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Supporting Academic Writing Practices in Postgraduate Studies

A theoretical and practice-based overview of academic writing support approaches and initiatives

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A *sourcebook* of academic writing support approaches and initiatives

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A more detailed and in-depth account of the information contained in this source book can be accessed in the corresponding extended text: "Supporting academic writing practices in postgraduate studies: a theoretical and practical overview". *(Available at: http://www.ru.ac.za/cpgs/)*

Note on contributors

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Thanks also go to Professor Chrissie Boughey (Acting Deputy Vice Chancellor: Academic and Student Affairs) for allowing the Centre for Postgraduate Studies access to, and use of, her academic writing workshop programme and for being a 'critical friend' in this project.

1   See the University of Minnesota's Writing-Enriched Curriculum at: http://wec.umn.edu/

2   See the Knight Institute for Writing in the Disciplines at Cornell University:
      http://www.arts.cornell.edu/knight_institute/

3   Full details of the Pomodoro technique can be accessed via: http://pomodorotechnique.com/get-started/

4   Acknoweldgement to Matt (IWR Masters, digital) for his mind map contribution

5   A 'writing circle' is one kind of writing support pedagogy, based on a system of peer review. This pedagogy is elaborated on in the ''Situated Postgraduate Writing Pedagogies'' section.

6   The scholar category of ''non-English speaking background (NESB)'' in Case Study 2 and 3, as well as Section 3 'Writing Consultations', are directly quoted from the papers in question; they are neither endorsed by, nor form part of the lexicon of the Centre for Postgraduate Studies.

7   Writing advice on the blog can be accessed at: http://www.phd2published.com/topics/writing/

8   Blog can be accessed at: http://thesiswhisperer.com/

9   Blog can be accessed at: http://patthomson.net/

10   Full blog post can be accessed at: https://medium.com/advice-and-help-in-authoring-a-phd-or-non-fiction/seven-upgrade-strategies-for-a-problematic-article-or-chapter-3c6b81be9aa2

11   See: http://www.phd2published.com/2013/10/09/announcing-acwrimo-2013/

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Aim of source book

Designed as a writing support resource and guide

This source book has been designed as a writing support resource and guide for understanding academic writing at the postgraduate level in higher education. **Drawing on theory, it offers practical tools and activities for developing and enacting writing support at Rhodes University.** Building on the work undertaken by the Centre for Higher Education, Research, Teaching and Learning (CHERTL), and more recently, within the Centre for Postgraduate Studies (CPGS), this resource is aimed at both academic staff and postgraduate scholars. It outlines how writing support initiatives can be developed across the university, both independently and in collaboration with the CPGS.

Writing is a social practice - *we learn to write by writing.*

Academic writing is a social practice - *we learn academic writing by writing academic texts.*

ALL postgraduate scholars and academic workers need to learn academic writing, it is not taught to us in schools ...

This source book is oriented towards providing positive guidance and support for academic writing.

The source book can be used by postgraduate scholars, by supervisors supporting academic writing, and by academics who are themselves still learning the art of academic writing.

Academic writing – the expectations at a postgraduate level

This section outlines the changing demands being placed on higher education institutions internationally, as they continue to diversify and expand. A wider variety and increased number of scholars has placed additional pressure on universities to transform their academic literacy practices. Common-sense understandings of academic writing - as a 'normal' part of Higher Education teaching, learning and research - are challenged and the need for support is explained.

It is not uncommon knowledge that the context of higher education is changing rapidly, both within South Africa and internationally. Increased access to higher education - a result of the globalisation, massification and diversification of higher education internationally - continues to challenge dominant forms of knowing, of knowledge, and how one gains entry to the discourse of their discipline in this contested space.

Contributing to the complexity of the higher education space is the unavoidable diversity such increased access has resulted in. With increased numbers of scholars, there is also a need to accommodate the learning styles, languages and disciplinary-specifics of a wide range of scholars who also enter the institution with diverse histories, interests and learning experiences.

The growing expectations of universities are primarily realised through increased scholarly outputs. As such, increased pressure has been placed on the role of academic writing. Academic writing, particularly at a postgraduate level, remains the primary way to build new knowledge and contribute to a field of research. Without the written word, research cannot easily be documented, assessed, disseminated and worked with in society.

The importance of academic writing has resulted in the development of writing support approaches in literacy research in recent years. Many different theoretical approaches have been advocated and challenged in literature. While some contexts have long been engaged in support programmes (most commonly the "Freshman Composition" courses in the United States of America), other contexts, including South Africa, have been slower to implement wide-scale, theoretically-informed support initiatives. A change that has occurred, however, is the realisation that with the increased pressures and demands in higher education, academic success cannot be achieved without adequate support structures.

While the value of and need for writing support is widely accepted in South Africa, a clear and confident way to proceed remains a contested issue. This source book aims to shed light on this issue, and presents a practical and accessible guide on how writing support can be visualised, enacted and achieved. The emphasis of the source book is to support academic writing at Rhodes University where the ideas and approaches have been pilot tested.

Using a socio-cultural lens to understand academic writing

This section outlines what it means to understand and approach academic writing through a socio-cultural lens. It unpacks the value of using such a lens and it illustrates how common-sense understandings of both language and academic literacy practices need to be reconsidered as social practices embedded and enacted within particular social contexts which have varying levels of power relations within them.

Understanding literacy practices in higher education, particularly academic writing, through a socio-cultural lens is crucial when developing support structures for scholars. Various understandings of academic literacies have been purported over the years, with two main trends emerging. The first, the 'autonomous' viewpoint, considers academic literacy practices as a set of neutral, context-independent set of learnable 'skills'. Working in this 'deficit' model, this orientation treats writing support as separate to, or outside of, the discipline, focusing on language 'skills' (a focus on surface features of writing, such as grammar, punctuation etc.) rather than on the process of writing. The second, the 'ideological' viewpoint, views academic literacy practices as social practices, which are contextually-bound and often contested sites of struggle for dominance. Writing support within this view (an 'academic literacies model') considers the writing process as a social practice with differing power dynamics at stake; it makes allowances for the varying scholar dispositions at play; and it acknowledges the contested nature of building knowledge through writing. Writing support is thus treated holistically, taking into account the discipline norms and conventions and embedding scholars in the socio-cultural aspects of their disciplines. **This socio-cultural orientation informs this source book.**

Within a socio-cultural orientation to academic literacy in general and academic writing in particular, *language* plays a specific role in this contested space. Language is considered to be a key resource for the development of thought - a process and practice that is a necessary component and influencer of, a scholar's ability to build new knowledge. This understanding allows us to acknowledge the contested nature of language and the role it plays in academic writing. It also makes explicit how academic writing is not merely a set of 'skills' one can acquire outside of their discipline or context, but rather that it is a socially-mediated, social practice. This transformative approach to academic writing is vital when developing appropriate support programmes for scholars, as we need to equip ourselves as writers and scholars in the best way possible so as to gain access to, engage with, and ultimately master and critically engage the discourses of academic disciplines.

Within this understanding of language and academic writing, this source book offers strategies and tools for adopting a proactive rather than reactive stance to supporting postgraduate scholars in their writing endeavours.

Balancing 'theoretically sound' with 'practically feasible' writing approaches

There is debate around which approach to supporting postgraduate scholars is the 'correct' one, particularly with regards to academic writing. What works for one context may differ from another, and what might be considered 'best practice' in theory may be unfeasible in reality. This section describes how 'theoretically sound' approaches can be adapted for use in supporting postgraduate studies.

The academic literacies model, in its favouring of a socio-cultural orientation to writing support, has been critiqued for two reasons. First, for favouring a focus on the socio-cultural aspects of writing at the expense of the more textual, surface level features of academic writing. **The argument has been made that even if you cater for broader socio-cultural elements, without a coherent, grammatically competent, stylistically appropriate text, the scholar will still be denied access to their discipline discourse.** Second, the feasibility of enacting a practical writing pedagogy within this orientation has been questioned, particularly with large groups. An academic literacies approach is easier to implement in contexts with fewer scholars (which allow for regular small tutorial groups) and contexts where there are adequate resources to draw on.

Given that English is the language most widely used in academia in South Africa, and given that it is an additional language for many scholars, the textual component of writing support is also important to include; however, it should not be the overarching orientation to the programme. **While also important, giving attention to the technical aspects of writing, such as grammar alone, is not fully adequate for understanding the conventions of academic discourse and writing. This is why socio-cultural approaches to literacy and academic writing that also give attention to technical aspects of writing, can help scholars succeed, learn, gain access to, and challenge current norms and conventions.**

The following section of this chapter outlines two useful approaches to supporting academic writing that move beyond the technical. These are **peer review** and **generative writing**. Both of these approaches are informed by a socio-cultural orientation to academic writing, and both conceptualise writing as a social practice. The approaches demonstrate how writing support can be both a theoretically informed and practically feasible option.

Two 'best practice' approaches to consider: peer learning and generative writing

Peer learning

Peer learning is becoming increasingly prevalent in higher education spaces internationally. Studies have shown how increased learning opportunities with peers can enhance the overall postgraduate experience of scholars. Working with peers and cultivating peer-based communities of practice (within one discipline or multidisciplinary) can provide additional support and intellectual stimulation for scholars throughout their candidature.

Peer learning and *peer review* **are closely aligned with socio-cultural understandings of literacy** in that they open up a space for more holistic accounts of literacy to be explored and developed. Furthermore, they allow for opportunities for a wider distribution of more horizontal learning opportunities with peers. Peer review, within a community of practice of peers, creates another avenue for further learning and development. Gaining feedback from a variety of trusted 'critical readers' can widen a scholar's perspective on his/her work. Peer communities often allow more flexibility for debate and 'trying out' of different ideas. Additionally, being immersed within a peer community of practice, scholars can receive and learn to give support from and to other scholars.

One way to cultivate peer learning and peer review within a community of practice is through the establishment of *writing groups*. These will be elaborated on in the next section.

Generative writing

Research shows that there is a direct correlation between learning to think and the practice of writing. The understanding that **writing is a process necessary in order to create meaning** (and thus learning), has resulted in a push for scholars to engage in generative writing strategies, particularly when embarking on postgraduate research which inevitably has a written element to it, immaterial of discipline.

Given the importance of generative writing, that is, constant writing (both formal and informal) throughout the research degree, this approach should be encouraged across the disciplines and level of candidature. Framed within a socio-cultural orientation to writing support, generative writing encourages scholars to make the transition from considering 'writing up' as the last element to do before submission. Rather, writing should be done consistently throughout the research process as a means of making sense of, and developing ideas. This not only strengthens the thinking of the scholar, but embeds writing within practice. While disciplines do differ in terms of writing requirements, all are ultimately assessed on the written report. As long as this remains the primary means of assessment, generative writing will be a valuable feature to implement in scholars' daily research practices.

Generative writing can be enacted in various ways: the key focus is on scholars physically writing - in any form, at any level of formality - consistently throughout the research. Three examples of generative writing can be seen in *freewriting* exercises, *drafting* and using *reading journals* to explore literature through writing.

Freewriting is an effective generative writing activity as it encourages scholars to 'empty thoughts' onto paper. It is designed to be a fast, informal, non-threatening writing space to explore different ideas and for getting to grips with what is already known. The method is easy to follow and implement: a topic is decided on; a timer is set for between five to seven minutes; the writing will begin - with no stopping - for the designated time. During the writing process there is no concern for grammar, spelling or stylistics. The point of the exercise is to put down as many words on paper as possible in the 'emptying' of thoughts. The output is only for private use - it should not be used for evaluation.

Freewriting exercises not only help sort out different ideas, but it enables a scholar to start making sense of and drawing connections between different ideas.

Once initial thoughts are down on paper, they can be taken up and explored further in additional freewriting exercises. This technique is also a helpful strategy in working out what is already known and what still needs to be read or developed. It can also help a scholar to tease out his/her own perspective or view. This assists with developing a sense of argument in academic writing.

Freewriting can also have a positive impact on supervision meetings. It can be used at the end of each meeting to consolidate thoughts and discussions that have taken place. A scholar can use freewriting to write about what issues were covered, what was decided, what new thinking was discovered, avenues to follow up on, etc. This practice can also act as a personal record for the scholar, which, over time, can show the development of thought and practices. It also allows the scholar a chance to make sense of the meeting and to clarify any points that have been misinterpreted or misunderstood. This can help ensure that both scholar and supervisor are 'on the same page' in terms of the expectations.

Drafting and reading journals are other generative writing practices that encourage continual writing with an emphasis on using writing to discover meaning, to clarify thought and to develop an argument (to start generating opinions). These two forms of generative writing are further elaborated on in the next section.

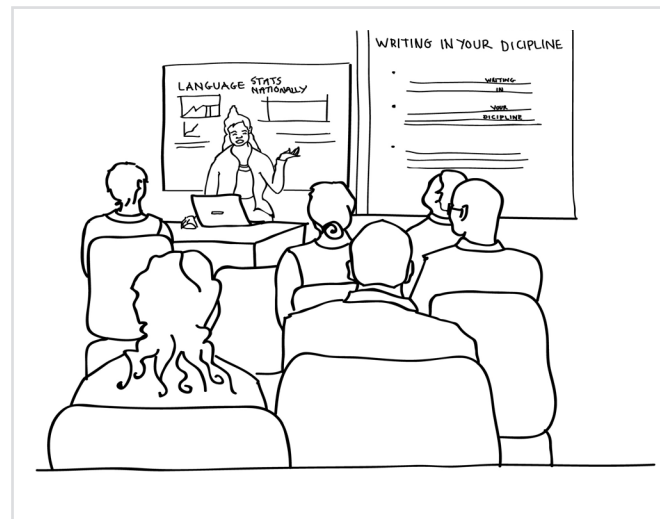# Situated writing pedagogies – learning from example

Writing Workshops

Writing workshops have long been used as a support mechanism for scholars. They are an attractive means of support because they are practical, focused and can benefit a high number of scholars at once, making it a more sustainable method than that of one-on-one consultations, for example. Although workshops have been criticised for adopting a lecture style that inhibits interaction and dialogue, they are a worthwhile option to consider, given the limitation of resources and high scholar numbers South African institutions face.

Writing workshops have been used extensively at Rhodes University. Previously managed by CHERTL, workshops are now being developed within, and coordinated by, the CPGS. Our key concern for writing support workshops is to avoid them being conceptualised within a deficit model to literacy, essentially as a once-off, 'fix-it', grammar-based workshop where scholars can 'solve' their writing problems. Rather, if one works within an academic literacies model, the focus of the workshops can centre on meaning-making and knowledge building, with an emphasis on how you only find out what you want to say through writing.

The aim of workshops is to provide an interactive space where the conceptual aspects of academic writing can be demystified and made accessible to students. Both generic and discipline-specific workshops are currently being offered at Rhodes University. The generic workshop series, offered as part of the Postgraduate Orientation Programme, provide a solid foundation for understanding the process and key issues associated with academic writing. These generic workshops, while having a definite function and place within the

university, ideally need to be supplemented with discipline-specific, department-based workshops. This will not only address discipline-specific writing conventions, genres and expectations, but will also embed writing support within the discipline - one of the key tenants of a socio-cultural orientation to academic literacy.

The table below illustrates current workshop themes that encapsulate a socio-cultural orientation to literacy. These themes should serve as a guide and can be adapted for discipline-specific workshops.

Socio-cultural writing workshop themes	
THEME	REASONING
Generative writing	Learning to write for yourself, as a process to discover meaning. Free writing activities are used to demonstrate this writing process.
Critical reading and writing	Learning what it means to think, read and write critically. This key aspect is what distinguishes the academic genre apart from other writing genres. Without an understanding of this more macro genre level, students will not be able to engage with their research in the necessary rigorous manner needed to succeed in postgraduate studies.
Learning about writing for others	This essential part of academic writing is explained to students so that they understand why it is important and how they can develop this. Prof Boughey's idea of engaging in 'imaginary conversations' with potential readers is particularly useful for this feature of writing.
Conceptualising writing to be a three-stage (generating, drafting, editing), iterative process	Unpacking the writing process to foreground the value of writing for oneself (in a meaning-making process), then moving on to writing for another in cultivating a voice and making a contribution (drafting and redrafting) and only moving on to editing at the end of the process.
Building new knowledge through creating arguments	Explaining to students why academic writing is all about making arguments, based on claims, which are substantiated with evidence. If a student does not understand this process and the reasoning behind it, they will not be able to do it in their own writing. Instruction on using academic hedging techniques to limit/substantiate claims is given.
Cultivating a voice/being authoritative	Unpacking what this actually means to students - why is it important and how you might go about it. Explanation about being a member of an academic community and taking up a position within that community of scholars is offered, together with examples of how this might be done.

Defending your approach	This is explained to students in terms of their understanding of their own position, how it relates to other positions, and why they have adopted it. This is a crucial aspect of academic writing and falls under critical scrutiny in the examination process. If the student does not understand that they have to be able to (a) take up a position, and (b) be able to justify and defend that choice in relation to their academic community, they will not be able to produce a strong piece of research.
The golden thread	Unpacking this concept for students to engage with, to understand the importance of writing coherently and logically in the academic genre. By explaining the difference between 'thesis as an argument' and 'using argument in the thesis', students can begin to see how the 'golden thread' (thesis argument) can be weaved throughout the dissertation, acting as a road map for coherent writing. Linguistic resources (for example, transitional words) are described and activities using such features are offered.
Technical polishing	Explaining the importance of this, but how it should be the very final aspect of the writing process. Ideas on self-editing and the role of using a 'critical friend' (peer review) are offered.

Following from this outline of workshop themes, the following section offers practical tools and activities for explaining and implementing these academic writing characteristics.

Tools and activities for enacting an academic literacies approach in writing workshops

1. Writing as an iterative, on-going process of meaning-making

The first point of departure when introducing writing support, immaterial of discipline, is to deconstruct the common notion that writing is something separate to the research project; that it is something to 'be done at the end of research'; a final 'writing up' stage, once all the other elements have been attended to. One of the most powerful tools to impress on scholars is that writing should be an on-going process of meaning-discovery and meaning-making. **Scholars who write throughout their research will inevitably produce more thorough and well-developed research, as they are constantly finding meaning and building their knowledge through making sense of their learning through writing.** Furthermore, scholars who get caught up in the editing of work too early in the writing process, often as a procrastination tool, often struggle more with academic writing.

Academic writing should be conceptualised and practiced as a three stage, iterative process involving: generative writing; drafting; and editing. The first stage should be used to generate and play with ideas, in a process of making sense of learning, making meaning, and developing ideas. The drafting stage should be a space where you take one idea and develop it further, in light of other ideas. This stage should involve a lot of (necessary) movement between drafting and redrafting, in the creation of a text that reflects thinking and understanding, in the building of new knowledge. This stage should only be concerned with the content of what is being produced, the meaning; not what it looks like on a surface level. **The final editing stage is only entered into when the meaning and structure of the text is complete.** This stage focuses on making the text 'look good' for the intended reader. The focus is on surface features of writing, such as punctuation, grammar, referencing styles, and so forth. While important, it should be left until the very end, once the scholar is confident that the content of the text is strong.

The following table, taken from the work of Professor Chrissie Boughey (CHERTL), provides a useful analogy in explaining this process to scholars.

Building a table: the three stages of writing	
Stage 1: GENERATIVE WRITING Conceptualising the table	– Will it be round? Square? Rectangle? – Will it be made out of wood? Metal? – Will it be a four-seater? Six? Eight? – Will it have curved legs? Square?
Stage 2: DRAFTING Building the table	– Exploring one design further and then creating the design by adding the different elements to it, in order to work out which elements are needed for a logical, strong structure. – Making sure there is enough support for the table to be able to withhold pressure and weight from external forces. – If the pieces of the table are not fitting together well at this point, it might be necessary to go back to Stage 1 to work out another approach. – At this stage it would be senseless to polish and refine the table, as structural changes will most likely need to be made throughout the building process
Stage 3: EDITING Polishing the table	– Perfecting and polishing the table once you are happy that it fits together well and that it has a strong enough composition to withstand external pressure. – Making the table look as good as possible for potential viewers.

An activity for enacting the three stage writing process

This activity comes from Claire Aitchison's workshop: *Making writing happen: strategies for productivity and connectedness* (Postgraduate Supervision Conference, 2015).

If you are at the beginning of the research stage:

– **My research is relevant because...**

If you are busy with your literature review:

– **The key different debates in the literature are... My position is...**

If you are busy with your methods:

– **My research design is the best one for the job because...**

If you are busy with your results/findings:

– **How do the key findings relate to my research questions/hypothesis?**

If you are busy with your discussion/conclusion:

– **How might my research impact policy/theory/future research?**

Stage 1:	Generative writing	Free write on the topic for seven minutes
Stage 2:	Writing as a social practice	Discuss your free writing output with a peer
Stage 3:	Critical reflection on writing (drafting)	Read your piece of writing critically, thinking about what, if anything, you would change in terms of the content
Stage 4:	Redrafting	Pick up a pen and make the actual changes
Stage 5:	Editing	Read the piece over again and make the small editorial changes to grammar, punctuation, etc.

2. Reading journals and concept banks

Reading journals and concept banks are particularly useful tools for not only engaging with literature, but for developing generative writing skills. They encourage the scholar to start forming opinions about the literature and writing notes in an informed and beneficial way.

Reading journals

Reading journals enable scholars to build a record of their readings. The main difference, however, is that each entry is a *reflection* on the text, not a summary or a string of pages which have been copied out verbatim. Research has shown that if a scholar merely copies or highlights large chunks of text, they are not necessarily engaging with the content or generating a relational view of the literature. This is where a reading journal can help.

A step-by-step guide to a reading journal

– Setting up a journal
   • Buy a book or create a file on your computer
   • Write a complete reference at the top of the page
   • Read the text (either at once, or in chunks) - the aim is *not* to remember verbatim, but rather to understand what is going on in the text
   • When reading, *do not* take any notes or highlight any sections
   • When you have finished, write in your journal.

– Writing an entry: "Dear Diary"
   • What does this remind me of? Why?
   • What does it agree with/disagree with? Why?
   •   What really interests me about this?
   • How does it fit with my research interest/topic/question?

The idea of the diary is to let your thoughts flow in the entry, guided by the above questions. It is not an activity that should be assessed in any way - it is merely for you, the scholar, to engage in the literature you are immersed in.

Concept banks

Building on the idea of a reading journal, **a *concept bank* is another useful tool to use.** If, during the reading of texts, you come across a really well-phrased definition of a concept, it is worth noting it, as there will be opportunities to draw on direct quotes when writing. This can be done in a concept bank, which can be added to the end of the diary entry. The following table illustrates one such example. Again, it is important that the 'Own Words' category is filled in, to ensure that the concept has been fully understood by the scholar. This will avoid long chunks of text relying too heavily on direct quotes from sources, without much scholarly interpretation and engagement.

Concept banks for reading journals		
CONCEPT	DEFINITION Quote Plus Reference	OWN WORDS
Semantic Gravity	"Degrees of context-dependence of meaning". (Maton, 2014)	How much meaning is tied to or embedded within the context where it is produced
Semantic gravity wave	"A recurrent weakening and strengthening of semantic gravity by moving between concrete examples and abstract ideas" (Maton, 2014)	Ability to demonstrate an understanding of something by describing/talking about it in a very concrete, context-embedded way and then moving to a more abstract level (and repeating this action)

3. Reading maps

Reading maps can help scholars understand their topics in light of the literature. They provide an effective, visual way to represent the different areas of their research question, which can help provide clarity and direction when facing their literature review. Scholars often feel overwhelmed when starting their literature review, due to the vast volume of information in the field. A reading map (see Activity below) can help alleviate this feeling in providing a structure and plan for reading areas, which can be tackled one at a time.

Activity example for building a reading map

ACTIVITY: Build a quick reading map for your research object/question with search words

Search words
- ....
- ....
- ....

Reading Area 4

Reading Area 2

Reading Area 1

Research OBJECT / QUESTION

Reading Area 3

ACTIVITY: For one of your 'reading areas' can you identify:

- **Your favourite reading/s** - What makes this your favourite reading?
- **Seminal texts** - What makes this a seminal text?
- **Key contemporary authors** - Who are they and how do you know you have 'found them'? Is your search broad enough?
- **Contextually relevant authors** - Do you have authors from your context?
- **Important reviews/overviews of the topic** - Why are these helpful?
- Central readings & Peripheral readings

FIND YOUR TOP 20 READINGS!

4. Finding your 'voice' amongst others

Finding a sense of 'voice' in academic writing is often a hard concept to grasp and to enact in writing. Scholars will often be confronted with feedback asking for a greater presence of 'voice' in their writing, particularly within their literature review, with little or no guidance as to how to actually achieve this. A simple 'voice' exercise can help with this.

A scholar's 'voice' is his/her interpretation or analysis of literature. This is the reason why each piece of research has some unique element to it - a unique personal perspective, or 'voice' - which is enacted through writing. The way a scholar links pieces of literature, how they might analyse certain elements of literature, how they interpret the different pieces of text, all contribute to the 'voice' in their piece of writing.

A simple way to demonstrate this can be seen in the following diagram. It graphically shows how the job of the literature review is to link different aspects of literature together by building connections and relations between them. The way in which you do this reflects your unique contribution to the already established and on-going conversation in your field. A 'voice map' can help clarify how what you have been reading relates to each other; while the connections you draw will start developing your own interpretation and perspective.

Activity example of using a reading, voice or text map

ACTIVITY: Finding your voice using a text map
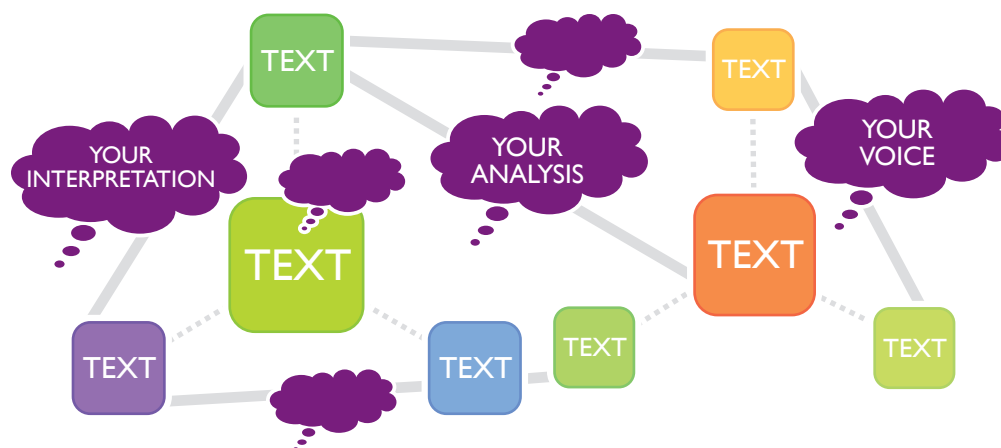
ACTIVITY: Finding your 'voice'

• Select key texts that relate to your research question

• Build a 'voice map', like the one above, based on your chosen texts

• Draw lines which connect relevant texts

• Add in comments explaining why you have connected the specific texts

   – Texts can relate both in similarities/shared points of view or they can be connected as opposing perspectives

• Using your diagram as a guide, start developing the comments into a coherent piece of text through free writing and drafting.

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5. Building an argument and making claims

Building an argument and making claims is the very essence of academic writing and is the feature that sets it apart from other writing genres. For this reason, this feature of academic writing needs to be made explicit to scholars, as the genre of 'academic' writing does not come naturally to any one person.

The most important starting point is for scholars to be able to distinguish claims from evidence in texts. Without this understanding, it is unlikely that they will be able to enact this feature in their own writing. Professor Chrissie Boughey outlines a very effective exercise for doing such a task. The exercise below is taken out of her 2015 undergraduate *RU Learning?* guide (available in hard copy from the CHERTL or electronically via their website).

ACTIVITY: Identifying claims

This example can be used as a prototype for any text in your discipline. Give students a discipline-specific text and ask them to fill out the below table. Generate discussion around how you would go about making claims in your discipline.

An example from the social sciences

Traditional methods of teaching in most school classrooms involve the spoken word as the primary mode of communication. On average, up to 60% of classroom learning activities involve either listening or participating in verbal communication with the teacher or other learners (Sutherland & Lubman, 2001:2) which means the better the learner can hear, the more s/he is able to learn (Smith, 2002:2).

	CLAIM	EVIDENCE	WHERE DOES IT COME FROM?
1.	On average, up to 60% of classroom learning activities involve either listening or participating in verbal communication with the teacher or other learners	On average, up to 60% of classroom learning activities involve either listening or participating in verbal communication with the teacher or other learners	From the work of Sutherland & Lubman - two researchers who presumably measured learning activities in classrooms. The reference (Sutherland & Lubman, 2001:2) tells us this.
2.	the better the learner can hear, the more s/he is able to learn	Research which presumably measured hearing ability with learning	Work done by Smith and reported in Smith (2002:2)

An example from natural science

The use of maggot debridement therapy (MDT) in South Africa has gained interest in the past decade (Williams et al. 2008, Du Plessis and Pretorius 2011). The identification of the maggots used for this therapy remains an issue, as most medical doctors are not adequately trained in entomology to correctly identify the flies (Williams et al. 2008, Tantawi et al. 2010). Lucilia Sericata is the most commonly used species (Sherman et al. 2000) but it is often misidentified as L. cuprina. These two species are also used in forensic entomology (Louw and van der Linde 1993, Smith and Wall 1997, Anderson 2000, Oliva 2001, Clark et al. 2006, Day and Wallman 2006).

	CLAIM	EVIDENCE	WHERE DOES IT COME FROM?
1.	Over the past ten years, scientists have become interested in the use of maggots to clean wounds.	Not explained.	Evidence can be found in the work of Williams et al. 2008 and Du Plessis & Pretorius 2011.
2.	Medical doctors are not trained in entomology so the identification of flies which can be used in this form of therapy can be a problem.	Not explained.	Evidence can be found in the work of Williams et al. 2008 and Tantawi *et al.* 2010
3.	A species called *Lucilia sericata* is used most often in the therapy although this species is often confused with another called *L.cuprina.*	Not explained.	Evidence can be found in the work of Sherman *et al.*, 2000.
4.	*L. Sericata* and *L. cuprina* are the two species most often used in forensic entomology.	Not explained.	Evidence can be found in the work of Louw & van der Linde, 1993; Smith & Wall, 1997; Anderson, 2000; Oliva 2001; Clark *et al.* 2006 and Day & Wallman 2006.

Once scholars have an understanding of what it means to build an argument based on claims, which are reinforced with evidence, they can start developing them in their own writing. The art of making claims requires specific linguistic resources that can alter the strength in truth of the claim being put forward. Such resources include **academic hedging techniques** - used to acknowledge a potential 'gap' in the claim or to associate one's position very closely to the claim being made *(see activity box below)*.

Identifing Academic Hedging Techniques

- – Consider the following sentences

  - • The commitment to some of the social and economic concepts was less strong than it is now.

  VS.

  - • It may be said that the commitment to some of the social and economic concepts was less strong than it is now.

- – Hedging limits your commitment to a claim
  - • X is true
  - • X may be true
  - • It could be the case that X is true
  - • Arguably, X is true

- – Why use hedging?
  - • It acknowledges a 'gap' ('wobble') in the claim

The following exercise helps scholars to first identify the claims being made and the evidence used to support them. It then asks scholars to identify instances of academic hedging and to explain its role in the making of claims. This extract comes from a Commerce text, but could be easily replaced with any other discipline text.

ACTIVITY: Building an argument and making claims

Let's look at an extract from Myers & Klein (2011:19).

In this text we see that the authors are making claims:

1) How many claims can you identify in this text? Underline them.

2) How are the claims being supported?

3) How would you judge if the claims are valid or trustworthy?

4) Can you find two examples of academic hedging?

5) If you were the author, what would you change, if anything?

Although the list of critical Information Systems (IS) research articles in Table 1 is by no means comprehensive, one noticeable feature is the fact that most IS research studies published in the 1990s used concepts from the critical social theory of Habermas only (e.g., Lyytinen 1992; Myers and Young 1997). Richardson and Robinson (2007) point out that critical research in Information Systems is still identified with the critical social theory of Habermas today, even though this represents just one school of thought within what is a broad approach (see Cecez-Kecmanovic 2001a; Cecez-Kecmanovic et al. 2008; Te'eni 2001). In the following decade, however, IS researchers began to use theoretical concepts from other critical theorists besides Habermas, particularly Bourdieu and Foucault. (REFS?)

Although some critical theorists have had a negative view of aspects of technology, IS researchers have been reasonably even-handed in their treatment of technology, seeing both its downside and potential. Also, while Orlikowski and Baroudi criticised critical researchers for focusing almost exclusively on economic factors in social relations, obscuring the importance of other factors such as race and gender, recent critical IS research has engaged with these issues (see Falconer 2008; Howcroft and Truath 2005; Kvasny and Keil 2006).

Another key element to building arguments around the claims and evidence structure is the issue of the 'golden thread' in writing. The golden thread relates to the structure of the piece of writing, and whether or not the main thesis statement (central argument) is maintained throughout the text, linking all elements together into a coherent whole.

A crucial aspect to weaving the thread is to employ linguistic resources such as **linking or transitional words or phrases** (see BOX on page 22) to link different sections of the text together.

Linking or 'transitional' words or phrases allow the writer to weave different elements together in a relational way.

They can also act as signposts throughout the text to help create coherence and flow for the reader.

The following exercise requires scholars to identify and explain how these resources create coherence in a text. The extract used in this example comes from Management; however, it can just as easily be replaced with any other extract from other disciplines.

ACTIVITY:
Using transition words and phrases to weave the golden thread

Let's look at an extract from Myers & Klein (2011:33). This is the final paragraph of the article.

In this text we see that the authors are using signposting and transition words:

1) Identify 3 instances of transitional words

2) What is their purpose? Why do you think the authors are using them in their writing? (Discuss with peers)

3) How do these linguistic resources help weave the golden thread? (Discuss with peers)

4) Do you use these linguistic features in your own writing? Discuss with the person sitting next to you how you might use transitional words in similar or different to how they are used here.

Third, from our argument it would follow that the number of critical research publications is not the only measure by which we should assess their importance; equally, or perhaps even more important, is the impact that this type of research has on the richness and depth of the discourse within the field. Therefore we agree with Richardson and Robinson (2007) that it is unwarranted to speak of a "missing paradigm" within the IS journal literature, as the Chen and Hirschheim (2004) survey results would indicate. Nevertheless the underrepresentation of the importance and influence of critical research in numbers is a valid concern (Chen and Hirschheim 2004; Falconer 2008; Richardson and Robinson 2007). To address this concern, our principles are designed to help increase both the number of critical research articles and the depth of penetration with which critical researchers dissect their domain of investigation. This in turn will strengthen and enrich their contribution to the IS research literature. Last but not least, we hope that the advances made in this paper will stimulate further reflection and debate on the importance of critical research and how its quality can be assessed and improved.

A further activity, focusing on the golden thread itself, can be seen in the following. This activity requires scholars to identify the main thesis statement and the different claims that build the thesis.

ACTIVITY:
Using abstracts to identify the main thesis and the different claims which build the thesis

Reading journals involve working closely with abstracts and texts to find the main thesis (argument) and the different claims which build this thesis

Abstract activity:

• Identify the key thesis / claim to new knowledge in the abstract

• How is the author making the case for his / her claim?

Sample abstract to work with (it could be replaced by any other well written abstract)

TITLE: **The relationship between goal achievement and the job satisfaction of small and medium-sized business owner-managers**[1] (question about full references)

ABSTRACT

Defining 'success' in terms of family businesses is problematic; and the debate on how to define success among these businesses is ongoing. A goal is an aim or desired result, while success is defined as the achievement of an aim or purpose. The purpose of this study was to gain greater clarity on the meaning of 'success' as interpreted by owners of family businesses by looking at the relationship between their goal achievement and their perceptions of success. The goals investigated were the Continuity, Financial, Human resources, Personal, Operational, Service, Socio-economic, and Growth goals. A survey was undertaken using a structured questionnaire. The respondents were identified by means of the convenience snowball sampling technique, and the survey yielded 213 usable questionnaires on which to undertake the statistical analysis. To assess the validity and reliability of the measuring instrument, an exploratory factor analysis was undertaken and Cronbach's alpha coefficients were calculated.
The hypothesised relationships were assessed by means of multiple regression analysis. In the pursuit of providing greater clarity on the interpretations of success among family businesses, the results of this study show that achieving financial returns and gaining respect in one's industry are key to perceptions of success among family business owners.

Key words: Family business, Business success, Goals.

Exercises such as these provide examples of how different academic writing concepts can be learnt through practice, rather than on instruction alone. Getting scholars to participate in activities helps solidify their understanding and provides an opportunity for them to practice what they have been taught and to ask questions if they still have concerns.

6. Advice on editing

While the surface-level textual elements of academic writing should be left until the end of the writing process (the third stage, following the generative and drafting stages), this aspect of academic writing is still vital to address before submission. While purely grammar-based, 'deficit model' workshops are not the most helpful way of engaging with academic writing as a social practice, the importance of the editing component can (and indeed should) be introduced to scholars through workshops. This has been done at Rhodes University through an 'editing focus' for the final academic writing workshop of the Postgraduate Orientation series; given by an English language expert.

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[1] Venter, E., Farrington, S., Scheepers, J & de Lange, J. 2014. The relationship between goal achievement and the job satisfaction of small and medium-sized business owner-managers. Paper presented at the 26th SAIMS Annual Conference, University of Johannesburg, 14 -17 September 2014.

Various features of the editing process can be described, discussed and debated during the workshop. Possible topics include:

General considerations	• Check on the word limit for your dissertation - have you stuck to this? • Decide on a page limit for each chapter before you enter into the final draft stage. • Check that the subheadings for each chapter correspond to the argument you are making.
Sentence considerations	• Academic writing should aspire to simplicity and coherence - something that is not always easy given the information load that each structure carries. – Make sure that your sentences are short and clear.
Style considerations	• Due to the fact that a dissertation is written over a period of time, there might be 'archaeological' style elements which need to be attended to. – When it comes to the final editing stage, make sure your writing style from the first chapters matches that of the last. If there is a noticeable difference (or improvement) in the writing style, you will need to go back and redraft earlier versions.
How to be taken seriously	• Make sure the claim + evidence structure runs throughout your text in the formulating of your arguments

Politeness considerations	• Awareness of audience: self-check questions.
	  – Have I introduced the argument adequately?
	  – Have I provided sufficient signposts that will weave the golden thread?
	  – Am I respectful of opposing views? Have I provided enough evidence to back up my views?
	• Hedging and modest claims.
	  – Have I presented my claims in a modest way using hedging techniques, to show that I acknowledge that what I believe to be the case might not be applicable in different contexts.
	• Formal style.
	  – Have I used a formal style in my writing? Do I have instances of colloquial language in my writing that doesn't match the kind of style used in the journal articles I have been reading?
	  – Have I used the appropriate technical language for my discipline? Have I made sure that I have adequately explained such technical language?

Employing a proof-reader	• Do the first edit yourself then ask a critical friend to help you.
	• If you think that you need a professional proof-reader, make sure that:
	  – They are familiar with the academic genre of your field and discipline.
	  – That they are able to check the referencing conventions that you use.
	  – That you leave enough time for the proof-reading process.

7. Opportunities for peer work in workshops

Writing workshops should ideally draw on peer work opportunities as often as possible, to enrich learning opportunities. It also creates a break in flow of instruction, and is an effective way for scholars to build peer networks and learn to engage in productive peer review practices.

While instruction is often necessary, actually practicing different aspects of academic writing is more beneficial for scholars, this is because academic writing is a practice that is mainly learned in the doing. Engaging with peers provides the perfect community of practice for scholars to be a part of, and can be of on-going value to scholars as they conduct their research. One example of how peers can be used in writing workshops can be seen in the following activity on writing abstracts. While there are many formulas to follow in the writing of abstracts, actually doing one and receiving feedback provides a much richer learning experience.

ACTIVITY: Writing abstracts

- Write an abstract for your paper/dissertation

- Swop your abstract with the person sitting next to you

- Identify the key argument your colleague is making

- Is it clearly stated?

- Could it be more clearly stated?

- What would you change, if anything?

Nine questions to review an abstract:

1. Who are the intended readers?

2. What is the history and purpose of the project (i.e. how does it locate in the field etc.) [justification of research question]?

3. What did the researcher do [research design, methods and approaches]?

4. Why did the researcher do it [rationale for methods and approaches]?

5. What happened [main results]?

6. What do the results mean in theory [implications of results for the theoretical field]?

7. What do the results mean in practice [implications of results for advancing practice]?

8. What is the key interest for readers (i.e. the field) [core contribution / claim]?

9. What remains unresolved [further research]?

Opportunities for peer engagement should be encouraged throughout degree candidature and across different contexts (informal and formal) and disciplines. Having a peer community of practice or just one 'critical friend' who can read over drafts of writing will have a positive outcome on scholars' writing ability and confidence.

Writing Groups

Continuing with the theme of peer work, writing groups are a particularly effective way to cultivate and encourage peer communities of practice, both on campus and for postgraduate scholars who live away from campus.

Writing groups are modelled on a system of peer review and their success depends on reciprocal and co-productive relationships with peers. **Peer learning and peer review within writing groups allow for a non-threatening space for ideas to be introduced, challenged, debated and developed. It is a space where writing is not produced to be assessed and graded, but rather for the development of ideas and knowledge building.** Opportunities to redraft in light of feedback allow scholars to develop their writing (and thinking) before submitting it to their supervisor for review.

There is no strict definition of what a writing group should look like and how long it should operate for: this depends entirely on the objectives and goals of each group. For example, if a group of scholars have a research deadline, a short-term writing group can be established to increase outputs and provide peer review before the formal submission. In this case, groups could meet multiple times a week for two to three weeks. Other writing groups are established for long-term support, with the aim of providing a community of practice for scholars to be a part of during their degree candidature. These typically run for much longer - often six months to a year (and beyond). Long-term writing groups tend to meet weekly or fortnightly, normally for a two-hour period, depending on the particular group. Maintaining the enthusiasm within a long-term group can be challenging. For this reason, groups need to be entered into voluntarily and participating scholars must remain active and contribute to the group in order to sustain the momentum. Without scholar 'buy-in', groups will inevitably dissolve.

The composition of writing groups can also differ: groups can be discipline-specific or they can be multidisciplinary in nature. Again, this depends on the needs of the group in question. Some scholars find disciplinary groups more useful, as they can discuss discipline-specific writing features and get help with developing disciplinary knowledge and using concepts correctly, among other things. While this is useful, it can also distract scholars away from the process of writing and more towards content - the products of writing - which is not the goal of the writing group initiative (advise on content should be left to the supervisor). If scholars feel more comfortable with discipline peers, it will be up to the group coordinator to maintain the group's focus.

Writing groups generally consist of about eight to ten scholars and a group coordinator who usually has a language background or teaching experience. One student will contribute a piece of work (limited to two pages) each meeting for peer review. All scholars within the group will review the writing and give feedback on the piece of text. The group will then discuss elements of feedback, opening space for the scholar in question to seek clarification on feedback, as well as debate aspects of feedback. The scholar will then collect the reviewed texts at the end of the session and will keep them for redrafting purposes. The group coordinator will also provide some form of instruction at each session. A range of topics can be covered, depending on the needs of the scholars.

Writing groups are particularly effective initiatives because they are able to offer long-term, sustainable writing support for scholars. They cultivate four key attributes of scholarly writing, as graphically illustrated in the following figure.
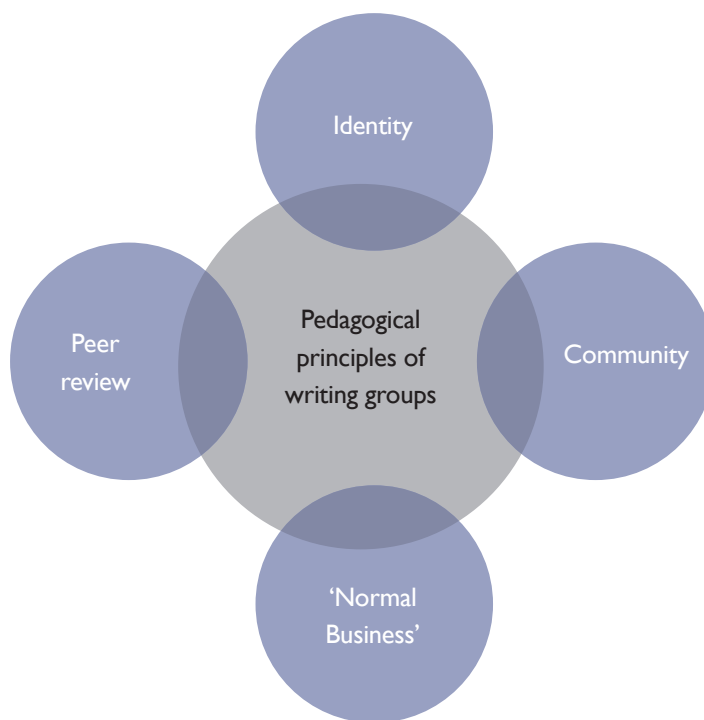
Diagram adapted from Aitchison and Lee (2006)

Writing groups allow opportunities for the **identity** of scholars to be developed and explored to a further extent than that of within the supervisory setting. **Community** is created through being part of a group of peers. As the group develops, so does the trust and camaraderie of the group, providing a supportive network for postgraduate scholars. Working on a system of **peer review**, scholars also develop their writing through the giving and receiving of feedback on their writing. An important outcome of being part of a writing group, meeting weekly, is that writing becomes habitual, consistent - an everyday, **'normal business'** activity. This alleviates the anxiety many scholars feel when embarking on academic writing activities.

Writing groups can work on themes covered in writing workshops, and explore them in more depth given the interactive environment of the peer group. For example, series of free writing exercises can be done during group sessions to embed the practice into everyday habits. Peer review tasks on writing abstracts can be another theme of a writing group session. Scholars can offer abstracts for review, instruction on the different components that make up an abstract can be given by the coordinator, and abstracts can be developed and written during the sessions in a series of free writing activities or in a Pomodoro session [a timed session, see below]. Other examples of themes that can be covered in writing groups are described below.

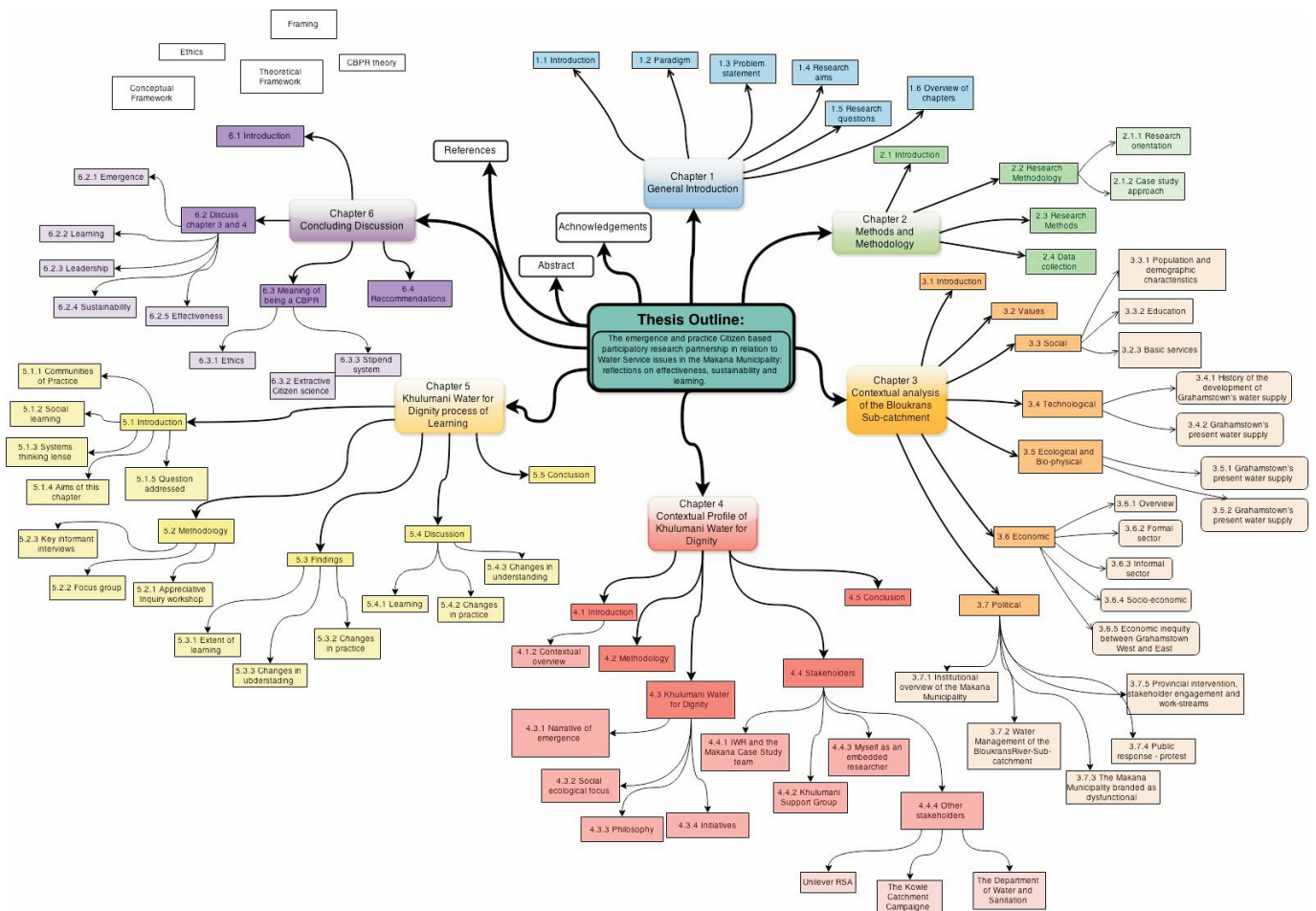| Best practice' feedback strategies?	Providing constructive feedback is a pivotal part of any writing group, and academic work in general. From the onset, scholars need to learn what 'good practice' feedback practices look like, and how to enact them in their own peer review. Learning how to give good feedback also develops scholars' own sense of academic writing, as they start to learn to identify key features in peers' writing, and consequently, start being more sensitive to issues in their own writing.
Storyboarding and chunking	Storyboarding and chunking involves creating a graphical display of a summary of your research. The dissertation is usually 'chunked' into sections (such as chapters), and each section is summarised onto a movable block which gets added to the board. What makes this exercise particularly useful is that it enables the scholar to get an overall picture of the research plan, and it makes it easier to tackle each component one step at a time, thus decreasing levels of anxiety often felt when overwhelmed by the extent of the work one has to do. The moveable pieces also allow opportunities for redrafting of the structure and plan which can help build coherence when the different elements on the board are linked through the writing process.
Language elements	Some grammatical instruction can be provided by the facilitator of the group, if deemed appropriate. Topics can range according to the needs of the scholars, but may include: using the correct tense, particularly when referencing; the effective (and correct) use of semi-colons, colons and dashes; transitional words and phrases; and academic hedging techniques. Instruction on these elements works best when given in tandem with an activity for the scholars to work through together. Features covered in the instruction can also be highlighted when peer reviewing pieces of text during the meeting.

Mind mapping

Mind mapping is another essential skill to draw on for organising ideas and structuring academic writing outputs. Many scholars find graphic displays of content far easier to understand and conceptualise, particularly when working out a dissertation plan. Mind maps can be simple, elobrate, hand-drawn or digital, depending on the preferences of the scholar. An example of one such mind map which was developed during a writing group task can be seen in the following diagram. In this instance, the scholar has started to map out his BSc dissertation in a digital mind map using the free Google Chrome application *draw.io*[2].

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[2] *draw.io* can be accessed at: https://www.draw.io

Thesis Outline:
The emergence and practice Citizen based participatory research partnership in relation to Water Service issues in the Makana Municipality: reflections on effectiveness, sustainability and learning.

References · Achnowledgements · Abstract

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- 1.2 Paradigm
- 1.3 Problem statement
- 1.4 Research aims
- 1.5 Research questions
- 1.6 Overview of chapters

Chapter 2 Methods and Methodology
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- 5.3 Findings
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  - 6.2.4 Sustainability
  - 6.2.5 Effectiveness
- 6.3 Meaning of being a CBPR
  - 6.3.1 Ethics
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  - 6.3.3 Stipend system
- 6.4 Reccommendations

Theoretical Framework
- Framing
- Ethics
- CBPR theory
- Conceptual Framework

Cubing

Cubing is an effective exercise to force yourself to consider your research from multiple persepctives. This lessens the chance of becoming too immersed in your own topic, and losing touch with the broader field. An example of a Cubing worksheet, taken from a multidiscplinary writing group, is given on the following page.

'CUBING'
Writing Group: Week 11

What is 'cubing'?

- A writing activity (developed by Cowan & Cowan 1980) that helps you think about your research topic from a number of different perspectives

Why do it? - It helps you to:

- Generate new ideas about your topic
- Makes sure that you don't get too *bogged down* in one aspect of your research topic, or in only one perspective

How do you go about a 'cubing' exercise?

- Imagine that you have a six-sided cube in front of you - imagine that these sides represent six different ways of looking at your research topic
- Each side of the cube represents a free writing activity (5 minutes each), guided by a specific question
- Questions must be answered in the order in which they are asked

'Cubing questions'

1) **DESCRIBE**
   - Generate ideas that tell what the subject looks like, that appeal to the five senses (i.e., sight, sound, taste, touch and smell). In other words, describe every aspect of your research topic

2) **COMPARE**
   - What is your topic similar to? What is it in direct opposition to?

3) **ASSOCIATE**
   - What does your topic remind you of? When you close your eyes and think about your topic, what pops into your head?

4) **ANALYSE**
   - Think about the parts of your topic and how they work together. Tell what causes your topic, how it emerges/emerged, what causes or influence it, and how it can be categorised or grouped.

5) **APPLY**
   - What can you do with your topic? How can your subject be used productively? What good does your subject do anyone?

6) **ARGUE**
   - Take a stand in relation to your research topic. Think of reasons, logical or silly, that you might have for favouring or opposing your subject.

What do the above questions relate to and/or direct you to when considering your academic writing practices, if anything?

Sources

Cowan, G. & Cowan, E. (1980). Writing. New York, NY: Wiley

http://writingcenter.unc.edu/handouts/writing-groups/writing-exercises/

<table>
<tr><td>**Pomodoros**</td><td>Pomodoros is a writing technique that operates on a time-management system - keeping the pressure on, but in a sustainable and manageable manner. It works off a system of '25 minutes on, 5 minutes off', and encourages writers to split up their work-load according to this timeframe. Pomodoro exercises are great for writing group sessions to encourage outputs and long-term habitual writing. An example of a Pomodoro worksheet from a multidisciplinary writing group is given below.</td></tr>
</table>

THE POMODORO TECHNIQUE
Writing Circle: Week 13

WHAT IS THE POMODORO TECHNIQUE?

- The Pomodoro technique is essentially a simple time-management strategy to help you to improve your outputs
- It works on a system of 25 minutes 'on' and five minutes 'off', forcing you to plan your objectives into 25 minute slots. This makes the task appear more manageable and less daunting...

WHY POMODORO?

1. WORK WITH TIME - NOT AGAINST IT

For many people, time is an enemy. We race against the clock to finish assignments and meet deadlines. The Pomodoro Technique teaches you to work with time, instead of struggling against it. A revolutionary time management system, it is at once deceptively simple to learn and life-changing to use.

2. ELIMINATE BURNOUT

Essential to the Pomodoro Technique is the notion that taking short, scheduled breaks while working eliminates the 'running on fumes' feeling you get when you've pushed yourself too hard. It's impossible to over work when you stick to the system. You may end up taking fewer sick days, too!

3. MANAGE DISTRACTIONS

Whether it's a call, a Facebook message, or suddenly realizing you need to change the oil in your car, many distracting thoughts and events come up when you're at work. The Pomodoro Technique will help you log your distractions and order them according to priority levels. Often, they can wait.

4. CREATE A BETTER WORK / LIFE BALANCE

Most of us are intimately acquainted with the guilt that comes from procrastinating. If we haven't had a productive day, it's pretty easy to end up feeling like we can't enjoy our free time. Becoming a Pomodoro Master involves creating an effective timetable, allowing you to truly enjoy your time off.

SIX OBJECTIVES OF POMODOROS*

1. Find out how much effort an activity requires by monitoring how many Pomodoros you need to finish the task

2. Protect Pomodoros from internal and external interruptions

3. Make accurate estimations as to how many Pomodoros you will need to finish a task

4. Use your Pomodoro time to not only work on your task but spend the first few minutes on recap and the last few minutes on review

5. Set a timetable according to your "to do's", to your time, or even to the season. This is good for organising work and also for creating more free time

6. Once you have completed these objectives, find your own personal objective, such as being more efficient, or improving the quality of your work

    a. In order to achieve the best results your objectives should be done incrementally - in other words, if you didn't complete an objective, don't move ahead to the next one; rather, continue trying to do better with the current objective until you feel that you've mastered it

POMODORO FIVE MINUTE BREAKS: What to do?

• Try some simple desk exercises, like the ones listed in this article, "**5 Desk Exercises for Your Busy Office Life.**" They're quick, effective, and don't even require leaving your office, if you're not in the mood to walk around.

• Do a quick organizational chore. Not one that you dread, or find to be cumbersome. Just something small, like emptying out your backpack, purse, or briefcase, and reorganizing it, or cleaning up your desk area and tossing unnecessary documents. Or if you work from home, you could get a load of laundry started, or wash the dishes. Little household or administrative tasks like these can feel oddly satisfying and mind freeing when breaking up your Pomodoros.

• Do a simple hand or neck massage to release tension. There are several **video tutorials** online that can teach you how.

• Similarly, some "**office yoga**" or breathing exercises can go a long way in five minutes to centre your mind and body.

• Or even keep it as simple as getting up to get a glass of water.

SOURCES

* The six objectives are described in a short video on the website - it is worth watching!

Informal and online support

Finding creative ways to support scholars through online systems is a necessity in the South African context, given the high number of part-time and off-campus postgraduate scholars. Online support has become an increasingly prevalent resource for teaching and learning opportunities in the higher education space. As such, using technology for postgraduate writing support, particularly support initiatives which enable all scholars (both on and off-campus) to take part in, is key for on-going, sustainable academic literacy development.

Two very different forms of online writing support are introduced below, with insights into how these platforms can be adapted for supporting scholars in South African university contexts. The online platforms include *AcWriMo* and the use of **online writing blogs** and websites to support scholars.

AcWriMo

AcWriMo is a month-long writing activity that aims at encouraging academics (at all stages of their careers) to write prolifically throughout the month of November each year. An online community is usually created, such as through a writing blog like *PhD2Published*, through Twitter or through Facebook. Academic writers join an online community and publicly state their goals for the month in the "Writing Accountability Spreadsheet". This spreadsheet captures the members' goals for the month, and provides space for weekly progress updates. The spreadsheet, together with the online interaction with other members, acts as a support mechanism to encourage participants to achieve their goals. Additionally, it provides a level of accountability for members to meet their daily targets.

Although AcWriMo is a month-long initiative with the aim of achieving short-term ambitious writing goals, the long-term aim of the initiative is to encourage prolific and consistent writing throughout the year.

The AcWriMo initiative is particularly useful as it provides a fun and dynamic online space to create momentum, support and inspiration to help participants achieve ambitious writing goals.

Although academic writing is usually characterised by quality rather than quantity, the initiative can help scholars and academics alike push through writer's block and it can help them overcome a fear of beginning the writing process. It also encourages getting ideas down on paper which organises and clarifies thinking, thus enhancing one's academic outputs. Being accountable to an online community is less threatening than perhaps a community of writers that meet face-to-face each week, therefore less-confident participants can still benefit from the aspect of community without feeling vulnerable. **The online nature of the initiative means that members can be scattered geographically and still take part. This is significant when considering the postgraduate community at many universities in South Africa, which is often off-campus.** AcWriMo is also useful as writers at all different stages of their careers, disciplines and writing genres can join in the initiative. Whether a Masters scholar is writing their literature review; an academic staff member writing a paper; or a Predoc working on their proposal, anyone can benefit from the practices developed in this writing initiative. AcWriMo can be developed by any person willing to coordinate it online and it can be adapted in many ways to meet the requirements of the participants and the context.

Writing Blogs

There are a number of different academic writing blogs freely available on the web for scholars and academic staff to draw on. **Writing blogs offer advice, guidelines and create a sense of a global supportive community of writers.** Such blogs are created by a range of different authors on a continuum of expertise, ranging from scholars to professors to writing experts. Writing blogs are easily accessible to all and apart from going on to the web and reading, they do not require any commitment or effort from the scholar in order to benefit from the advice on offer.

Writing blogs cover a wide range of topics, ranging from advice about the research process to managing your supervisor. A particularly useful blog is *Doctoral Writing SIG*[3]. Examples of posts from this blog include: resources for writing; referencing systems; using peer review for editing purposes; working with feedback; crafting conclusions; writing abstracts; dissertation structure; conversations about what the examiner will look for; publishing while completing your research; how to write a conference paper; advice on what to do if you have too much data; communities of practice for international students; and generative writing strategies and activities. Other useful writing blogs include: *PhD2Published*[4], *The Thesis Whisperer*[5] and *Patter*[6].

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[3] Blog can be accessed at: *https://doctoralwriting.wordpress.com*
[4] Blog can be accessed at: *http://www.phd2published.com/topics/writing/*
[5] Blog can be accessed at: *http://thesiswhisperer.com/*
[6] Blog can be accessed at: *http://patthomson.net/*

Concluding remarks and suggestions

This source book, together with the corresponding overview booklet, has illustrated the importance of adopting a socio-cultural orientation to writing support in higher education. It has demonstrated the need to offer theoretically informed support programmes that will cultivate a community of practice in university spaces and which embeds academic writing practices within broader disciplinary research practices.

While there is no one 'right' way to offer writing support at the postgraduate level, this source book offers **a number of useful tools and activities** which can be used in various ways for supporting scholars. In particular, the resources offered in this source book can be **adapted for any discipline**, and can be enacted by any proactive lecturer, tutor or by scholars themselves.

The key challenge for ensuring long-term, sustainable and effective writing support is proactivity and accountability in academic departments themselves.

Writing support should not be seen as something external to the discipline - outside of, 'at the end of', or separate to - the disciplinary research process. Rather, it should be conceptualised and treated as being embedded and enacted in the everyday, social practice of postgraduate studies.

As such, scholars need to be supported within their disciplines from the beginning of their research. They should be encouraged and taught the value of generative writing, how writing should become a habitual practice in their daily research endeavours, and, essentially, the writing norms of their disciplines should be made explicit to them from the very beginning of their candidature. This can be done through the adaptation of many of the tools and activities outlined in this source book. What is also emphasised, however, is **the need for disciplinary experts (academic staff members) to collaborate with language experts (language staff), in the development of discipline-specific writing support.** This source book offers one step forward in this development plan.

Postgraduate scholars should also be inducted into the practice of peer review as often as possible, as this provides another effective and sustainable long-term support possibility.

Peer learning opportunities are greatly underdeveloped and underutilised in many institutions, and yet can offer rich learning experiences. This is an avenue of support that should be further developed at a departmental and multidisciplinary level, in collaboration with the Centre for Postgraduate Studies.

Develop and add to the activities that can support academic writing

This source book has presented a broad framework for approaching academic writing and academic writing support. The activities presented are but a few of the many different activities that can be used to further develop academic writing competence. In concluding the source book, we invite academics and postgraduate scholars in diverse disciplines to try out the activities outlined in the sourcebook, but also to develop additional activities and to further expand the ways of supporting academic writing in Rhodes University. As indicated at the start of this source book, a socio-cultural approach to supporting academic writing does not have a long tradition in South Africa, yet research is showing that it is an important process in furthering the knowledge production process. Importantly, academic writing support should not just be seen as a 'service' provided by the Centre for Postgraduate Studies personnel or other outsiders, rather it is a practice that should become embedded and part of 'normal practice' in supporting postgraduate scholars in all research groups, departments, research institutions and faculties.

Add your academic support writing activities here and share them with the Centre for Postgraduate Studies as you try them out so that we may share them more widely with others...

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This sourcebook provides a more practice-oriented summary of the more substantial overview booklet, drawing on the following references. For a more detailed account of how the literature was drawn on, please refer to the overview booklet, available on the CPGS website: http://www.ru.ac.za/cpgs/

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