



MICHIGAN SERIES IN ENGLISH FOR
ACADEMIC & PROFESSIONAL PURPOSES

Academic Writing for Graduate Students

ESSENTIAL TASKS AND SKILLS

3RD
EDITION

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Introduction to the Third Edition

The Changing Scene

The second edition of *Academic Writing for Graduate Students* (henceforth *AWG*) was published in 2004. In the ensuing eight years, many of the important trends we identified in that edition's Introduction—in North America and elsewhere—have developed further. Email and the internet are now nearly universal, especially since the spread of wireless technologies. Graduate degrees available or partly available online have been increasing rapidly. The American tradition of requiring doctoral students to take courses has been adopted and adapted by more and more countries. Co-authorship of papers written by graduate students and their professors and/or advisors continues to increase. Doctoral students are attending and presenting at more conferences and are doing so at earlier stages in their PhD programs. As a result of these trends, graduate students and junior researchers are much more networked than they were 20 years ago; indeed, the 2010 book by Lillis and Curry, *Academic Writing in a Global Context*, provides compelling evidence of the advantages today of operating within and through networks. Several other scholars have also been emphasizing that academic writing today is much more of a collaborative activity than it used to be. The growth of research groups, writing circles, close mentoring, and email have all contributed to our growing understanding that writing is increasingly embedded in social and professional contexts (e.g., Bhatia, 2004; Molle & Prior, 2008). Although this book focuses on academic writing, we also recognize that it is often mediated by academic speech.

Further, those with overall responsibility for graduate education, such as graduate schools, are offering more workshops for graduate students, many of whom are often concerned with strengthening communication skills in some way. Finally, the traditional distinction between native and non-native speakers of English continues to erode. In the research world, in particular, there are today increasing numbers of “expert users” of English who are not traditional native speakers of that language. This has given rise, in recent years, to the English as a Lingua Franca (ELF) phenomenon whereby these expert users, as well as those with lower English language proficiency, communicate with each other on matters of research, scholarly, or business

interest. One further piece of evidence for this trend is the increasing spread of English-medium post-secondary instruction at universities in non-Anglo-phone countries.

When *AWG* was originally published in 1994, the number of courses in academic writing for graduate students was both rather small and largely restricted to entering international graduate students. Nearly 20 years later, both the number and range of these courses have increased as graduate students move around the world in growing numbers and as recognition grows that increasing numbers of native speakers of English would welcome, for various reasons, some assistance with their academic writing. As part and parcel of these developments, research in English for Academic Purposes (EAP) has advanced, partly through dissertation-level studies on various aspects of academic discourse; leading examples of this trend are China, Iran, Italy, and Spain. It is clearly time for a third edition!

In the years between the previous edition and this one, there have also been changes in our personal circumstances. John officially retired in 2007, but he maintains a university office, interacts with doctoral students, and keeps busy as a researcher, materials writer, reviewer, guest lecturer, and conference speaker. Overall, he feels he is keeping up to date with events in the global world of EAP. Meanwhile, Chris has taken over and further developed the English Language Institute's advanced courses in dissertation writing and writing for publication. She also gives frequent workshops, both at Michigan and elsewhere, and is increasingly invited to speak at international conferences.

Approach and Organization

A third edition of an EAP textbook usually indicates that the first two have enjoyed some success. And this has been the case with *AWG*. As a result, we have largely retained the basic approach of the previous editions. This approach can be spelled out in this way.

- The book has evolved out of both research and teaching experience.
- It is as much concerned with developing academic *writers* as it is with improving academic *texts*.
- The book is conceived as providing assistance with writing *part-genres* (problem-solutions, methods, and discussions) and *genres* (book reviews and research papers).
- It is targeted at graduate students (although we have heard of its successful use with advanced undergraduates). These graduate students

may variously be internationals with limited experience writing academic English, “proficient users” with a first language other than English, and native speakers of English. The last group in particular may not need to pay as much attention to the *Language Focus* sections in this volume.

- The general approach is analytical and rhetorical: Users are asked to apply their analytical skills to the discourses of their chosen disciplines and to explore how effective academic writing is achieved. In effect, we are strong believers in this cycle, which is fashionably known as *rhetorical consciousness raising*:



- The tasks and activities are richly varied, ranging from small-scale language points to issues of how graduate students can best “position” themselves as junior researchers.
- The book is fairly fast paced, opening with a basic orientation and closing with writing an article for publication.
- With the help of the accompanying *Commentary*, scholars and students should be able to use this volume profitably on their own.

We have also largely retained the original eight-unit organization because nearly all the reports we have received suggest that users are happy with it.

- The first four units are essentially preparatory; they pave the way for the more genre-specific activities in later units.
- Unit One presents an overview of the considerations involved in successful academic writing, with a deliberate stress on early exposure to the concept of positioning.

- Units Two and Three deal with two overarching patterns in English expository prose: the movement from general to specific and the movement from problem to solution.
- Unit Four acts as a crucial link between the earlier and later units since it deals with how to handle interpretation and discussion of data.
- Units Five and Six then deal with writing summaries and critiques, respectively.
- Finally, Units Seven and Eight deal with constructing a real research paper—that is, one that attempts to make an original contribution to the field.

Changes in the Text

Within this retained basic approach and structure, there are, however, also a number of important changes. Many of the older sets of data and older texts have either been updated or replaced. Even so, in response to user pressure, we have kept a number of instructor “favorites,” such as the test-retest data in Unit Four. Although the range of disciplines represented remains large, we have, again in response to user requests, somewhat increased the material from the hard sciences and Engineering. Among other changes, an important one has been a sharp reduction in the attention to the grammar of definitions in Unit Two, which is now relegated to an appendix. The space created has allowed for a new closing section to this unit that deals with the kinds of specific-general texts that can be found in the humanities.

Throughout, new findings (both published and our own) from discourse analysis have been incorporated. Another important innovation has been our use of the Michigan Corpus of Upper-level Student Papers (MICUSP), which became freely available in 2009 (see www.elicorpora.info/). This corpus consists of an electronically searchable collection of 830 top-rated student papers at the University of Michigan, representing 16 disciplines and consisting of work submitted by final year undergraduates and graduate students in their first three years.

AWG has been designed as a first course in graduate-level writing and is most suited to the first two years of graduate education. For the later course work, there is *English in Today's Research World: A Writing Guide (ETRW)*, published by the University of Michigan Press in 2000. This has been replaced by some more specialized mini-volumes, all published by the University of Michigan Press (see www.press.umich.edu/esl/compsite/ETRW/).

As a result, *AWG* does not deal in depth with abstracts as a distinct part-genre, nor does it address free-standing literature reviews, writing introductions to term papers and other course work, or writing applications.

The Teaching Context

We have designed this textbook to be used by students who come from a broad range of disciplines. After all, this has been our primary experience as writing instructors at Michigan's English Language Institute. Even at our large research university, the logistic problems of organizing and staffing courses along disciplinary lines mean that such courses remain the exception rather than the rule. Although it is often believed that disciplinary courses are better or more efficient, it is our experience, especially with students in their second year or beyond, that a multidisciplinary class has several advantages over a monodisciplinary one. The former turns attention away from whether the information or content in a text is "correct" toward questions of rhetoric and language. In this way it encourages rhetorical consciousness-raising. It also leads to interesting group discussion among members who come from very different parts of the university. This kind of class can also create a special—and more tolerant and lighthearted—community among its members, since students are much less likely to be competing with others from their own departments.

Irrespective of whether the teaching context is multidisciplinary or not, *AWG* is a text that instructors should use selectively. Each unit has more material than can realistically be handled in a timely and efficient manner. Further, instructors should be encouraged to substitute activities and, more particularly, texts more suited to their own circumstances. In effect, we look upon our fellow instructors more as distant partners and collaborators in an educational enterprise rather than as people expected to obediently follow the course we have set out. In the same light, we have not tried to impose our own beliefs (which are by no means identical in every case) about how *AWG* should actually be taught. We have, therefore, relatively little to say about such matters as error analysis, peer feedback, task-based learning, or product-process approaches to teaching academic writing. So, rather than a traditional teacher's manual, *AWG* is supported by a companion volume carefully entitled *Commentary*. This consists of synopses of what each unit attempts to achieve, further discussion of certain points, and sample responses to the more controlled tasks. The *Commentary* should therefore

also be useful for scholars and students using *AWG* in self-study situations. In addition, and again in response to numerous requests, we have expanded the number of teaching suggestions, which are now placed at various points in each unit.

Thanks to Others

Finally, we turn to those who have helped us prepare this third edition. We would like to acknowledge the insights of all those who took the trouble to write and publish reviews of the second edition or to provide feedback to us directly (including colleagues Deborah DesJardins, Mindy Matice, and Julia Salehzadeh at the University of Michigan English Language Institute) or via Kelly Sippell at the University of Michigan Press. Then there are the hundreds of graduate students who have taken ELI writing courses over the last eight years and who have taught us much about what works and what does not. We have also been able to benefit from the evaluations of our workshops at the University of Michigan and elsewhere, wherein we experimented with parts of this volume. Finally, we want to thank the developmental editor who offered valuable feedback that has strengthened the textbook and commentary in significant ways.

As intimated in the previous paragraph, a particularly significant player in the emergence of this volume has been Kelly Sippell, the dynamic ELT editor at the University of Michigan Press, who not only provided enthusiastic encouragement, but also kept the pressure on when it mattered most. Chris would like to thank Glen, who again willingly endured the uncertainty of her schedule and picked up the slack so that this book could be completed. She also wants to thank Warren and Brian for their newfound interest in her books and her mom, Ursula, for her support. And not to be forgotten are Karl and Angie, who have realized that *AWG* is actually a rather useful resource that they can turn to in their own academic writing pursuits. John is grateful to Vi Benner for once again putting up with the distractions arising from his co-authoring at home yet another book-length manuscript, even though he is “supposed” to be retired. We also both thank Vi for her careful reading of the proofs.

JMS & CBF
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