1991). Whilst it is potentially vast, language-as-toolkit is not the same for all users. Individuals gain access to particular ways of using language through participating in the specific social and cultural contexts where certain types of language are

required. Learning to use new ways with words in new or different contexts may be very exciting but it can also be difficult or even frightening.

In higher education, particular ways of using language have become associated with, and valued in, student academic writing: these are ways with words, particular ways of constructing meanings – some to do with the histories of academic disciplines (e.g. history, physics, linguistics) and some more broadly with the traditions and conventions of Western academia – and ways of organising written texts. To introduce students to these different aspects of language use, our view is that as lecturers and writing tutors we need to do the following: a) identify the kinds of language use with which students need to become familiar in order to write successfully in higher education; b) make these uses available to students in ways which enhance their learning and motivation for writing and participating in higher education; and c) find ways of building on students' existing knowledge of and uses of language.

These last points, above, signal our understanding of what constitutes successful teaching and learning. Briefly, following Vygotsky and neo-Vygotskian research, we conceptualise successful teaching and learning as a 'scaffolded' activity, whereby lecturers actively support and guide students' participation in knowledge-making practices (Bruner, 1983; Vygotsky, 1978). In the process of scaffolding, a more advanced 'expert' or 'teacher' is seen as helping a less-experienced student to learn to do a particular task so that the learner can replicate the process alone at some point in the future. For successful scaffolding to take place, lecturers need to know where the student is starting from and aiming for in the process of learning. A key aspect of this scaffolding activity in the teaching of student writing is raising students' awareness of the conventions within which they are expected to write and then helping students to add these conventions to their linguistic and rhetorical repertoires.

Tools for teaching writing

We also use the notion of a toolkit approach at a more concrete level to indicate what we are offering in this book: a range of tools, or ideas for thinking about and teaching student writing in higher education. In constructing this toolkit, we draw on a considerable body of research from the traditions referred to earlier. Our decision to explore what each of these has to offer, rather than argue that one approach or one tool

can suit all purposes, stems from our acknowledgement of the varied and complex contexts in which lecturers and students are working in higher education and the range of experiences and expertise of all involved. The kinds of tools we use in the book are of two main types:

Heuristics – sets of questions for thinking about what’s going on in student texts and what kind of response or feedback might be most appropriate at a particular moment, or to encourage reflection on different aspects of teaching writing. These questions are set apart from the discussion with lines above and below them.

Activities – specific suggestions for lecturers and tutors to use either with students or in responding to student writing. These are labelled as Activities throughout the book, and sometimes function with the reflection questions.

The terminology in this book

When discussing students’ written texts in this book, we use frameworks and terminology that are widely used by subject lecturers and writing support tutors, as well as some more specialist linguistic terminology. We have attempted to keep specialist linguistic terminology to a minimum, but we have found it useful in discussing various aspects of the teaching and learning of student writing to include some terminology, which may be new to some readers. Below we give an overview of the key terms we use, which are further defined and exemplified in relevant sections of the book. When other specialist terms are introduced throughout the book, you will find the first mention of a term in italics followed by a brief definition.

At an overarching level we have distinguished between two kinds of approaches to students’ written texts: what we call ‘a focus on linguistic accuracy’ and ‘a focus on text types’. Linguistic accuracy includes aspects such as spelling, punctuation and grammatical accuracy. By ‘grammatical accuracy’ we mean things like subject-verb agreement (i.e. *she works*, rather than *she work*), consistent use of verb tenses, and writing in complete sentences using appropriate punctuation. Many comments on students’ texts refer to these different aspects of linguistic accuracy. Although we recognise that such conventions shift over time, they are an important aspect of creating shared meaning.

It is also important to think of students' writing in terms of what we call *text types*. Typical academic text types include essays, laboratory reports, research projects reports, and reflective diaries. Whilst the exact nature of these text types varies according to disciplines, departmental practices and the preferences of individual lecturers, it is useful to consider what these text types broadly involve. In this book we foreground three key dimensions of text types: *rhetorical purpose*, *register* and *text structure*, all of which can be explicitly discussed with students both when setting assignments and when commenting on their writing. By *rhetorical purpose* we mean the overt communicative purpose of the text. So, for example, the overt rhetorical purpose of the essay is to construct an argument, whereas the main rhetorical purpose of the laboratory report is to provide an account of a scientific procedure, giving specific information in a predetermined format. Whilst the rhetorical purpose of any text may be far less straightforward than we might often assume – for example, argument means many different things in different contexts – we think it is useful to discuss the rhetorical purpose of writing tasks with students. Argument is considered to be the key rhetorical purpose of much academic writing, indeed is seen as an essential aspect of intellectual activity within higher education. For this reason we focus on argument in several chapters in the book: in Chapter 2 we focus on academic argument in general terms and in Chapter 3 we discuss some discipline-specific aspects of argument.

By *register* we mean the vocabulary and sentence structures which students are expected to use in written texts. Some lecturers and tutors may refer to this as 'style'. Academic writing involves much specialist vocabulary and particular kinds of sentence structures. Some of these are general features of academic writing and some are discipline-specific. Thus, for example, academic vocabulary and sentence structure are generally considered to be more formal than many other types of communication, and seem to be what students mean when they talk about having to use 'long words' in their writing. These general aspects of academic language are discussed in Chapter 2; some discipline-specific issues surrounding language are discussed in Chapter 3. Throughout the book we argue that aspects of register should be explicitly explored with students.

By *text structure* we mean the ways in which complete texts are structured and form a coherent whole. Often text structures are discussed with

students as if these were quite unproblematic – for example, ‘in an essay, you need an introduction, a main part and a conclusion’. However, as Chapters 2 and 3 discuss, there are more specific ways of analysing the organisation of texts with students which can help them improve their academic writing.

THE BOOK’S AUTHORS

Separately and together, the six authors of *Teaching Academic Writing* have many years of experience teaching and researching academic writing. We have taught in distance and face-to-face settings, including the Open University in the United Kingdom and traditional universities and colleges of further education in countries including Costa Rica, Italy, Malaysia, the United Kingdom, the United States, and Australia. We have worked in settings ranging from secondary to undergraduate to adult education to postgraduate programmes in English education and applied linguistics. We have taught both native and non-native speakers of English who have a variety of backgrounds. Our research has included looking at our own teaching practice as well as the experiences of students and lecturers working in other classrooms and institutions. Our sometimes – but not always – complementary and overlapping approaches and theoretical frameworks include writing as social practice, process writing approaches, and systemic functional linguistics.

OVERVIEW OF TEACHING ACADEMIC WRITING

The remaining five chapters of the book focus on broad issues related to student writing and the challenges facing lecturers in terms of introducing students to the writing conventions relevant to their disciplines, setting assignments, assessing student work, and using electronic communication to teach writing. In addition to discussing its main topic, each chapter includes Activities for teaching and doing academic writing. Throughout the book we use authentic examples from student writing. Where these have appeared in publications, we reference the sources. In other cases, we draw on our research projects, for which we have received students’ permission to cite their texts. We have tried to write these chapters so that they can largely be read on their own but we do refer readers to related issues discussed in other chapters. At the end of the book we offer an annotated bibliography of selected books

and papers which we consider to be particularly useful, which stands apart from the references that we cite in each chapter.

Chapter 2, 'Approaches to teaching writing', focuses on academic writing at a general level. It explores issues of general concern and offers practical approaches to the teaching of writing which can be used in both study/writing support sessions and within disciplinary contexts. It considers various ways in which 'argument' is understood and used in academic writing and discusses issues related to teaching students to construct different text types, use evidence, and draw on sources. It provides suggestions for students to develop awareness of the norms of the various text types they encounter in different disciplines. The chapter also covers various techniques for teaching writing processes, including prewriting activities, student journals, the stages of drafting an essay, and peer review.

Chapter 3, 'Writing for different disciplines', looks at the implications for student writing of the requirements of various disciplines. It identifies major text types and aspects of writing in four broad disciplinary areas: the sciences, the social sciences, humanities and arts, and the applied disciplines such as business and education. It explores ways of initiating students into appreciating the 'constructedness' of specific text types and their disciplinary differences, for example, the way in which different disciplines base their arguments on different types of evidence. The chapter emphasises ways in which discipline specialists can help students to become aware of academic writing requirements – both those that operate across disciplinary boundaries and those that are shaped by specific disciplinary paradigms and conventions.

Chapter 4, 'Planning the assessment of student writing', focuses on issues related to the design and assessment of writing assignments. Assessment practices vary across subjects and academic areas, as well as between individual lecturers, and requirements are not always made clear to students. Miscommunication between students and lecturers can result from factors including students' unfamiliarity with the conventions of academic assessment; their experiences of differing assessment practices between courses and between lecturers; differing cultural expectations; and differing language backgrounds. An important and problematic assessment issue that lecturers regularly face is plagiarism. The rise of the Internet has engendered ever-more sophisticated and widespread techniques of plagiarism. Yet what lecturers perceive as

‘cheating’ may stem from students’ lack of understanding of academic writing conventions, differing cultural models for citing experts, the results of collaborative learning, or students’ failure to reference adequately. Chapter 4 problematises the concept of plagiarism and offers suggestions for tackling it at different points in the assessment process.

Chapter 5, ‘Giving feedback on student writing’, addresses an important component of teaching writing. Higher education lecturers spend much time and energy in providing feedback to students on their writing. Feedback, whether written or spoken, is crucial in these ways: it can justify and explain marks awarded for a piece of writing; it can highlight the academic conventions within which students are expected to write; and it can suggest ways for students to improve their future writing. Given the range of purposes for providing feedback, it is important to understand which kinds of feedback practices are useful. Whilst much feedback is given, it may often be of little relevance to students, particularly to those least familiar with academic writing practices. Chapter 5 illustrates why widely used feedback practices often cause confusion rather than fulfilling lecturers’ aims of teaching students academic writing, and discusses ways in which feedback practices can offer students greater support.

Chapter 6, ‘Academic writing in an electronic environment’, focuses on the increasing use of electronic communication for teaching and learning writing in both local and distance contexts. Electronic tuition raises important issues related to forms of writing. Chapter 6 discusses the possibilities created by information technology for teaching and learning academic writing. The spectrum covered ranges from electronic mail at one end of technological interaction, to course websites and on-line conferencing at the other end.

NOTES

- 1 Throughout the book we use the term ‘lecturer’ to refer to teachers in higher education who are responsible for teaching a discipline area, and ‘tutor’ to refer to teachers who are responsible for writing, language or study skill support.
- 2 This debate is evident in developments such as funded projects on key skills in higher education, one of which is ‘communication’; the growth of discussion groups on writing in higher education in the UK, relating to both research and pedagogy; and conferences and research groups on academic literacies (e.g. the Writing Development in Higher Education conferences, the Academic Literacies group at the Institute of Education, London).

- 3 'New' universities in the UK are those which before 1992 were polytechnics but which since then can claim university status.
- 4 We use text type throughout the book to indicate that our principal focus is on the key text types – and their component parts – that students are asked to write in higher education. We have chosen not to use the word 'genre' because of the debates surrounding the meaning of this term within applied linguistics, a discussion of which is not central to our aims in the book.