

Overview of Academic Discourse:

Genre and Language

Objectives

When you have finished this section, you will

- be aware of various academic genres (text-types)
- be aware of what makes language 'academic'
- be better able to identify a range of Academic genres, to identify their structure and their main linguistic features
- be better able to analyse how these features are used
- be better prepared to use these features in your writing

Key Concepts: Academic genres; academic register, complex sentences, complex noun phrases and nominalisation, integrating sources, hedging, building cohesion.

Before the first class:

- 1) Survey the Write Site website: <http://writesite.elearn.usyd.edu.au/index.htm>

The Write Site website was developed at the University of Sydney. It provides support to help you develop as an academic English writer.

- 2) Read the text « Academic Discourse » by Ken Hyland provided in the IVLE folder.
- 3) Read the lesson notes below.
- 4) Preview the activities on 'Recognizing text types' (see IVLE folder) to analyse how context influences the types of texts we write.

What is Academic Discourse?

As a university student, you are a member of an academic community. Learning about this new group will help you feel a part of it and meet the expectations in your writing and other tasks. What values does your discipline hold dear? How do scholars in this group express their ideas? What types of texts and what language do they use?

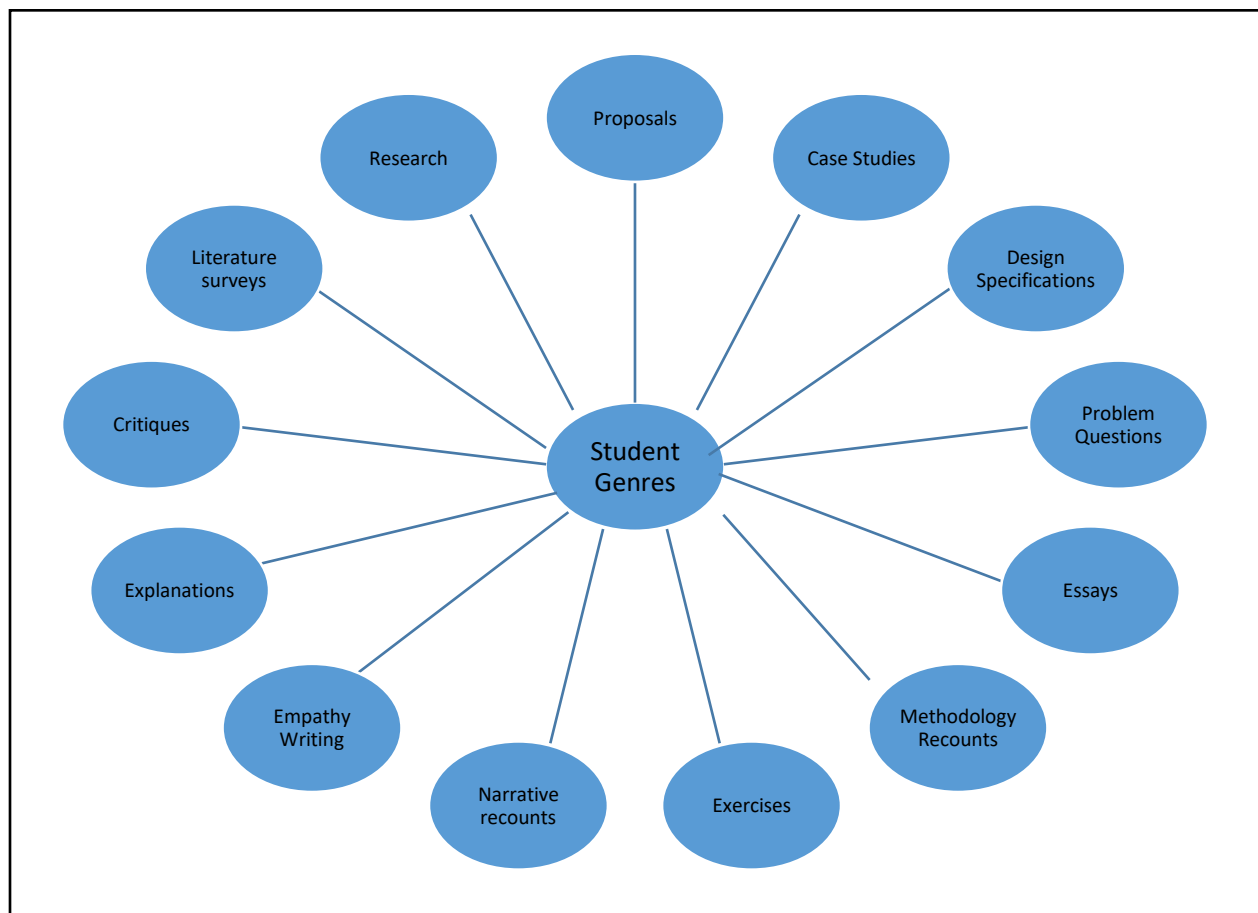
At university, various disciplines use a variety of genres (text-types) and these tend to follow expected stages/structures to fulfill the purpose of the text/the intentions of the writer. Also, academics value debate and discussion of ideas and use logical argument and precise evidence to support their views. This has an impact on the style of English that is acceptable in your assignments. However, as Hyland (2011) argues, there is some variety across the disciplines: humanities and science disciplines do not create or share knowledge in the same way and this is reflected in the genres and language they use. Students are expected, through clear and precise language, to demonstrate their

understanding of concepts and their ability to synthesize and discuss their assigned readings. They are also expected to write according to the expectations of their disciplines. Despite this discipline variety, Academic English makes use of several **recurrent** language structures which are very useful to be aware of. We will first look at Genres (the types of texts) and then at some of these features (see the table below) with the role (function) they play.

1. Academic Genres

Tasks:

- Complete the activities on 'Recognizing text types' (see IVLE folder) to analyse how context influences the types of texts we write.
- Discuss the types of texts you wrote at school. What types are you writing in your university modules? (If you still do not know, do a quick search of your modules assessment types). What kind of structure do these texts/assignments adopt? Structure means the expected 'stages' of the text (an introduction, one paragraph to describe, one paragraph to discuss and compare, a conclusion...).
- Look at the figure below adapted from the work of Nesi and Gardner (2012) . Indicate with a 'R' the ones you are reading and a 'W' the ones you are writing. Add any additional genres/text-types not indicated.



2. Academic language

Task: Scan the table below. Highlight the terms which you feel are unclear or you need some revision on. You will be able to discuss this in class with your tutor and classmates.

This table represents the 4 main ‘language toolkits’ we will see in the next 6 weeks. These toolkits will be taught and practiced in ES1103. How these toolkits are useful in your discipline writing will be discussed too.

GENRE and generic stages	Function/ Purpose	4 Linguistic Toolkits (examples in blue)	
	To create texts that flow logically and represent your views more persuasively.	Toolkit #1 - Textual cohesion Macrotheme (Thesis statement) Hyperthemes (Topic Sentences) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> General nouns <u>problems</u>, <u>causes</u> <u>effect</u>, <u>impact</u>, <u>reasons</u>, <u>issue</u>... Nominalisation Referencing pronouns and other words) <u>Shopping centres</u>→ <u>they</u>→ <u>such places</u> Conjunction/linkers <u>however</u>, <u>as a result</u>, <u>Beyond</u>... Thematic progression (information flow) A→ B B→C A→ B A→C A→B B1→C B2→D Cohesion at paragraph level : <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Lexical chains <u>Hong Kong</u>→ <u>the SAR</u> → <u>The territory</u>→ <u>the city</u> Reference and Substitutions <u>Shopping centres</u>→ <u>they</u>→ <u>such places</u> Lexical field/sets (related words): <u>computer components</u>, <u>printers</u>, <u>CPUs</u>, <u>memory chips</u>, <u>high tech equipment</u>. 	This is the toolkit to produce texts that flow well.
	To express complex thoughts and their logical links	Toolkit #2 - Logical links between clauses in complex sentences <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Clause complex (sentences with more than one clause) = <u>non-defining relative clause</u> + <u>while</u>, <u>whereas</u> X Time: <u>while</u>, <u>as</u>, <u>before</u>, <u>after</u>, <u>until</u>, <u>as soon as</u>... Manner: <u>as</u> Cause, condition, concession: <u>because</u>, <u>in order that</u>, <u>in case</u>, <u>if</u>, <u>unless</u>, <u>although</u> Projection: <u>state</u>, <u>suggest</u>, <u>argue that</u> <u>think</u>, <u>believe</u>, <u>know that</u> 	This is the toolkit to express the content of your discipline (the field). It includes the technical words as well as the logical link between concepts (cause/effect; sequence..)
	To discuss abstract concepts.	Toolkit #3 - Noun group (headnouns are underlined) <u>Continued exposure to such chemicals</u> can lead to <u>reduced functioning of the auto-immune system</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Modifiers: prepositional phrase <u>of the auto-immune system</u> Adjective Relative clauses Nominalisation (often combined with prep.phrase) Verb→ noun <u>to formulate</u> → <u>formulation</u> Adjective → noun <u>complex</u> → <u>complexity</u> 	
	To present your views persuasively; to by show caution and tentativeness	Toolkit #4 - Evaluation/Appraisal <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Hedging and Modality: <u>antonym</u>: <u>booster</u>, eg <u>definitely</u> Modals: <u>may</u>, <u>might</u> , <u>could</u> Adverbs: <u>perhaps</u>, <u>probably</u> Quantifiers: <u>some</u> Verbs: <u>appear to</u> + V/ <u>seem to</u> + V/ <u>tend to</u> + V 	This is the toolkit to critically evaluate the concepts, to present results and discussions, to persuade your reader (according to the

when presenting arguments or discussing results; to express your critical stance on external on sources you use in your writing	<p>Other expressions : <i>x is likely to + V/ there's a tendency for x to + V</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Reporting structures: <i>The research report concludes [that + SV]. As Jones (2010) argues,... According to Zhang (2009), ...</i> Endorsing and distancing <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Evaluative reporting verbs: <i>claim, suggest, demonstrate...</i> Intensifying/limiting adverbs: <i>clearly, unambiguously, strongly/somewhat, to a certain extent</i> Concessive clauses: <i>although...while..</i> 	purpose of the text you are writing)
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In the following activities, we will observe these features in a text.

Reading Task

1. What are the benefits of studying at University? Discuss with a classmate.
2. Read the text below. Highlight the main points and note down the benefits mentioned. Are they the same benefits as the ones you listed in the pre-reading discussion?

ERIC Identifier: ED470038

Publication Date: 2002-00-00

Author: Porter, Kathleen

Source: ERIC Clearinghouse on Higher Education Washington DC.

The Value of a College Degree.

- (1) The escalating cost of higher education is causing many to question the value of continuing education beyond high school. Many wonder whether the high cost of tuition, the opportunity cost of choosing college over full-time employment, and the accumulation of thousands of dollars of debt is, in the long run, worth the investment. The risk is especially large for low-income families who have a difficult time making ends meet without the additional burden of college tuition and fees. In order to determine whether higher education is worth the investment, it is useful to examine what is known about the value of higher education and the rates of return on investment to both the individual and to society.
- (2) There is considerable support for the notion that the rate of return on investment in higher education is high enough to warrant the financial burden associated with pursuing a college degree. Though the earnings differential between college and high school graduates varies over time, college graduates, on average, earn more than high school graduates. According to the Census Bureau, over an adult's working life, high school graduates earn an average of

\$1.2 million; associate's degree holders earn about \$1.6 million; and bachelor's degree holders earn about \$2.1 million (Day & Newburger, 2002). These sizeable differences in lifetime earnings put the costs of college study in realistic perspective. Most students today-- about 80 percent of all students-- enroll either in public 4-year colleges or in public 2-year colleges. According to the U.S. Department of Education report, *Think College Early*, a full-time student at a public 4-year college pays an average of \$8,655 for in-state tuition, room and board (U.S. Dept. of Education, 2002). A full-time student in a public 2-year college pays an average of \$1,359 per year in tuition (U.S. Dept. of Education, 2002). These statistics support the contention that, though the cost of higher education is significant, given the earnings disparity that exists between those who earn a bachelor's degree and those who do not, the individual rate of return on investment in higher education is sufficiently high to warrant the cost.

- (3) College graduates also enjoy benefits beyond increased income. A 1998 report published by the Institute for Higher Education Policy reviews the individual benefits that college graduates enjoy, including higher levels of saving, increased personal/professional mobility, improved quality of life for their offspring, better consumer decision making, and more hobbies and leisure activities (Institute for Higher Education Policy, 1998). According to a report published by the Carnegie Foundation, non-monetary individual benefits of higher education include the tendency for postsecondary students to become more open-minded, more cultured, more rational, more consistent and less authoritarian; these benefits are also passed along to succeeding generations (Rowley and Hurtado, 2002). Additionally, college attendance has been shown to "decrease prejudice, enhance knowledge of world affairs and enhance social status" while increasing economic and job security for those who earn bachelor's degrees (Ibid.)
- (4) Research has also consistently shown a positive correlation between completion of higher education and good health, not only for oneself, but also for one's children. In fact, "parental schooling levels (after controlling for differences in earnings) are positively correlated with the health status of their children" and "increased schooling (and higher relative income) are correlated with lower mortality rates for given age brackets" (Cohn & Geske, 1992). A number of studies have shown a high correlation between higher education and cultural and family values, and economic growth. According to Cohn and Geske (1992), there is the tendency for more highly educated women to spend more time with their children; these women tend to use this time to better

prepare their children for the future. Cohn and Geske (1992) report that "college graduates appear to have a more optimistic view of their past and future personal progress."

- (5) Public benefits of attending college include increased tax revenues, greater workplace productivity, increased consumption, increased workforce flexibility, and decreased reliance on government financial support (Institute for Higher Education Policy, 1998). While it is clear that investment in a college degree, especially for those students in the lowest income brackets, is a financial burden, the long-term benefits to individuals as well as to society at large, appear to far outweigh the costs.

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4. Text Deconstruction

The text above is an example of a general academic text. We will look at it in more detail.

a) Structure: How is the text organized?

Text Deconstruction Task 1

1. Read the text and annotate (main ideas and supporting information)
2. In pairs, complete the table below.

Par.	Structural Features: Main idea/Supporting Info	Language Features
1		
2		
3		
4		
5		

b) Language:

Text Deconstruction Task 2

In groups, search the text to find examples of the 4 Linguistic Toolkit features shown in the table above. You can either write a few examples of the features in the table above (write the paragraph number) OR highlight the features in the text directly (in this case, you can write in the margin what these features are: ie 'hedging').

As this is the first time you have done this activity, you might not be able to identify many features, or you might only see some, but not others. As the semester progresses, you will become more used to noticing these features in your reading and you will see how they contribute to academic writing. You should also try to consciously use them in your writing.

Compare your findings with another group.

- Did you find all features?
- Are there any features from the table that are missing in the text?
- Are some features more difficult to find than others? Why?
- Do you agree on most findings? Where do you differ?

Preparation for next class:

Read and watch the sources below and bring a reading from one of your modules to class to practise reading strategies and note-taking.

Resource List

http://sydney.edu.au/stuserv/documents/learning_centre/M1.pdf

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=M3aZNaPY88Y>

(Monash University on Efficient reading strategies)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WtW9lyE04OQ> (Taking Cornell notes in a lecture or from a text)

Annotating while reading:

http://learners.ncu.edu/writingprogram/writing_center.aspx?menu_id=82

Critical reading towards critical writing:

<http://www.writing.utoronto.ca/advice/reading-and-researching/critical-reading>

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