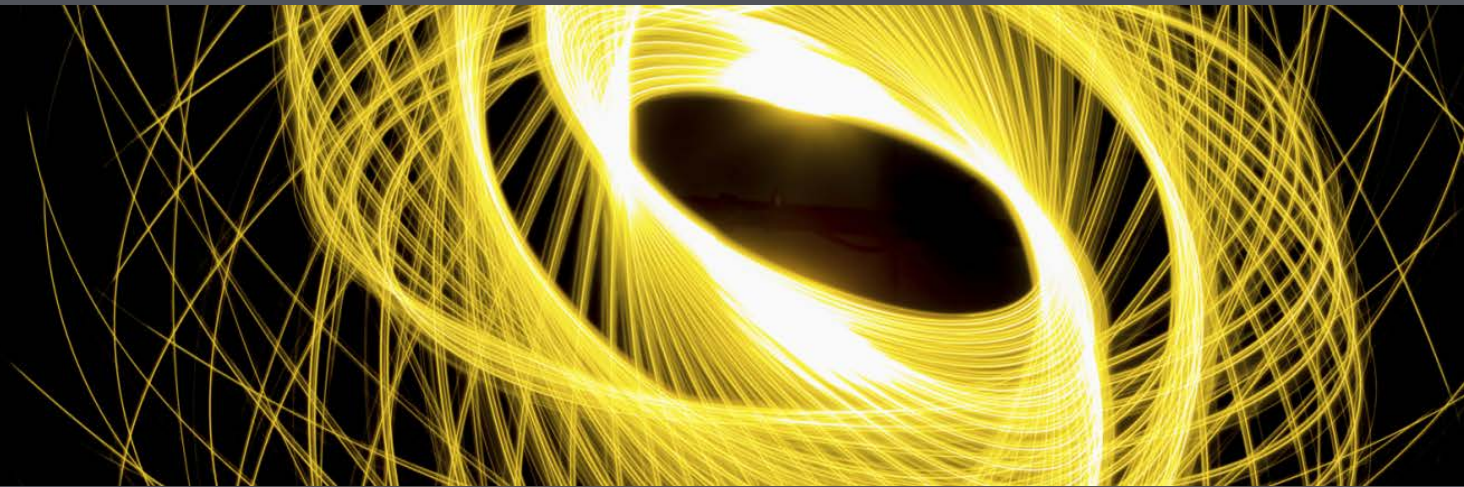


LEARNING TO WRITE FOR ACADEMIC PURPOSES: HOW NEW MASTERS STUDENTS LEARN THE RULES OF THE GAME



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BACKGROUND: WRITING ON MANY UK MA PROGRAMMES

- ‘essayist literacy’ tradition (Scollon and Scollon 1981) = the dominant Western, rationalist tradition of literacy
- = an “ideologically inscribed” practice (Lillis, 2001: 39)
- = “an institutional practice of mystery” (Lillis, 2001: 53) for many students

MY STUDY'S RESEARCH QUESTIONS:

1. How do
taught postgraduate students
develop an understanding of the writing demands
of the academy
in the early stages of their study?
2. What differences are there in
the experiences of students
developing academic writing skills
within this context?

BACKGROUND

- Longitudinal study: 1-year
- Case studies
 - Students x 6
 - MAELT/AL students, University of Reading, UK
 - Gender: 3 men + 3 women
 - Age range: 21-33 years
 - Language skills
 - Non-native English speakers x 5
 - IELTS 6.5-8.0
 - Japanese, Polish, Romanian, Turkish
 - Native English speaker: x1 (British)
 - Language teaching experience: 1-7 years

FOCUS:

FIRST THREE ESSAYS- WRITTEN BY ALL STUDENTS

Assignment	Deadline	Length (words)	Credits
Formative pre-course	Term 1, Week 4	1,000- 1,500	0
Discourse Analysis	Term 1, Week 10	2,000-2,500	10
Second Language Acquisition	Term 2, Day 1	3,000-4,000	20

THEORETICAL BACKGROUND:

- **English for Academic Purposes**
(Flowerdew and Peacock 2001, Hyland 2003)
- **Academic Literacies**
(Lea and Street 1998, 2006; Lillis 2001, 2003)
- **Discourse community**
(Swales 1990)
- **Community of practice**
(Lave and Wenger 1991)

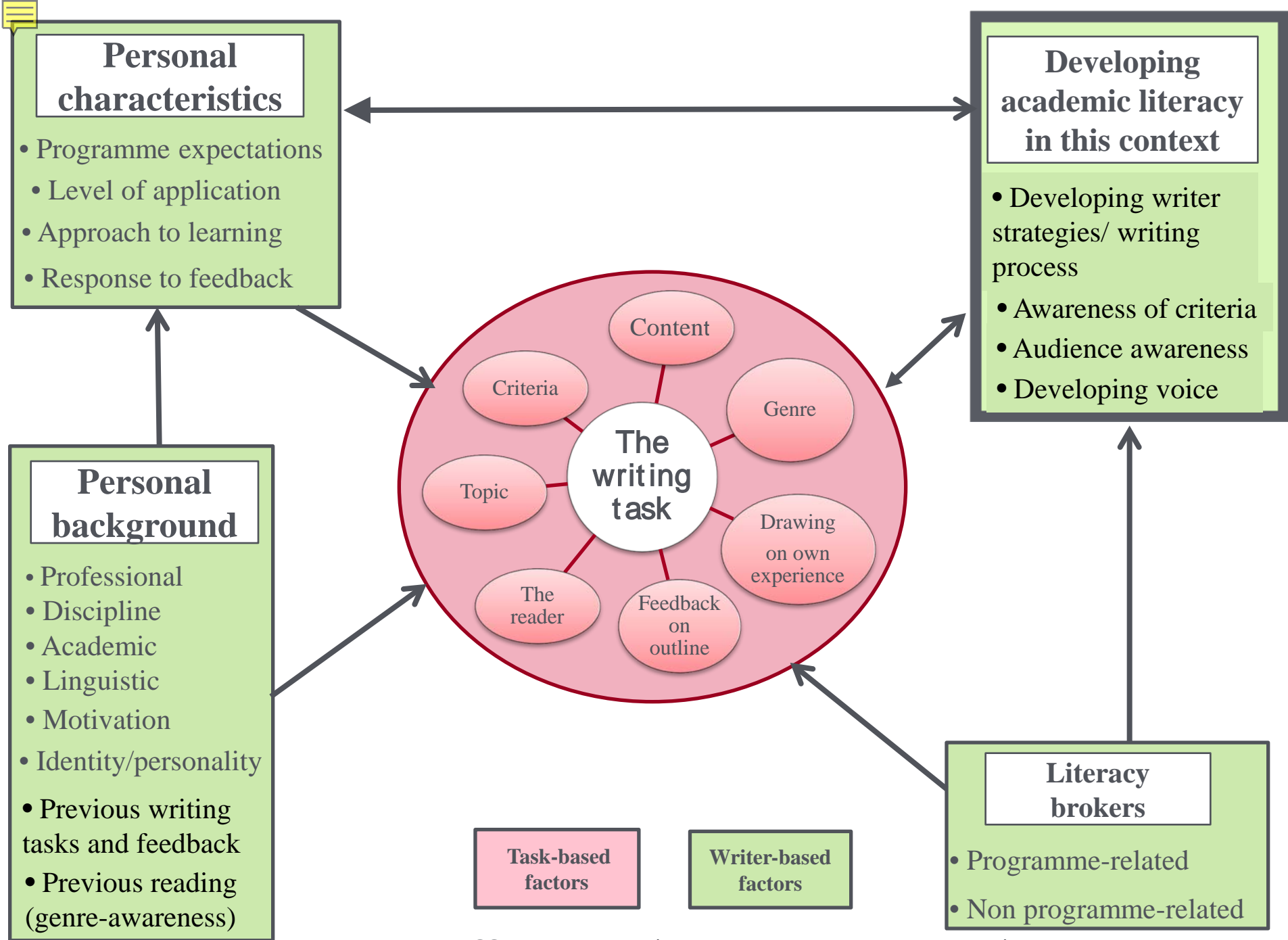
CORE INFORMATION SOURCES:

- Interviews : students (5 times over the academic year) and staff
- Student questionnaires (pre-course, one-year after leaving)
- Student e-mail reports at key points
- Assignment rubrics and briefings
- Assignments
- Feedback on assignments (written and f2f)

FINDINGS

- All students are individuals
- BUT
- common issues/ challenges

- Not a community of practice
- More a discourse community



PEDAGOGIC IMPLICATIONS

1. Departmental support
2. Developing a community
3. Broadening genre awareness
4. Meeting readers' expectations

PRINCIPLE: LOCATING ACADEMIC WRITING SUPPORT WITHIN THE DISCIPLINES

- All students need writing support while studying:
 - from subject-discipline teachers?
 - from non-subject specialist EAP/Study Support teachers?
- From both, as appropriate for a student's needs
- Drawing on:
 - EAP pedagogy and Academic Literacies thinking

1. DEPARTMENTAL SUPPORT

Module tutors: more in-class time on writing; more detailed explanations than might be thought necessary:

1. to explain **assignment demands/ marking criteria**
 - in detail
 - > once
2. to emphasise /exemplify advantages of any **pre-submission support**
3. for in-class tasks: analyses of **successful/ unsuccessful previous student writing**

DEPT SUPPORT CONTD.

4. to give:
 - criterion-linked feedback re **specific strengths & weaknesses** in assignments
 - general points about **lessons future writing**
5. to help to develop **audience-awareness**
eg by ref to themselves as readers in feedback

2. DEVELOPING A COMMUNITY

1. out-of-class small **study groups**
2. these need developing and practising in-class
3. group **collaboration** can then be extended to writing, with students being encouraged to read each other's work

3. BROADENING GENRE AWARENESS

1. broadening the **range of assessment types** beyond the essay
2. students studying **egs of appropriate writing** in a limited range of genres
3. the authors of these egs = previous students on same programme – so: **writing situated in the same context**

4. MEETING READERS' EXPECTATIONS

1. identifying who the **readers** are
2. developing own **voice**
3. understanding the UK **grading system**
4. using **feedback** – understanding its purpose
5. Johns and Swales' (2002) four **layers of socio-cultural expectation** that affect genre requirements for doctoral students – these apply here:

JOHNS AND SWALES' (2002) LAYERS OF EXPECTATIONS

Layers of expectations	Issues noted in Furneaux (2012) study	Examples of pedagogic implications for Master's programmes
University-wide expectations of scholarship	Students' bemusement at the University grading scheme	More class time required to discuss the mark scheme and expectations, especially on the return of first pieces of assessed work

Layers of expectations	Issues noted in Furneaux (2012) study	Examples of pedagogic implications for Master's programmes
Departmental & discipline expectations of appropriate topics and appropriate claims	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Challenges of assignment topic choice 2. Learning that T&L experiences = evidence + learning how to do this 3. Learning how to draw on reading appropriately 4. Interpreting feedback (FB) appropriately 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Structured, discourse analysis of assignment topics in classes 2. Discussion of when/how to draw on their T&L experience 3. Discussion of range of different uses of reading in assignments, including choice/length of quotations 4 Analysis of FB on successful and unsuccessful assignments Explaining FB, so that students do not see it as idiosyncratic to each tutor

Layers of expectations	Issues noted in Furneaux (2012) study	Examples of pedagogic implications for Master's programmes
Sub-field expectations re methodologies, approaches and rhetorical options	Students' need to learn that MA assignments for different modules could represent different genres, with different expectations of how to meet core criteria	As above + highlighting differences between assignments in different sub-disciplines / modules Tutors must be aware of the format/genre of assignments in other modules.

Layers of expectations	Issues noted in Furneaux (2012) study	Examples of pedagogic implications for Master's programmes
Personal expectations: the need to consider support-givers and examiners	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Students' need to take note of advice from module tutors, in general and with regard to their specific outline 2. The need to bear their audience, tutors and examiners in mind when writing 3. Differing use of appropriate and inappropriate FB 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1 Departmental discussion, among staff and with students, about differences in expectations across modules and tutors 2 Discussion with students of the audience, and their expectations, in assignment documents, briefings and feedback 3 Analysis of assignment marking criteria <p>Discussion with students of what they find to be helpful and unhelpful feedback.</p>

TIMUR'S EXPERIENCE

‘I was in the middle of nowhere when I came in this MA programme because I didn't know how to write academic writing.’

to

‘I know that if I have enough time I can do anything.’

a year later

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