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# "Hidden" Features of Academic Paper Writing

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# "Hidden" Features of Academic Paper Writing

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Brian Street

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This paper describes the development of a set of working concepts to enable students and their professors to address issues involved in the writing of academic papers. It draws upon recent theoretical turns in the fields of Writing in the Disciplines (WiD), Genre Studies and Academic Literacies, and considers whether and how such theory can be adapted to practice. Whereas dominant models of student writing (ESP; ESL) have tended to emphasise formulaic lists of things to be covered, usually in terms of the structure of the essay (e.g., introduction; theory; methods; data), this approach focuses on the more hidden features that are called upon in judgments of academic writing that often remain implicit. The paper describes how, during a literacy course at GSE, a table of terms was drawn up for making explicit the criteria used for assessing and reviewing academic papers. In the first instance this framework was applied to the chapters of an edited book, with particular respect to the opening sections, using a typology of "vignettes, personal, declarative." The terms in the hidden features table as a whole were then used to review drafts of students' assignments for the course. The paper concludes with some student responses, and the implications for wider applications in support of academic writing are considered.

## Introduction

In graduate classes on literacy (EDUC724), and on language and power (EDUC917) at the University of Pennsylvania Graduate School of Education (GSE), I as course tutor (professor), in liaison with the students, developed a set of working concepts to enable us to address issues involved in students' writing of assignment drafts. Since the students were mostly from the doctoral programme in GSE (although some were MA students), the main assignments we addressed were those required for doctoral work, such as the final assignment for the language and power course, a 4-5,000 word essay to be handed in after the completion of the course. We did also have in mind the first drafts of doctoral dissertations that most of the students would shortly be required to write, and indeed some students were already at this stage and were able to advise their

colleagues on what was involved. We drew upon recent theoretical turns in the fields of Writing in the Disciplines (WiD), Genre Studies and Academic Literacies, and considered whether and how theory could be adapted to practice. Whereas dominant models of student writing (ESP; ESL – see below) have tended to emphasise formulaic lists of things to be covered, usually in terms of the structure of the essay (e.g., introduction, theory, methods), this approach focused on the more *hidden features* that are called upon in judgments of academic writing that often remain implicit. I was particularly concerned with the hidden criteria that I know are used by supervisors, by assessors for conference papers and by journal reviewers. I wanted to make these features explicit so that writers could anticipate what their readers were going to say.

We developed these features in what we hoped were less formulaic and more interactive ways, drawing upon broader aspects of the social practice of academic writing and recognising the importance of discipline specific rather than generic approaches (see below). In the class we discussed and developed a list of hidden features such as *voice, stance* and the “*so what?*” question, which are laid out in Table 1, as examples of the criteria in question. The final list emerged from the discussion, although I as tutor had presented an early draft and talked through many of the features. Each student was called upon to provide the class with a written handout of draft introductory pages of their proposed assignment for the course – a 5,000 word essay to be finally handed in after the end of the course. In the class, students placed the pages electronically onto a shared screen, which could be accessed by tracking changes. A keyboard was passed around the class and different members entered comments as the discussion on the hidden features proceeded. In this way a number of features of writing and feedback were engaged with and these brought out the criteria for writing the features that I had introduced: namely talk about the text, written feedback by the tutor and by colleagues, and responses by the writer to such feedback. In this paper I will locate this procedure in the larger context of work in the field of academic writing and then detail the different features that emerged and how they worked in practice. I have been helped in this process by one of the class students, Sarah Lipinoga, who has provided comments on the written paper that complement those made during the class discussions. I hope that this account will contribute to the ongoing dialogue in this field in both theory and practice and I look forward to feedback from both students and faculty regarding the application of this process and the features that emerged.

### Approaches to Student Writing in Higher Education (HE)

A detailed account of different approaches to writing at university in the USA, Australia and the UK has recently been provided by Russell, Lea, Parker, Street and Donahue (forthcoming). Here I call briefly upon that and other sources to signal the themes that we took account of in the classes at Penn, as we attempted to develop a language of description for making explicit what we felt were often hidden features of the writing process and in particular the criteria that those in power would use to assess such pieces in the academic context.

In the USA, composition courses have been compulsory for most students for more than a century, as described in helpful detail by David Russell (1991) in his book where he shows how the term *Writing Across the Disciplines* (WAC) was established as an academic discipline in the late 1970s. (Please read Russell et al., forthcoming for further elaboration.) Originally, cognitive theory was used to explain the processes of writing but from the mid-1980s, linguistic and ethnographic studies identified writing as genre-based to be understood as social practice (e.g., Bazerman, 1988; Berkenkotter & Huckin, 1995). Genre theory recognises that a) there is a variety of discourse communities with their own norms and conventions for constructing and debating knowledge, and b) that texts vary linguistically according to their purpose and context. The *genre approach* was developed in Australia in the 1980s (e.g., Halliday & Hasan, 1985; Martin, 2000) although versions of genre have also been developed in the USA (Bazerman, 2004, 2007; Prior, 1998; Russell, 1991). It is based on systemic functional linguistics and, in pedagogic contexts, has often been taken to require explicit teaching of linguistic features of particular text types in relation to their social functions. In this approach, the teacher plays a “visible and interventionist role” (Martin, 2000, p. 124). The phases of the genre-based teaching and learning model (modelling / deconstruction of a text, joint construction and independent construction) require different degrees of teacher control (Martin, 2000, p. 131). In the USA the approach has generally been interpreted more broadly, and genre approaches have been linked with cultural-historical activity approaches in order to theorize writing in the disciplines and to guide practice (Berkenkotter & Huckin, 1995; Russell, et al., 2007). The approach is also related to social constructionist theory (e.g., Bizzell, 1982) where the concept of discourse community is central (Swales, 1990). Writing is a purpose-driven communication in the social context of the academic discourse community (Hyland, 1999, 2006; Ivanc, 2004, p. 234).

In the UK, the *Academic Literacies* (AcLits) model was developed by Lea and Street (1998), drawing on the theoretical framework of *New Literacy Studies* (Gee, 1990; Street, 1984, 1995). The model recognises academic writing as social practice within the given institutional and disciplinary context, and (perhaps more than the US *Writing in Discipline* approach) highlights the influence of factors such as power and authority on student writing. In the development of this model Lea and Street conducted an

empirical research project in two very different universities in the UK, in which they examined student writing against a background of institutional practices, power relations and identities. Rather than frame their work in terms of “good” and “poor” writing, they suggested that any explanation needed to examine faculty and student expectations around writing without making any judgments about which practices were deemed most appropriate. Findings from their research suggested fundamental gaps between student and faculty understandings of the requirements of student writing, providing evidence at the level of epistemology, authority and contestation over knowledge, rather than at the level of technical skill, surface linguistic competence and cultural assimilation.

Based on analysis of their research data, Lea and Street (1998) explicated three models of student writing. These they termed *study skills*, *academic socialisation* and *academic literacies*. The study skills model is based on the assumption that mastery of the correct rules of grammar and syntax, coupled with attention to punctuation and spelling, will ensure student competence in academic writing; it is, therefore, primarily concerned with the surface features of text. In contrast the academic socialisation model assumes students need to be acculturated into the discourses and genres of particular disciplines and that making the features and requirements of these explicit to students will result in their becoming successful writers. The third model, academic literacies (AcLits), is concerned with meaning making, identity, power and authority and foregrounds the institutional nature of what “counts” as knowledge in any particular academic context. It is similar in many ways to the academic socialization model except that it views the processes involved in acquiring appropriate and effective uses of literacy as more complex, dynamic, nuanced, situated, and involving both epistemological issues and social processes including power relations among people and institutions, and social identities. In some respects the third model, academic literacies, subsumes many of the features of the other two. Lea and Street pointed out that the models are not presented as mutually exclusive and that each should be seen as encapsulating the other. Nevertheless they argued that it is the AcLits model which is best able to take account of the nature of student writing in relation to institutional practices, power relations and identities, in short, to consider the complexity of meaning making which the other two models fail to provide. The explication of the three models proposed by Lea and Street has been drawn upon very widely in the literature on teaching and learning across a range of Higher Education (HE) contexts (e.g., Thesen & van Pletzen, 2006, on South Africa) and calls for a more in-depth understanding of student writing and its relationship to learning across the academy, thus offering an alternative to deficit models of learning and writing based on autonomous models of literacy. Academic literacies, for instance, has been a useful “critical frame” for identifying shortcomings

in the current provision at UK universities (Lea & Street, 2006; Lillis, 2006, p. 33). However, there is still much to do in developing the pedagogic implications of these research and theoretical approaches (cf. Lillis, 2006; Lillis & Scott, 2008). One implication that is emerging is that, unlike genre-based writing pedagogy, the pedagogic implication of the findings is that writing is learned “implicitly through purposeful participation, not through instruction” (Ivanic, 2004, p. 235). This would correspond in Lea and Street’s models to the academic socialisation approach, according to which the role of the teacher would be to provide opportunities for learners to participate in meaningful socially situated literacy events with relevant social goals (Ivanic, 2004). However, Lea and Street have drawn attention to the limitations of this academic socialisation perspective and would argue that an AcLits perspective offers a broader take on what is involved in student writing and faculty feedback.

Whilst the theories and models discussed so far situate the teaching of academic writing in the discipline, there is another approach in which writing is taught generically to students from a wide variety of disciplines. The approach is common in the fields of *English for Academic Purposes* (EAP) and *English as a Second Language* (ESL), but is also used to provide academic writing support to native speakers of English, usually in central learning support units. The approach is based on the assumption that there are common features in academic writing that can be usefully taught to students independently of their discipline. Called the “study skills” approach by AcLits researchers (Lea & Street, 1998), it has been criticised for a) dealing only with surface linguistic features, b) shifting the responsibility for supporting students from the subject tutors, who define and assess the writing tasks, to agents outside the discipline, and c) neglecting the relationship between writing and the construction of knowledge in the discipline (Mitchell, 2006). The necessity of teaching writing within the discipline has continually been stressed by researchers of disciplinary genres (Hyland, 2001; Prior, 1988).

The model indicated in Table 1 was based upon these theoretical perspectives with particular focus on the AcLits model but also takes into account other models and traditions. I will now follow through how it was made use of in the class and where it was intended to support students beginning to write a course assignment that would eventually feed into the wider dissertation process. My aim here is to expose the model and the associated practice to wider critical gaze and feedback.

Table 1

*"Hidden" Features of Academic Paper Writing*

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**Framing**

Genre  
Audience

**Contribution / "so what?"**

To knowledge  
To field  
To future directions / research

**Voice**

"Voice refers to the capacity to make oneself understood as a situated subject... Bourdieu's concept of habitus can be useful ... provided we see habitus as ethnographically grounded, i.e., as allowing for the situated, performed subjectivities... this addresses" (Blommaert, 2005, p. 222).

"Who am I as I write this book? I am not a neutral, objective scribe conveying the objective results of my research impersonally in my writing. I am bringing to it a variety of commitments based on my own interests, values, beliefs which are built up from my own history..." (Ivanic, 1998, p. 1).

**Stance**

Person/ Agency  
Reflexivity  
"... in presenting informational content, writers also adopt interactional and evaluative positions. Stance refers to the ways that writers project themselves into their texts to communicate their integrity, credibility, involvement, and a relationship to the subject matter and their readers. I therefore express a writer's socially defined persona, the created personality put forth in the act of communicating" (Hyland, 1999, p. 99-101).

**Signalling**

Setting  
Theory  
Method

**Structure**

Opening  
    Vignette  
    Personal  
    Declarative  
Setting  
Theory  
Methods  
Conclusions

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### Framing

We began by considering what kind of text was being produced by students in this class and what was its purpose. Here two concepts from the literature were helpful, *genre* and *audience*. We discussed the different meanings of genre (see above), especially as between Australian and US perspectives but mainly at this point wanted to take a broader view that simply asked where the particular assignment was located institutionally and who would be reading it. The language and power course was part of a graduate programme preparing students to move on to their doctoral dissertations. It was credit bearing, and the grade would count towards an overall profile that would determine whether the student was ready to move on to the dissertation stage, in this case setting up a committee and writing a research design. The assignment for the literacy course was for a 4-5,000 word essay that would demonstrate that the student had taken on board some of the issues raised during the ten session course, could write their own account of such a process and demonstrate readiness to move on to longer pieces of writing that the dissertation itself will require. The assignment was, then, clearly different from a narrower “report” (final paper) or a longer actual chapter of the dissertation. Thus some of the criteria used for assessment would be the writer’s ability to summarise theory and method succinctly, to reference clearly and with sufficient detail apt sources and to then apply some of the ideas from such sources and from class discussions to their own project or question. We discussed these issues and used these criteria for then assessing first drafts of fellow students’ essays, as they were presented to the class. One way of addressing these considerations was to look at the openings of the assignment essay.

### Openings

In looking at such *openings* we identified three different types, *vignette*, *personal*, and *declarative*, recognising of course that there are others but noting that these were what emerged in this context and out of the source materials used for the class. These headings emerged to some extent from an in-class scan of one of the edited volumes on the course, *Travel Notes from the New Literacy Studies: Case Studies in Practice* (Pahl & Rowsell, 2006). As class tutor, I went through some of the openings of the chapters in this volume as case studies for the different ways that authors in the field might begin a piece of writing (not at all as required “models” of what should be done or even as exemplars of “good practice” but simply as indicative of the sort of thing that is to be found in this area of study). Below I detail examples of these openings before then addressing some of the discussions:

Ch 1 Jackie Marsh: "Since the early 1980s, numerous studies have offered valuable insights into the literacy practices undertaken by young children in the home" (p. 19).

Ch 2 Donna Alvermann: "This is a case study of an ongoing e-mail discussion between an eighth grade student named Ned and a graduate research assistant named Kevin" (p. 39).

Ch 3 Julia Davies: "In this chapter I use teenaged Wiccan Websites as a case study to help explore the concept of on-line space" (p. 57).

Ch 4 Michelle Knobel and Colin Lankshear: "Interest in the extent to which texts (and the larger practice in which they are embedded) can and do cross sites is by now quite well established within literacy studies" (p. 72).

Ch 5 Hilary Janks and Barbara Comber: "The northern suburbs of Johannesburg, South Africa are home to middle class predominantly white families. Their large gardens give "Johannesburg the distinction of being the largest man-made urban forest ...[excerpt from website]" (p. 95).

Ch 6 Pippa Stein and Lynne Slonimsky: "In this chapter we present data from an ethnographic study of multi-model literacies involving two family members and girl children, all of whom are high achievers in school literacy" (p. 118).

Ch 7 Cathy Kell [lengthy quote from Appadurai]: "Appadurai's words go to the heart of a central problematic of our times: the relation between local and global" (p. 147).

Ch 8 Sue Nichols:

Mrs P: *Put your green hats on, I'm trying really hard to think but you know my problem?*

Child: *Not enough green hat?*

Mrs P: *I didn't have a lot of green hat thinking when I went to school, but I know you do* (Researcher's fieldnotes).

"Success in the knowledge economy demands that corporations and other market players have the ability to generate knowledge which can be commodified" (p. 173).

Ch 9 Jennifer Rowsell: "This chapter is a case study of publishing corporations crossing into classroom sites" (p. 195).

Ch 10 Brian Street and Dave Baker: "We would like to put on the agenda for those discussing multimodal literacies, the issue of multimodal numeracies" (p. 219).

Ch 11 Elaine Millard: "This chapter draws from four particular cases of teacher/ pupil interactions in which each of the teachers, who were at the time involved in separate small-scale research projects into home influences on children's understanding, supported their classes' learning by drawing on individual pupils' informal knowledge to support formal and, indeed, national curriculum requirements" (p. 234).

Afterword Deborah Brandt and Katie Clinton: "We are thrilled by a volume of studies that brings together two vital strands of literacy research, New Literacy Studies and multimodality, to explore how the two perspectives challenge and complement each other" (p. 254).

The reader may take some interest and indeed pleasure in tracking these different openings and considering how they themselves would respond. In the class we went through different responses and different questions, with an eye to what we could learn about our own writing from these small examples. We wondered which openings were engaging, so that we wanted to read more. Did we trust the writer that they would get to the point soon enough for us to continue reading? Did the use of first person feel engaging but at the same time sufficiently authoritative for us to stay with them? Or did people prefer the more detached, "academic" openings that explained something in the field, again leaving us to decide whether we trusted the author to get to some concrete data soon enough to maintain our interest? Four chapters began by using first person – "In this chapter I use," (Ch 3); "We present data," (Ch 6); "We would like," (Ch 10); "We are thrilled," (Afterword). Three made the subject of the first verb the chapter itself – "this chapter is a case study of ..." (Ch 2 & Ch 9); "this chapter draws from ..." (Ch 11). Two were what we termed vignettes, accounts of something in the author's experience that did not immediately signal the link to the book's theme and title, but left the reader to make the assumption that such a link would soon enough be drawn, as in Chapter 5 on the trees in the suburbs of Johannesburg, and Chapter 8 on "green hats." This leaves a further three that begin with more "academic" voice, telling us about the state of thinking in the field – "Since the early 1980s, numerous studies have offered valuable insights ..." (Ch 1); "Interest in the extent to which texts .. can ..." (Ch 4); and "Appadurai's words go to the heart of a central problematic ..." (Ch 7). We roughly divided these openings into three text types, of vignette, personal and declarative, and mainly discussed how the writer would hope to keep the reader's attention, to gain trust that they would "get to the point" and establish the link to the overall theme and title of the book.

All of these strategies would be important resources for students in the class as they produced pieces of writing in the immediate context for the course tutor but soon and perhaps more weightily for those assessing whether they should go ahead to set up a dissertation committee.

Yet many of these issues had not necessarily been signalled in the more explicit attention to “writing support” to be found in the manuals and textbooks or in the more formal linguistically based accounts in the EAP/ESL literature. From the perspective of one of the students in the class, the following was also at play:

Final papers within coursework where professors emphasize the incorporation and application of a shared corpus of knowledge often do not offer graduate students feedback on these aspects of their writing, leaving “hidden” how to fine-tune our writing for a broader, less familiar and more critical academic audience that we must address in conference presentations and journal publications (S. Lipinoga, personal communication, October, 2008).

In that sense, some of the features discussed here – for instance, whether the reader would be “willing to wait” to be told the point of a vignette or whether a complex “academic” declarative statement would be unpacked – remain hidden when students are advised on their writing. It was these hidden features that the class focussed on and that we discussed as we put up on the screen examples of students’ own openings to their course assignment. The class discussion made use of the terms we had evolved to describe the openings in the *Travel Notes* book, and we then went on to consider some of the more known criteria that readers of postgraduate work would bring to bear. Again these might not be so obvious to students just entering that zone of postgraduate writing, thus the importance of making them explicit in the discussion.

### Contribution

Another fundamental question we emphasized was the *contribution* of the piece of writing, the “so what?” question. Students’ writing prior to postgraduate level is less likely to ask such questions, assuming instead that they were simply being asked to “say what they know” about a field, to demonstrate their knowledge. As they move towards doctoral-level work, however, they are beginning to be expected to add something to what is known, not just summarise it. We again subdivided these kinds of questions, addressing what the contribution of a piece of writing might be: *to knowledge, to a field, and to future directions / research*. This sub-division was seen by some students as particularly helpful, not just “so what?” but how “so what?” could (and should) apply to many different levels or areas. As one of the students says, “I had not really thought about the ‘so what?’ as different levels of contribution (knowledge, field, future directions) before and find these distinctions make the sometimes overwhelming question of why my work should matter much more approachable” (S. Lipinoga, personal communication, October, 2008).

The opening to Chapter 10 of the *Travel Notes* book, for instance, made explicit that the authors considered they were bringing approaches known in one field – multimodality – to another field where they had been less frequently addressed – numeracy. This led to a new coinage, *multimodal numeracies*. The opening of Chapter 5 on trees in Johannesburg was less explicit in its contribution but as we discussed in the class, given the context and the authors, the reader could be confident that the “so what?” question would shortly be addressed. And this is, indeed, done through explicit discourse markers that link the vignette for the reader with the theme of the book. For example, as children in Grades 2/3 were given the “tree project as part of a ‘literacy and social power’ curriculum unit” (Janks & Comber, 2006, p. 96), their recognition of the density of trees in middle class suburbs was seen to be part of their recognition of aspects of neighbourhood that they were asked to write about, and their writing tells us more about those children’s education. Literacy, then, is at the heart of the project, and the opening about trees did not leave us waiting long. Similarly, the author of the “green hats” vignette in Chapter 8 soon comes to explain, “In this chapter I will be tracing a discourse of thinking by following a particular technology for producing thinking subjects – the Thinking Hats approach is based on the categorisation of thinking into discrete cognitive orientations” (p. 174). And indeed, all of the chapters we had considered did provide some such explicit account of the orientation and contribution of the piece, either from the outset as in Chapter 10 or within a few paragraphs as in Chapter 8.

So students in the class, as they began their essays, might decide which genre of opening to employ but were then well aware that they had to address the “so what?” question fairly soon in their exposition. Again Lipinoga comments:

The “so what?” questions also proved exceptionally useful for helping students determine what to include and remove from their papers by forcing the author to see how each piece connected with and enhanced his or her “so what?” These suggestions and questions became a central part of the feedback sessions and pushed authors to answer what precisely their essay would address, why it mattered and how each point added to the construction of it,” (S. Lipinoga, personal communication, October, 2008).

Having started with openings in this way, the class then moved on to use concepts taken more directly from the fields of writing support and academic literacies summarised above. I consider below the concepts of voice, stance and signalling as they became salient in this class, with a view to arguing their importance more generally as students move from stages of writing where the criteria appear more apparent to those where they seem more hidden.

## Voice

Blommaert (2005, p. 222) states, "Voice refers to the capacity to make oneself understood as a situated subject." He links this to work by Bourdieu, whose concept of habitus, he claims, "can be useful ... provided we see habitus as ethnographically grounded, i.e., as allowing for the situated, performed subjectivities... this addresses" (p. 222). So, the writer is establishing who they are as a situated subject when they present their essay / dissertation, etc. They are not just presenting data in some supposedly objective way, as many students may have been led to believe up to this stage (and beyond) but rather, their own habitus is there in the text. As Ivanic states in the preface to her book *Writing and Identity* (1998, p. 1):

Who am I as I write this book? I am not a neutral, objective scribe conveying the objective results of my research impersonally in my writing. I am bringing to it a variety of commitments based on my own interests, values, beliefs which are built up from my own history...

These concepts, then, of voice, habitus, identity, provided an external source of ideas for students in the class developing their writing, as they enabled the discussion to range outwards from the particular task to larger issues associated with academic literacies and then back to the specific text under consideration. A similar move was identified with reference to the notion of *stance*, which to some extent overlaps with voice but which has evoked particular research approaches in the field of applied linguistics and, as we shall see below, in particular corpus linguistics.

Ken Hyland provides a helpful way of describing and analysing the academic writing process by documenting the ways in which academics can be seen to write in different contexts. Stance, for him,

refers to the ways that writers project themselves into their texts to communicate their integrity, credibility, involvement, and a relationship to the subject matter and their readers. It therefore expresses a writer's socially defined persona, the created personality put forth in the act of communicating (1999, pp. 99-101).

Similarly to Ivanic and Blommaert he argues that "in presenting informational content, writers also adopt interactional and evaluative positions" (p. 101). In his research he collected corpora of academic writing from academic journals in social science, humanities and natural sciences and noted the linguistic markers of stance that were used in these different fields. His main finding was that even where authors attempted to argue that they were not adopting a stance, not taking a position with respect to their data which remained objective and detached, in fact they were

always signalling issues of integrity, credibility, etc. with respect to the data and their relationship to it. For the students in the literacy class the ideological point probably did not need to be made (although some said they had spent most of their academic career being subjected to “truth” claims), but what Hyland contributed was a more sophisticated linguistic account of the ways in which claims were asserted and the author’s position inscribed in the text. So, they could now address these issues in their own writing as they produced drafts of the term paper and subjected them to the view of fellow students, alerted to the nature of credibility claims and authorial stance. Hyland’s work “also provided students with a clear framework and vocabulary to discuss the wording in each others’ drafts, to question and control the levels of certainty we wished to exert within our own writing” (S. Lipinoga, personal communication, October, 2008). Again we were making very explicit what is often handled at the level of implicit assumption and enabling the writer to perhaps take more control of what they were laying claim to and how their reader might respond.

### Signalling

Much of what we were engaged with above needed to be signalled at various points in the text so that the reader could track the development of an argument, and the consistency with which the writer was presenting his or her voice and stance. So, although openings provided a neat concrete way of discussing many of the issues raised, it was in the body of the text, often in more hidden ways, that the key criteria to be brought to bear on the essay would be invoked. Here it was a matter of referring forwards or backwards to the same argument, sometimes using the same terms even at the risk of “repetition,” something students were often very wary of, perhaps because of a more “literary” approach to writing when they had been at school (cf. Medway, 2005). So Rowsell, in the *Travel Notes* book, reminds the reader occasionally of her opening argument, that there are *crossings* between publishing corporations and classroom sites. In the second section of her paper she provides a heading “Crossing as a Heuristic Tool,” and later, after providing some ethnographic data, she summarises her findings as “Case Study of Local Crossings,” “Multimodal Crossings,” etc. Likewise, Nichols returns at various points to the “hats” she introduced us to in her opening vignette, whilst Kell, having taken us through a complex series of data strips, returns to her opening claim from Appadurai and challenges the distinction between “local and global” (p. 166). These lexical and discursive repetitions offer the reader signposts through the text, as they weave through complex arguments and ideas. Put this simply it might seem obvious, but working through the texts with students using them to think about their own writing, this signposting stood out as a well-worked strategy by experienced writers who are suf-



ficiently confident about repetition, marking and making explicit that they are indeed able to make clear that which is otherwise obscure. Again this might not seem to be a surface feature of writing support but in this context, its value became apparent.

### Structure

Manuals for writing at postgraduate level will often set out a structure for a dissertation, listing features that need to be taken into account. The obvious ones here are *theory*, *methods*, *data* and *conclusions*. Such terms tend to be the ones that are put up front as the key to good thesis writing, but they can, however, become restrictive if they simply provide the headings for different sections of the dissertation required for masters and doctoral levels, as though each one had to follow a regularised sequence. In contrast, the class discussed here attempted to track ways in which such themes might be incorporated into more integral and sophisticated ways of organising structure. The data chapters, for instance, need not be called “data” but could instead be labelled according to local terms in the site studied, and some of the data might actually be called upon quite early in the dissertation to provide concrete illustration for claims regarding theory and methods. The trees, green hats, multimodal numeracies and uses of local and global that we have seen above might, then, all provide headings that subsume the more mechanistic ones of theory, method and data. According to S. Lipinoga this was useful for students in that “by looking at articles we liked and that have a similar approach, we came to see the sundry ways to organize the structure of our own papers, with an eye toward what is easier and more difficult to follow as a reader” (personal communication, October, 2008).

### Conclusion

One feature of the five-paragraph essay, so beloved of some writing teachers in US schools, is that the essay must have a “conclusion.” But as students move to doctoral level and start writing articles for publication, they learn to develop subtler strategies for rounding up what they have had to say. One reason for this is the recognition that perhaps the project has not ended just because it is now being reported on. Maybe it is the future that should be signalled rather than what the term “conclusion” seems to imply, the past. Janks and Comber, for instance, begin the final paragraph of their chapter in the *Travel Notes* book by admitting, “Our project is far from over,” as they talk about future “connections” they hope to see across “transnational communities” (2006, p. 115). And if we were to track the discourse of the various chapters’ closings in the way we did their openings, we would find



much pointing forward— “there is a need for further research,” (Ch 7); “There is great scope here for further research,” (Ch 10); “Not There Yet” (Ch 2). And the very last sentence of the book uses the future tense to mark that its conclusion is indeed pointing forward: “With its steady eye on literacy in its particulars, NLS [New Literacy Studies] not only forces attention to the ideological meanings of literacy but cumulatively will be able to tell the story of ideological transformations in those meanings over time” (p. 258). The lexis, transformations and time, and the grammar “will be able to tell,” (point us forward) well beyond any static “conclusion.” That is how I would like to “end” this paper, as a contribution perhaps to forward thinking, offering ways in which both theory and practice in the field of writing might be taken on into our own future classrooms and papers; if it is seen in this light then it will have (as English nicely offers through its future perfect tense) made a contribution. From this point of view it is appropriate and indeed integral to the whole project and its contribution, to conclude with a quotation from S. Lipinoga, as she comments on the contextual factors that facilitated this peer/tutor electronic group-session feedback.

As students came from a range of disciplines within the broader umbrella of education (history, reading/writing/literacy, linguistics, etc.) this process made us confront our own assumptions or norms of “correct” academic writing in terms of these different features and to make explicit to our peers why we were adapting them in certain ways. In addition, this process makes (student) authors feel vulnerable and could be intimidating; yet a class atmosphere where everyone would eventually be in the spotlight of sharing their own work as well as offering feedback to others helped ease that tension and engage the group in collaborative, constructive feedback. And of course, the features gave the group a collective vocabulary to make explicit the questions or critiques we had—instead of subconsciously feeling that something was unclear, it helped us specify in others’ and our own writing exactly why it was unclear and discuss it in meaningful ways (personal communication, October, 2008).

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## “HIDDEN” FEATURES OF ACADEMIC WRITING

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