

Multidimensional Instruction Model for Comprehensive Academic Writing Capability Development: The Integrative Approach

Suppawan Satjapiboon¹, Alisara Chuchart²

Academic writing is pivotal to education as a mean to develop the society and the country. Quality academic articles can be realized only with due attention on all stages of writing from planning, content screening and presentation of information to correspond with the expectations of the readers and the academic contexts. Undergraduate students, nevertheless, appear to be challenged in this regard. A study of their academic articles reveals issues concerning thinking process, planning, content screening and writing protocol. These can be addressed with an integrative approach to the development of comprehensive academic writing capability, combining the advantages of different writing-instruction to cover all dimensions of communication: the author, the content and the reader. The three approaches are the process-based approach, the content-based approach and the genre-based approach. The strengths of these approaches are integrated into a model for the teaching of academic writing skills which is aimed at improving the author's thinking process, the content quality and the understanding of academically correct writing principles. The model will facilitate dissemination of knowledge and benefit social development efforts eventually.

Keywords: academic writing; critical thinking; process-based approach; content-based approach; genre-based approach

Academic Writing: The Key to Knowledge-Based Economy

Writing can be likened to a journey that brings you to new discoveries concerning thoughts, life, the world we live in and our professional self. (Murray and Moore, 2006: 4)

If the journey you make in life is a process through which you try to understand the world as it is and broaden your perspective as a traveler, academic writing is a very important journey you accomplish by compiling knowledge and experience, integrating your belief, views and understanding of the matter, and, presenting new discoveries that not only expand one's horizon but lead towards a better society.

¹ Ph.D. Candidate, Chulalongkorn University, Bangkok, Thailand

² Assistant Professor, Chulalongkorn University, Bangkok, Thailand

This is especially true for a knowledge-based economy where information bears significant economic, political, social and cultural influences on the human way of life. Academic writing is a crucial tool to help individuals in the society refresh themselves with new advances and to compile currently available information for in such a manner that it can be used to more objective benefits. This will lead to subsequent development of the society and the country in other areas (Schleppegrell & Colombi, 2002, p. 1).

Further, academic writing plays an important role in the context of educational management for undergraduate students, as a tool used as a part of the instruction of all courses at college level (Lavelle & Guarino, 2003, pp. 1-2). Most importantly, academic writing reflects the “quality” of learners and the instructional process. It is the skill shaping the learners into individuals with characteristics corresponding to those defined by undergraduate level curricula where broad and profound understanding of their field is required. Undergraduate students are supposed to be able to present their thinking process in a clear and systemic manner and to creatively synthesize new advancements in their field. Consequently, academic writing should be considered a highly necessary skill which needs to be developed at the undergraduate level. A proper academic writing skill allows students to function efficiently in the context of education, as well as to apply the knowledge attained to endless development of the society.

Despite this significance, study of literature and relevant researches on academic writing has revealed that learners remain challenged by multifaceted issues, particularly thinking process where most learners are unable to correctly identify the key points of the article being written, to determine the credibility of information and its source, and, to arrange and summarize the information in a logical manner (Chinnawongs, 2000; Johnson, 2003; Vieara, 2005). Regarding writing protocol, most learners lack the understanding of writing formats and language use. They are unable to write properly and methodically as a result (Scarcella, 2003; Thaiuboon, 2007).

The above argument highlights the fact that, in order to resolve learners’ academic writing challenges, the teacher needs to implement activities that promote development of thinking process for better analysis of writing contents and purposes,

information source credibility, information categorization and evaluation for improvement of writing quality. As well, these activities should reinforce understanding of writing formats and language use in order that the learners may be able to relay the message in written form in such a manner that is consistent with the objectives, linguistically pleasant and correct as per the generally accepted format for their specific field.

Integration for the Development of Comprehensive Academic Writing Capability

In academic writing, the readers must be able to sense quality in all processes of writing: objective-centered planning, screening of information to suit the writing format, and, artful and academically correct presentation of the written words. Any concept to improve writing quality must be comprehensive, covering all three dimensions of communication: the author, the content and the reader. It must comprise the three approaches as follows:

Process-Based Approach

The process-based approach to the teaching of writing skill is influenced by the concepts of psychologists and philosophers who believe in the cognitive and behavioral theory, as well as writing process theories where emphases are put on the study of actions and thoughts of the author at the time of writing, where it is believed that writing is both a mean of communication and a thinking process for which information needs to be sought and analyzed for subsequent presentation (Wallace, 1996). The approach values in-process reinforcement and constant practice for the development of skills as well.

The process-based approach to the teaching of writing skill values the development of the learners' thinking process through analysis of issues, systemic planning to overcome challenges, understanding of the random stages of thinking process (i.e., compilation, writing, enhancement, systemic information search, screening and verification), and, improvement of drafts, in order to achieve written articles that best correspond with the objectives. Additionally, the approach promotes social interactivity by giving learners the opportunity to exchange ideas and

experience through reading and evaluation of the articles of their peers. One's writing horizon will be broadened as a result.

Unfortunately, this approach is not fully compatible with academic writing where one must write in accordance with the given topic or write by systemically compiling information from various sources. (Chinnawongs, 2000, p. 56) Therefore, in the teaching of academic writing, the teacher must pay attention to the development of information sourcing and screening skill in order to ensure correctness and credibility of the information. The author should be helped to correlate information with their thoughts, leading to new conclusions which can then be applied to real-world situations. That is the domain of the content-based approach.

Content-Based Approach

The basis for the content-based approach to the teaching of writing skill is the Second Language Acquisition concept of Cummins (1981) Krashen (1985) and Brinton (2003). The concept maintains that, in order to learn a language well, one must also learn the context in which language is conventionally used in order to attain the language and the content of the course simultaneously. It focuses more on the “meaning” than the “format” of the language as the ability to understand the language would motivate the learners to continue with the learning. Once they are able to communicate in the target language, they will be able to understand the contents and subsequently see improvement in their linguistic skills.

In this approach, the contexts of the various contents are transformed into language learning tools. The instructional activities revolve around writing from sources, with integration of reading, listening and content discussion. The content-based approach emphasizes the development of strategies for information compilation, synthesis, interpretation and evaluation, as well as the correlation of new information and existing experiences. This approach allows for improved academic language usage skill and improved understanding of the topic learners write about. Additionally, it helps to improve communication skill, critical thinking skill and academic reading and writing capability of the learners effectively (Shih, 1986, p. 628).

Thinking process development aside, the quality of the writing is dependent upon the linguistic and compilation skills of the author. Therefore, in the teaching of academic writing, it is important for the teacher to include lessons on language use and different writing formats to further improve the quality of the learners' written articles. This need can be addressed by the use of the genre-based approach.

Genre-Based Approach

Based on the Systemic Linguistic Theory of Michael Halliday (Halliday & Hasan, 1985) where the focus is on the use of language to communicate the contents in linguistic contexts, the genre-based approach comprises the following principles. Firstly, language and meaning, the essence of language use is to understand the meaning. Secondly, language and context, the content can be understood correctly with the availability of context. Thirdly, language and register, the register allows for better understanding of contexts and contents. Fourthly, language learning in context, the leaning of a language should begin at the exposure to correct language use in different contexts and for different purposes.

With the genre-based approach, learners are encouraged to determine the correct pattern of language from the analysis of genre –the particular modes of writing with their own context and objective -- content sequence and specific register via activities which allow the learners to create knowledge on their own with the help of the group or self-practice. The approach enables the learners to write correctly as per the format, the structure and the generally accepted nuance of the linguistic.

The above information highlights the fact that each approach to the teaching of writing has its own merits which can be applied to develop different fields of academic writing skills . For instance, the process-based approach allows the learners to correctly analyze goals, issues and topics for the writing, as well as promotes systemic sequencing and relay of thoughts in writing. The content-based approach improves the learners' skills in the area of research, synthesis and evaluation of information which leads to correct and credible writing that is generally accepted in the field concerned. The genre-based approach, on the other hand, exposes the learners to different types of writing, as well as the principles of language use. This exposure enables the learners to write articles that comply with proper writing

principles and correspond with the expectation of the readers. Consequently, it is clear that a more integrative model encompassing all these three approaches is needed to best facilitate teaching of academic writing at the undergraduate level in order to ensure the highest possible academic writing and critical thinking capabilities of the learners.

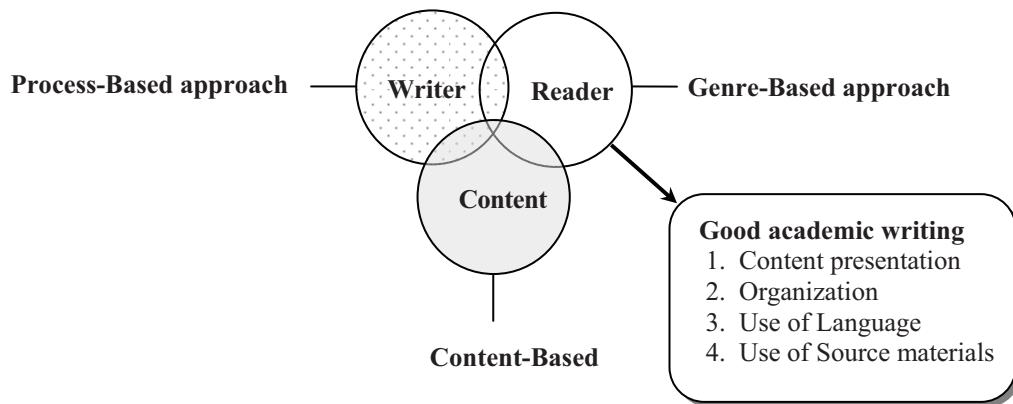


Figure 1. The integration of approaches to the teaching of writing for development of academic writing capability.

The ultimate goal of teaching of writing using the multidimensional instruction model is to enhance the academic writing capability of undergraduate students. This capability is explained as the presentation of information obtained through systemic research with references to supporting rationales in a linguistically correct manner and academically correct format for the specific kind of writing. Further, this instructional model promotes critical thinking which is basically the ability to evaluate the situation using available knowledge and experience to determine the credibility of information and its source before arriving at a logical conclusion.

The five principles of this model can be described as the use of relevant real-life situation in order to help them write more objectively; the use of thoroughly planned and analyzed writing goals in order to address writing issues, enhance thinking process and improve writing quality; the encouragement of learners to research and compile information from complex and diverse sources of information in order to develop the learning skills required for academic writing; the study of genre to help learners identify academic writing principles and correct apply them to their writing; and, the interaction with other individuals in order to broaden understanding of writing which will in turn benefit their own writing quality.

Use of the Multidimensional Instruction Model in Classrooms

In order to ensure the maximum efficiency of this multidimensional instruction model for the teaching of academic writing, the following two parts need to be carefully executed.

Part 1: Instructional Planning

The teacher must study the learners in terms of field, existing academic writing knowhow and experience, as well as current affairs of their interest in order to specify content, design instructional activities and develop instructional media. Subsequently, the teacher must determine the situation for the teaching of writing by studying types, contents and genres which are relevant to the field of undergraduate students.

The evaluation methods should be diverse. For instance, multiple-choice and essay tests to verify the linguistic skills of the learners, and, academic writing critical criteria to determine the quality of the writing.

Part 2: Instructional process

The instructional process of this multidimensional instruction model consisted of 6 stages. These stages can be described as shown in Table 1.

Table 1

Stages in Multidimensional Instruction Model.

Stage	Actions
1) Determination of writing aim from real-life situation: Analysis of academic writing situations and relate them to the experience of learners in order to allow them to write more objectively	1.1) Present real-life situation: Present academic writing situation that is relevant to the field of the learners 1.2) Relate experiences: Discuss the experience of learners which can be related to the specified academic writing situation 1.3) Determine writing goals: Specify type, genre and topic for the writing based on the given situation'

(continued)

Table 1 (continued)

Stage	Actions
2) Preparation of content: Examination of learner's knowledge and reflection of writing type, genre and topic in order to determine writing scope and criteria for the selection of information	2.1) Examine background knowledge: Examine learner's background knowledge of writing type, genre and topic by using various writing strategies 2.2) Reflection: Analyze one's own knowledge and raise questions concerning type and topic of writing to determine scope of content 2.3) Determine criteria: Discuss with peers in order to determine the criteria for the selection of information
3) Selection of content: Compilation and assessment of information following the criteria in order to help learners select the correct and credible content	3.1) Survey of information: Research information from complex, interdisciplinary sources by using various data collection techniques 3.2) Extract the information: Assess and select information, supporting rationale 3.3) Self-monitoring: Examine completeness and correctness of information by answer the determined questions (more research if necessary)
4) Design of writing outline: Organization of information for develop a writing outline by using various writing strategies and techniques	4.1) Organize the information: Categorize and relate information, and, convey it in term of graphic organizers for create a writing outline 4.2) Criticize the outline: Present one's own writing outline in group, Discuss and argue with peers for examine a writing outline 4.3) Adjust writing outline: Edit an outline of writing into a logical order and relevant to writing goals with input from the feedback

(continued)

Table 1 (continued)

Stage	Actions
5) Identification and application of writing concept from genre: Summary and apply writing principle from the study of correct genre sample for develop a writing outline which is consistent with academic writing principle	5.1) Analyze Genre: Analyze content, structure and use of language of a genre from writing samples 5.2) Identify writing concept: Discuss and raise questions about the genre to identify writing principle and concept 5.3) Apply knowledge: Apply acquired knowledge to edit an writing outline, and, incorporate necessary changes to the draft
6) Reflection: Evaluation of one's own writing problems based on the feedback and strive to improve writing quality	6.1) Analyze writing problems: Analyze one's own writing problems based on the given writing samples 6.2) Give an extensive feedback: Discuss with and learn from peers and teacher, and, give a feedback on the work of peers 6.3) Compile and Edit : Finalize the draft with input from the feedback

Based on this instructional process, learners can develop comprehensive academic writing ability; writing process, content selection and writing principle correspond with the expectation of the readers. For more effective teaching, the teacher should use the various teaching methods and techniques which benefit the overall development of learners' thinking process and writing proficiency. This process can contribute greatly to the achievement of the objectives set.

Implementation Strategies: Key Factor to Success

In order to ensure the efficiency of the implementation, the teacher needs to employ a number of key strategies that complement the use of this model. These strategies can be described as follows:

1. Analysis of existing knowledge and experience of the learners to enable them with necessary skills prior to the actual writing. This can be knowledge concerning writing type, genre, learning resource, feedback, information search and, for learners of other fields, language use principles.
2. Selection of situation that intrigues and is relevant to the experience of the learners. The selected situation must facilitate training of writing of exactly the intended type or genre.
3. Selection of writing samples of the correct genre and relevant content to the field of the learners. This gives learners an opportunity to see quality academic writing in their own field and to assess the concept of that genre correctly.
4. Use of question to provoke analysis, synthesis, evaluation and decision skill. The teacher should use multiple, high-level questions which offer the possibility of various answers. These questions should relate to the experience of the learners and the skills needed to be developed in each session.
5. Valuing evaluation and revision. The teacher should encourage the learners to develop a positive attitude and reinforce the need to revise written articles in order to achieve improved writing quality.
6. Allowance of discussion. The learners should be able to voice their opinions, relate experiences, critique written articles and ask questions in class. It is important for the teacher to appear receptive and to give feedback which benefits the overall development of learners' thinking process and writing proficiency.

Summary: An Attainable Success

While it is true that academic writing is usually difficult, complicated and not as touch as other types of writing, its significance cannot be dismissed. Academic writing is the mechanism ceaselessly driving the society in a more positive direction. This is the reason why it is important to equip people with the ability to write academic articles, using applied, comprehensive instruction model that encompasses analytic thinking process, planning, content screening, information presentation and revision. Once the learners are able to competently engage in academic writing, they will be able to help bring advancements to their society.

This article has presented the model, the methods and the techniques necessary to help learners develop skills concerning academic writing and critical thinking through learning processes that encourage them to analyze and relate their experiences to the various academic writing situations they may experience, to learn from multiple and diverse resources, to analyze samples of the correct genre for future application, and, to evaluate the quality of writing throughout the processes of writing. This instruction model should place learners in the best position to write quality academic articles and to excel in their future education and career later on in life.

References

Brinton, D. (2003). Content-based instruction. In D. Nunan (Ed.). *Practical English Language Teaching*. (p. 199-224). New York, NY: McGraw-Hill.

Chinnawongs, S. (2000). A study of the writing ability of EAP science students. *Pasaa Paritat*, 18, 10-27. (In Thai)

Cummins, J. (2006). *Interpersonal communicative skills and cognitive academic language proficiency*. Retrieved July 15, 2006, from <http://www.iteachilearn.com/cummins/bicscalp.html>

Halliday, M. A. K., & Hasan, R. (1985). *Language; context, and text: Aspects of language in a social-semiotic perspective*. Waurn Ponds, Victoria: Deakin University Press.

Krashen, S. (1985). *Writing: Research, theory and applications*. Oxford: Pergamon.

Lavelle, E., & Guarino, A. J. (2003). A multidimensional approach to understanding college writing processes. *Educational Psychology*, 23, 295- 305.

Murray, R., & Moore, S. (2006). *The handbook of academic writing: A fresh approach*. Maidenhead, England: McGraw-Hill/Open University Press.

Scarella, R. (2003). *Academic English: A conceptual framework*. Retrieved May 11, 2006, from http://www.lmri.ucsb.edu/publications/03_scarella.pdf

Schleppegrell, M., & Colombi, M. C. (Eds.). (2002). *Developing advanced literacy in first and second languages: Meaning with power*. Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.

Shih, M. (1986). Content-based approaches to teaching academic writing. *TESOL Quarterly*, 20(4), 617-648.

Thaiuboon, D. (2007). *Thai writing skill*. Bangkok: Chulalongkorn University Press.
(In Thai)

Vieira, I. M. (2005). On academic writing in Latin America. *Educational Studies in Language and Literature*, 5, 251-263.

Wallace, D. (1996). Reconsidering behaviorist composition pedagogies: Positivism, empiricism, and the paradox of postmodernism. *Journal of Composition Theory*, 16(1), 103-117.