Genre analysis: Comparison between User guide and Textbook

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**Introduction**

As de Chazal (2004) noted,*” Academic texts tend to be written following accepted conventions such as text structure and style (genre), for a clearly defined reader profile, such as students of sociology (audience) and for a specific purpose, for example to persuade through a convincing argument (P.59)”,* a genre is a type of writing combining many interrelated factors such as audience, purpose, organization and presentation (in de Chazal, 2014, p. 59). Being familiar with academic genres, that is doing some academic literacy practices (Curry, 2016, p. 83), is of great significance for graduate students, because with a specific genre, graduate students would be able to read and produce some related texts more formally and efficiently. This paper will introduce two genres, user guide and textbook, in the fields of computer science and electrical and computer engineering respectively. The key features of audiences, purposes, organizations and presentations of these two genres are descripted in paragraph 2 and paragraph 3. And the similarities and differences between the user guide and textbook, with respects to audiences, purposes, organizations and presentations are demonstrated in paragraph 4.

**User Guide and Textbook**

User guide, a kind of book offering step by step information on how to install, operate and troubleshoot a specific product, is one of the key genres in computer science (Mcmurrey, 2015). With the user guide, the customers will be able make better use of the product and fix some common bugs by themselves, it serves as a bridge between the manufacturers and the users. And there are four characteristics which make it very different from other genres. First, the target audiences may be common people, programmers or IT managers, they must be carefully identified. How they will use the product and their levels of technical Knowledge both should be counted in the process of designing a user guide. Second, the user guides are designed to instruct people on how to utilize the relevant product better. Third, a great amount of information of the user guide, such as instructions, precautionary information, the description of the product and technical background, should be organized in a particular format (Mcmurrey, 2015). This format often consists of task-oriented headings, lists, special notices and instructional design which make abundant use of graphics, tables and highlighting. Besides, the vertical numbered lists for actions are very typical characteristics in a user guide, with which the step-by-step instructions would be more logical and coherent. (Mcmurrey, 2015). Finally, the user guides are always presented as books, so they must have some book-design components like front and back covers, title page, edition notice, preface, appendixes, glossary and index. (Mcmurrey, 2015). With specific audiences, purposes, organizations and presentations, user guide is a very important type of genre in computer science.

The key genre in the field, computer engineering, is textbook. A textbook is a book used in the study of a subject. Based on the essential and useful knowledges provided by a textbook a computer engineer can process broader problems or design a better computer so textbook is of great significant in this field. For example, the textbook *Computer Architecture (*Hennessy and Patterson, 2012) teaches the architecture of computer, the constitution of computer, how the components work and how can we design a computer to pursue a higher performance. Those are key information to computer engineer. As the point stated in the first paragraph, as a kind of genre, textbook has specific audience, specific purpose, organization and presentation. The main audience of textbook of computer engineering is the students in this field. The audience of some guide textbooks also consists of people who are interested in this field and want to study it. The specific purpose of textbook in my field is to teach students or someone else in this field some important and useful conceptions, give examples to help understand these conceptions. Textbook also gives some problems computer engineer will meet and the solutions to them. In a word, it makes students or someone interested in this field able to become a computer engineer. For the organization of textbook, first, a textbook has the title of it and the author. Then it has a catalog which will mark the title and page number of every chapter. The contents of a textbook are usually divided into many chapters. Each chapter has a title and describes one conception using sentences, charts, equations, tables or pictures. Then some textbooks have appendix and reference. Those are the organization of a textbook. The presentation of textbooks, obviously, is usually a book. It can also present by a file on computer such as a PDF file or an electrical book online. Textbook is a key genre in computer engineering with specific audience, purpose, organization and presentation.

**Comparison**

These two key genres are similar in organizations and presentations, while different in purpose and audience. First, the readers of the user guides locating on the users of some specific product are very different from the audience of the textbook locating on the students and some people who are interested in computer engineering. Second, although both their purposes are to offer some knowledge and instructions to their readers, the user guide aims to help people on how to use the relevant product, while the text book aims to help readers get a profound understanding of some concepts in this field. Third, they both contain catalog and key words which help organize the book logically. But the textbook generally assigned its content in the order from simple to complex which means it will introduce the simple concepts first, and then introduce the more complex concepts based on the former. As to user guide, it is generally divided into many unit according to the functions operated by its different parts which have no much logically interconnection. Moreover, there are many numbered lists offering step-by-step instructions in user guide, which are rare in a textbook. Finally, user guide and textbook are both books, so they share much similarities in their presentation. They both have covers, catalogs, prefaces, references and so on.

**Conclusion**

A Genre is a type of writing which varies across disciplines, such as computer science, computer engineering, electrical engineering and so on (Curry, 2016, P. 84). In this paper, two genres are introduced, one is the user guide in computer science, another is the textbook in computer engineering. They share some similarities in the organizations and presentations, as well as differences in the audiences, purposes, organizations and presentations. In fact, complete information contained in the two genres are far more than those stated in this paper, the best way to learn them is to practice them.

**Reference**

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