"Academic Writing as the Departure Point the Writer has Chosen for His/Her Academic Career": A Book Review of Zhihui Fang's Demystifying Academic Writing: Genre, Moves, Skills, and Strategies

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Abstract

In the book, *Demystifying Academic Writing*, the author, Zhihui Fang, emphasizes the importance of improving the ability of graduate and undergraduate students, as well as early-career scholars, to write for academic purposes. Through a wide range of aspects of academic writing, adopting a functional linguistics perspective, he demonstrates how academic language can be used to think outside the box when it comes to typical tasks such as attracting readers, presenting information, constructing arguments, integrating perspectives, and organizing cross-genre and interdisciplinary texts for having participated in research fields. This well-referenced book is a valuable resource for academic writing as well as a strategic toolkit for readers who are writing for academic purposes, and it is highly recommended. Readers of this book will be inspired and energized to learn how to write in a variety of genres and in depth about a variety of topics.

Keywords
academic writing, cross-genre, functional linguistics, interdisciplinary text

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In the book, *Demystifying Academic Writing*, the author, Zhihui Fang, emphasizes the importance of improving the ability of graduate and undergraduate students, as well as early-career scholars, to write for academic purposes. Through a wide range of aspects of academic writing, adopting a functional linguistics perspective, he demonstrates how academic language can be used to think outside the box when it comes to typical tasks such as attracting readers, presenting information, constructing arguments, integrating perspectives, and organizing cross-genre and interdisciplinary texts for having participated in research fields. This well-referenced book is a valuable resource for academic writing as well as a strategic toolkit for readers who are writing for academic purposes, and it is highly recommended. Readers of this book will be inspired and energized to learn how to write in a variety of genres and in depth about a variety of topics.

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As someone who wants to be a successful academic writer and whose first language is not English, I think reading this book is like going on an academic journey in order to reach my goal of having a successful career in academic writing and publishing. This is one of the books I aspire to read as a thirst quencher on my path to becoming a true academic writer. In this book, I found that language was construed as an interlocking system of lexical and grammatical options for making meaning, rather than as a set of prescriptive rules and grammatical conventions to be followed.

In reading *Demystifying Academic Writing*, I was given the main overview of this book by Fang, in which he describes it as follows:

> One salient feature of this book is a functional focus on how language is used as a creative resource for presenting information, developing argument, infusing points of view, engaging readers, incorporating other people's ideas and voices, organizing discourse, and addressing audience needs in genre-specific ways. (p. xiii)

In his book, Fang shows the functional perspective by giving a thorough look at a wide range of aspects of academic writing. He covers the major writing genres in post-secondary education; relevant rhetorical moves; fundamental skills; language resources; strategies; and techniques for cultivating comprehensive writing ability. As a whole, the book is a great resource for people from a wide range of backgrounds who want to be good at academic writing

or publishing in general. He discusses six types of academic writing: reading response, book review, literature review, argumentative essay, empirical research article, and grant proposal. He addresses all of these types of writing. Fang's plan to organize this section of the book is to divide it into five parts: a general introduction; rhetorical moves of writing; a sample text analysis; a conclusion; and activities for thinking about what readers read. These organizations, above all, help readers understand the various types of writing; and then help them learn how to structure the various types of writing; and finally, understand the fundamentals of academic writing.

The word "genre" in Fang's book reminds me of Bazerman's and Miller's definition of the idea of genre as social action.

> Genres are not just forms. Genres are forms of life, ways of being. They are frames for social action. (Bazerman, 1997, p. 19)

> ...a rhetorically sound definition of genre must be centred not on the substance or form of discourse but on the action it is used to accomplish. (Miller, 1984, p. 151)

Miller's argument arrived at a crucial moment in North American composition and rhetoric: after rejecting the form-focused pedagogy of the mid-1900s, known as the "product approach," researchers and teachers in the 1970s focused on the individual writer's process, resulting in a sort of renaissance in the study and teaching of composition. By the mid-1980s, however, there was widespread dissatisfaction with the so-called "process approach," which was perceived to be based primarily on an overly broad cognitive theory of writing and, as a result, a failure to account for a broader social context (Par´e, 2014).

Because of their repetition, these categories (or genres) capture readers (Par'e, 2014). Genre influences writing by enforcing certain conventions, language, and structural standards (Hyland, 2003). Par'e (2014) asserts that "Everyone uses them, but almost no one pays attention to the nature of their construction" (p. A-85). To write well, a writer must understand the structure of the genre. Each genre has its own sense of genuineness, with distinct goals, structures, and forms. Writers should think about the genre in which they write, as well as what successful writing in that genre looks and feels like to the reader. Fang's discussion of writing comes to a close for him at this point.

> Writing is a complex and demanding process involving many factors, and the manner in which this process unfolds impacts the quality of the product you create at the end of the process. (Fang, 2021, p. 220)

Developing "expertise in academic writing," according to Fang's version, is a time-consuming and difficult process that can last for years and involves constant mental and emotional struggles. It is simply unrealistic to expect to become a good writer overnight, let alone a good writer for academic purposes, by attending a single workshop, taking a single course, reading a single book, or completing a single set of exercises. In short, to Fang, becoming proficient in academic writing takes time, effort, awareness, experience, reflection, stamina, and support.

Fang greatly shares his ideas and tips that, to be a prolific writer, one should foster writing habits that work differently from one to another. Fang adds that to be a good writer, one needs to know the topic or issue that she or he is talking about. To that end, one should read widely and thoroughly review journals, books, magazines, newspapers, and online resources (for example, blogs, websites, and YouTube). Fang (2021) asserts that "writing is a

process of making meaning through language (and other semiotic) choices" (p. 222). Because of this, Fang argues that being aware of how these choices make meaning allows a writer to present information, structure messages and add meaning, and position the reader in a way that fits the communication context while also adhering to discipline-approved discursive conventions.

Fang offers five additional suggestions for becoming a prolific writer.

Note how familiar grammatical resources are used in novel ways. This means that the writer will start coming across some familiar words or phrases used in a way she or he has never seen or tried before while reading. Therefore, the writer should pause, read the sentence again, write it down on a notepad, think about what the word/structure means and how it works, and be ready to use the word/structure in his or her own writing.

Observe how the same meaning is expressed in different ways. Fang asserts that giving the writer a lot of different ways to say the same thing allows her or him to show that he or she has good stylistic and rhetorical skills when writing academically.

Be curious about new words, phrases, or other grammatical structures. It is possible that the writer will want to look up a new word or phrase or a novel grammatical structure while reading in a dictionary or using Google to find more information.

Compare how texts are similarly or differently structured within and across genres. Fang asserts that the structure of texts of the same genre written by different authors or for different audiences may differ. The structure and language of genre texts also differ. He suggests how authors structure their messages, develop lines of reasoning, quote and reference others' work, incorporate points of view, integrate visuals, facilitate sentence and paragraph transitions, and use punctuation while reading. The writer can also compare your language choices with those of experts in the same field and think about how different words and grammar choices can change the meaning, style, flow, focus, and effectiveness (2021).

In the last great idea, Fang (2021) suggests the writer should *play with new language patterns.* Fang articulates that when a writer relates to a new language pattern at the word, phrase, sentence, or discourse level, she or he may want to experiment with it by attempting to use it in their own writing. Imitation is one of the most effective ways to improve one's writing. Even accomplished writers study how other writers construct a story, a poem, or an essay and then try it on their own to learn. It is important to note that imitating is not the same as plagiarizing because the former focuses on structure, style, and craft, whereas the latter focuses on content. This happens when the writer's style and structure match the thing they are imitating, so it ends up becoming their own.

Writing, according to Fang, is a recursive process that includes planning, outlining, drafting, revising, polishing, and submitting or publishing. As noted American writing researcher Weaver (2010, p. 190) points out:

> …the writing process is recursive rather than linear: we draft, but stop to brainstorm ideas or even to edit; we write a snippet that doesn't ft here, but might go somewhere else later; we backtrack to revise and edit…before moving forward to draft more of the piece. Of course the actual process of writing is still more chaotic than that and, in fact, I suspect that chaos theory might offer the best explanation of this predictably unpredictable process.

In terms of overcoming cultural differences, Fang recounts his experiences in China, where he worked as a professor, in which he describes how he overcame the cultural and intellectual differences between China and the West. Non-native English speakers can benefit from reading these stories, as they have had similar experiences. In this way, Fang explains the

publishing process, manuscript review, and many ways to improve the chances that a manuscript will be accepted for publication in a very clear way as well.

As my review/essay shows, I highly recommend this book. As opposed to classical grammar, Fang's work emphasizes how vocabulary and grammatical choices are related in academic writing, such as attracting readers, advancing arguments, and arranging writing across genres and disciplines. He views language as a tool for meaning construction and recommends that readers focus on language choices in major academic genres rather than generic grammatical norms. This might help readers who do not speak the same language get over language barriers and finish writing projects by using language that is real, relevant, and useful.

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Elih Sutisna Yanto is a reviewer for the *Journal of Applied Research in Higher Education*, published by EMERALD. In the Indonesian EFL context, Elih and Junjun Muhamad Ramdani have developed "Exploratory Practice," a form of practitioner research in which learners, as well as teachers, are encouraged to investigate their own learning and teaching practices while concurrently practicing the target language. Elih is a board member of the Exploratory Practice Indonesian Community (EPiC) and faculty member of teacher training and education at Universitas Singaperbangsa Karawang, Indonesia. He can be contacted through e-mail at elih.sutisna@fkip.unsika.ac.id.

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