Balancing old and new activity types on an academic writing website

Hilary Nesi
&
Sheena Gardner
A follow-on project

Intended to apply findings from ‘An Investigation of Genres of Assessed Writing in British Higher Education’ 2004-2007

www.coventry.ac.uk/bawe

For the British Council Learn English website

http://learnenglish.britishcouncil.org/en/
The team

• Hilary Nesi and Sheena Gardner - from the original ESRC project
• Andy Gillett – materials developer
• Tim Kelly – video and multimedia
• Elly Hutchings - icons
• Alex Woolner – consultant from Coventry Serious Games Institute
• Adam Kightley – British Council
Project objectives

• To raise teachers' and learners' awareness of the types of writing produced by students in specific disciplines
• To create motivating academic writing materials
• To improve the quality of student writing, especially the writing produced by users of English as a second or a foreign language.
Basic Exercise Templates

- True or False
- Reordering Vertical
- Reordering Horizontal
- Multiple Choice
- Matching
- Error Correction
- Gap Fill Drag & Drop
- Gap Fill Typing
- Grouping
- Multiple Selection
- Image Matching
- Image Library
Writing for a Purpose

Materials to improve the quality of discipline-specific student work.

- Introduction
- Primary Purposes
- Genre Families
- Your Writing Task
- Disciplines
- About Us
Writing for a Purpose

Materials to improve the quality of discipline-specific student work.

This is the basic menu for the site.
Expanding the Menu

The ‘Primary Purposes’ section provides audio files of mini-interviews, gap-fill and matching tasks.
## Purposes linked to genre families:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Purpose</th>
<th>Genre families</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Demonstrating knowledge and understanding</td>
<td>Exercises, Explanations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Developing powers of independent reasoning</td>
<td>Critique, Essay</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Building research skills</td>
<td>Literature Survey, Methodology, Recount, Research Report</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Preparing for professional practice</td>
<td>Case Study, Design Specification, Problem Question, Proposal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Writing for oneself and others</td>
<td>Event Recount, Public Engagement</td>
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We have divided the 13 types of written assignment into 5 broad categories. Each category has a slightly different primary purpose.

<table>
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Icons are associated with each purpose, and each genre family

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Primary Purposes: Tasks

Tasks 1 - 4 will give you practice in understanding and remembering the 5 primary purposes.

Task 1: Purpose Task 1

Instructions

Match the icons with the primary purposes.

START
Tasks 1 - 4 will give you practice in understanding and remembering the 5 primary purposes.
What do you mean by Preparing for Professional Practice?

Listen to the discussion between a student (S) and a lecturer (L) and fill in the blanks.

Instructions

Listen to the discussion between a lecturer and a student and fill in the blanks.
What do you mean by Preparing for Professional Practice?

Listen to the discussion between a student (S) and a lecturer (L) and fill in the blanks.

S: So what do you mean by ___?
L: Well, this is the kind of writing that you do when you're ___ problems that might ___ occur in the world of ___. If you were, for example, a ___ professional or a ___ or a ___ person. You talk about a problem that ___ in the ___ and you try to find ___ to that problem.
S: So I'm ___ things I might do in my ___?
L: Yes, that's right.
Instructions

Look at the assignment briefs on the left. Then drag the primary purpose into the appropriate column on the right.
Describe the stages of your experiment, ensuring that you explain why you chose that particular procedure.

Reflect on the process of carrying out the investigation, making clear what you have learned in the process.

How does a catalytic converter work?
The ‘Genre Families’ section describes and gives examples of each of the 13 genre families.
We have identified 13 types of student writing. These types of writing are often referred to as genres or genre families.

The 13 genre families we have identified can be described as follows:

- In a **Case Study**, you focus on a particular organisation, industry or person (such as a patient) in order to describe it from a range of perspectives. You will conclude with recommendations for future action. *Case Studies* are particularly common in medicine and health disciplines, and in disciplines which involve business studies (for example agriculture, business, engineering, and hospitality, leisure and tourism).

- In **Critiques**, you will be expected to evaluate something such as a theory, a book or a piece of equipment. This will enable you to answer the question, "What is the value of x?" *Critiques* are common across the disciplines, to evaluate the writer's own work, and the work of others.

- In **Design Specifications**, you are expected to demonstrate your ability to develop a design for a product or procedure that could be manufactured or implemented. *Design Specifications* are particularly common in computer science and engineering.

- In **Public Engagement**, you will communicate your specialist disciplinary knowledge in forms such as newspaper articles or information leaflets. You will be expected to write in registers suitable for general rather than academic audiences. *Public Engagement* is particularly common in the sciences, but can be given as a writing task in any discipline.

- In **Essays**, you are expected to develop ideas, make connections between arguments and evidence and develop an individualised thesis. You will usually write these in response to a question given by your lecturer. *Essays* can be given as a writing task in any discipline.

- **Exercise** genres give you the opportunities to demonstrate your understanding, usually of basic skills and concepts. They are typically short numbered responses to questions. *Exercises* can be given as a writing task in any discipline, and are common in disciplines where students are required to perform mathematical calculations.

- In **Explanations**, you are required to demonstrate your knowledge and understanding and to answer questions. They are generally longer than exercises and additionally expect you to explain how something works or functions. *Explanations* can be given as a writing task in any discipline, but are particularly common in the Sciences.
The ‘Writing Task’ section has activities relating to each of the genre families.

Your Writing Task

If you have read the first four pages and done some of the exercises, you should understand about the 5 primary purposes of academic writing and the 13 genre families.

You should now be able to choose the correct genre you need to use for your writing. If you are still not sure, read your question or assignment brief again. It might also be a good idea to talk to your lecturer.

What is your primary purpose?

If you have not read the first four pages and, therefore, cannot identify your primary purpose, we suggest that you have a look at those pages.
Audio and video clips, information about structure and vocabulary...
Information about stages and vocabulary, derived from examination of the corpus evidence.
The following sentences are taken from the introductory sections of Explanations.

- Match the sentences with their missing words.
- ........... or missing mass, as it's often known, is matter that cannot be detected by observing the electromagnetic radiation. As it is not directly detectable this makes its quantities very difficult to measure. (dark matter)
- The ........... has long legs, large pricked up ears, a long head and body, a straight belly and a distinctive red/ginger coat. Records show that this colour has not changed since the 1800s and importantly the coat prevents sunburn in summer. (Tamworth pig)
- The ........... is considered to be a 'noble' grape for wine making. The fruit is small, yellow in colour but not very juicy. (Riesling grape)
- One of the most easily recognised designs of the 20th Century is the ..........., which almost anyone would recognise regardless of age, nationality or gender. (Coca-Cola bottle)
- ........... is the art of sending secret messages. (cryptography)
- The ........... is one of the greatest inventions in the field of Artificial Intelligence. Its appearance based on the human body. (humanoid robot)
- ........... belong to the family of Orchidaceae. It is a unique group of plants that have over 800 genera and over 25000 species. (orchids)
- ........... is a collection of diseases with the common features of uncontrolled cell growth followed by metastasis to surrounding tissues. (cancer)
Explanations can begin in a number of different ways. Typically, the introductory section provides answers to one or more of the following questions:

- Why is it popular or well-known?
- Why is it important to study it?
- What is problematic about it?
- What are its categories or components?
- What does it do?
- What is its history?
And accompanying tasks.....

Group the following passages according to which of these questions they answer:

- The Chrysler Building is a masterpiece of Art Deco design, built at a time when there was great competition in New York to build the tallest building.
- A clear understanding of the Nitrogen cycle would help to make a profitable use of fertilisers and manure, and reduce the nitrogen content in the water cycle and atmosphere.
- Breast cancer is the most common form of cancer found in women; it is on the increase and is therefore a serious concern. The lifetime risk of developing breast cancer is 1:11 for women and 1:1000 for men.
- There are four different kinds of teeth; the anterior peg-shaped incisors and dagger-shaped canines and the posterior broad, cusped, molars and pre-molars.
Indicating importance and significance

Choose words to fill the gaps in these sentences, taken from introductions to Explanations:

• The **commonest** molecular disease for the isochromosome of the long arm of the X chromosome is Turner syndrome.
• It is easy to forget that tyres are still a race car's **biggest** single performance variable.
• The Petronas Towers are currently the World's **tallest** buildings.
• Studies indicate that capuchins show the **highest** degree of manual prehension among new world primates.
• Some of the **finest** sweet wines of the world may be produced from Rieslings.
• NME started in 1952, making it the **oldest** existing music magazine.
• Perhaps the **strongest** form of evidence for the existence of dark matter is the rotation curves of galaxies.
• The 2004 Indian Ocean tsunami is perhaps the **best** example of the devastating effect of a strong tsunami.
Drag and Drop

• So far the most .......... concerning spindle asymmetry is the involvement of heterotrimeric G proteins. (striking and exciting finding)
• One of the most .......... in the physiological adjustment of the carp during anoxia is its capacity to acquire the little oxygen that is present in oxygen defiant water. (important factors)
• As one of the most .......... proteins, Immunoglobulin G serves as a model for other immunoglobulins. (extensively studied)
• However, the most .......... of Fgf-8 is in its involvement in AER derived mitogenic activity that regulates limb bud outgrowth. (striking role)
• ATP is the most .......... of energy in the brain. (important form)
• This frame is the most .......... in the design of modern vehicles. (widely used)
A Janus Moment

From more traditional CALL exercises

To more extended (still controlled) access to the corpus via corpus tools ....
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<td>(e.g. to play/take/have an important role in ...)</td>
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Links to the corpus

Clusters which commonly occur in specific disciplines and genres are first identified using Wordsmith Tools, then conflated, then found in Sketch Engine using corpus query language.

For example:
Methodology Recount  (the) aim of this experiment/report is/was
Case Study          it is important / recommended / suggested / vital that

The relevant page appears in a frame.
Click on the red words to see more context

- expand left: a failure to define properly the purposes and nature of the project. Wheeler, Richard J. (2005), page 17. It must be clear what the project is going to do, how it is going to do it and how the outcome of the project will be measured. After the implementation the project should also be evaluated to see if what was promised in the beginning was actually delivered. (expand right)
- expand right: The objectives are a more detailed set of statements of what the project is going to deliver. The objectives should be SMART to ensure a focus on what is pertinent and facilitate a thorough evaluation of the project. Evaluation will allow for further improvement and also helps to ascertain if objectives set out at project initiation are met.
Links to the Wordtree

http://wordtree.coventry.ac.uk/BAWE
CALL activities check understanding of corpus evidence

For example

• Which of the following verbs does not occur after ‘in this essay I will…..’

• Which of the following sentences express the writer’s personal opinion, and which express the opinion of others?

etc.
Model texts. Word lists. Information about the distribution of genre families, citation practices etc within each discipline and disciplinary group.
The British Council’s promotional material for the launch – at the ELTONs