Academic Writing in English

A Process-Based Approach

Janene van Loon, Arnoud Thüss,
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Third, revised edition

For teachers
This book is accompanied by a **Teacher's guide** with didactic suggestions and sample answers to the tasks, as well as **Vocabulary exercises**. To obtain this material, teachers can fill in the request form on **www.coutinho.nl/ academicwritingenglish**.

Preface

The Language Centre of the University of Groningen is experienced in providing academic writing courses in English to students from a variety of disciplines. The challenge for many of these students is that they are learning to write in academic style at the same time as they are developing their language skills as writers of English as a second language. Such learners have the advantage that they have access to authentic ideas and material from elsewhere in their curriculum, which provides them with excellent subject matter for their writing. With this in mind, we set about writing a book that would guide learners through the academic writing process, using their own material as the focus of this writing practice.

This book aims to support student writers in the development of academic writing skills and strategies. The book takes a process-based approach, providing students with the opportunity to produce one or more texts as they work through all the stages of the writing process from pre-writing to editing. During this process, learners are encouraged to practise new techniques at various levels of difficulty and to reflect not only on their own written work but also on the work of their peers. This helps learners to become aware of their needs and to set themselves personal learning goals. The instructor should see this book as a tool that can be used both to support general writing development and to target specific weaknesses in academic writing. Within the consistent framework of each chapter, the instructor can decide which materials best fulfil the needs of learners in their specific academic context. The book includes the following features:

- the continual development of one long-term writing assignment throughout the book;
- scaffolding activities that practise key writing skills and support the development of learner autonomy;
- authentic samples of texts from academic journals and student writing;
- awareness-raising activities, such as goal setting, self-reflection, and peer feedback.

In this third edition, some theory and exercises have been added. We have taken suggestions of users in higher education into account and also used this revision to add new insights. This has resulted in more information about resources supporting academic vocabulary, such as Google Ngram Viewer, more information about documenting sources, and a more elaborate section

on flow and designing for the reader. Moreover, we have updated example texts and added more practice material.

Acknowledgements

We would like to express our appreciation to the Language Centre of the University of Groningen for the support it has given us in the writing of this book. We would like to thank all our colleagues in the English section for the inspiration and ideas that they have given us during this process. We would especially like to thank our colleagues in the Law team for providing detailed feedback on many of the tasks. We could not have written this book without you!

We would also like to thank our students. The work of students has provided us with the foundation for many of the tasks in this book; we have gained many insights both from the work produced by our students and from our observations of the way in which they have approached the writing process. Finally, thanks to our reviewers at other universities for supplying us with such useful and meaningful feedback. We greatly appreciate the time that you spent on our manuscript, and we have done our best to incorporate your ideas into our text.

Janene van Loon, Arnoud Thüss, Nicole Schmidt, and Kevin Haines
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Contents

Introduction

This opening section gives an overview of the main features of this book as well as some important points of reference for the reader. In particular, we outline the following aspects:

- purpose
- method
- framework
- chapter guide
- coded practice tasks
- peer feedback
- the Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR)

This book has its roots in the academic writing courses delivered at the Language Centre of the University of Groningen. The authors have been involved in teaching the writing of academic essays, reports, and papers to second-language learners of English with various levels of writing experience for many years. In this book, we draw together some common threads from these courses, which we offer at Pre-university, Bachelor's, Master's, and PhD levels. Our starting point for all such courses is that academic writing is not an intrinsically straightforward process, and that consequently there are no easy answers to the question "How do I go about writing this paper?"

A text develops over time and involves false starts and many revisions. Furthermore, writers are individuals with their own approaches, their own strengths and weaknesses, and a writing course often challenges them to reconsider deep-seated habits. The development of maturity as a writer requires a self-critical approach, which is encouraged throughout this book through peer feedback and self-reflection procedures. These procedures encourage learners to reflect on the writing process in a structured way, questioning the choices they make as they proceed through different stages of the writing process. We guide them through this process by focusing on key factors in the context for which they are writing, starting with purpose and audience.

We recognise that academic writing in English will be particularly challenging for a second-language writer. Nevertheless, we believe that there are structural, linguistic, and stylistic skills and strategies that provide a foundation to every writer when producing an academic text. This book aims to increase learners' awareness and understanding of these skills and strategies, with the result that both a more mature text and a more mature writer emerge. Fur-

thermore, we present a number of tools that can help second-language writers to improve the quality of their texts: these include tools that increase learner awareness of specific academic vocabulary such as the Academic Word List (AWL). We also recommend an informed use of the Common European Framework (CEFR) Can Do statements as a means of establishing self-awareness at the start of the process.

1 Purpose

The purpose of this book is to focus on the needs of learners in developing academic writing skills through a process-based approach. This goal is achieved through a variety of tasks that promote language development, critical thinking skills, and personal awareness of the use of writing skills and strategies. Throughout the book, learners are encouraged to examine and develop their own writing processes in the light of the genre-specific models or examples provided. In this way, learners will develop the appropriate use of English in the academic genre and consequently increase their overall confidence in writing at an academic level.

2 Method

Each chapter takes the writer a step further in the development of an academic text through coded **practice tasks** and the development of a long-term writing assignment or **developing text**. The book can be seen as a flexible resource that can be used in slightly different ways in different settings. We have therefore provided the instructor with two options:

Option 1
The first option is to use the materials alongside the development of a **long-term writing assignment**, a process which is guided throughout the book. In this option, the instructor may provide students with instructions for an extensive writing assignment such as a paper or an essay. The book can be used to guide the students through the complete writing process. This process is addressed explicitly in the **Goal setting** Section of every chapter, the **Developing your text** Section, and other tasks that are marked with the Developing your text icon ⌨. Learners who are involved in writing this long-term assignment will also make use of this **developing text** in the **Peer feedback** and **Evaluation** Sections at the end of each chapter. Through this option, learners will work on one developing text throughout the book, and this text will be finished on completion of the last chapter.

Option 2

If the instructor's teaching context does not allow for a single long-term writing assignment, the second option is to assign locally appropriate topics to learners using the open Four Wing tasks that are also provided towards the end of each chapter (for further explanation of the Wing codes, see below). These tasks will encourage learners to produce several pieces of their own writing either on the topics provided or on academic topics chosen by their instructor as relevant to the local academic context. The texts produced in these tasks can also be used as the basis for the **Peer feedback** and **Evaluation** Sections at the end of each chapter.

Both of the above options are supported by the regular **practice tasks** that provide the bulk of the material in each chapter. Through these practice tasks, responsibility for the learning process is gradually transferred from the instructor to the learner, which is referred to in the literature as "scaffolding". The coded practice tasks allow instructors to make informed choices regarding the types of tasks that are most appropriate for their particular group of learners.

3 Framework

The chapters in this book closely follow the stages of the writing process. This enables the instructor to systematically teach learners the problem-solving skills that are required at each stage. Inspired by Seow (2002), the writing process described in this book incorporates six stages: pre-writing, planning, drafting, revising, fine-tuning, and editing.

Pre-writing

At this stage, the writer determines the topic and how it should be developed within the academic genre. Consequently, the writer is urged to make decisions with regard to purpose and audience, and these decisions will be reflected in the chosen register and style.

Planning

During the planning stage, the writer develops a thesis statement and prepares an outline for the academic text. A referencing system is also established, allowing the source materials that have been gathered to be organised and integrated into the text.

Drafting

The drafting stage is the phase during which textual concerns such as paragraph structure and the use of connectors become increasingly important.

Revising

Revising involves the polishing of the paper, the review of paragraph structure, and the reconsideration of aspects such as cohesion. During this stage, the paper should evolve into a well-structured, coherent piece of writing.

Fine-tuning

At this stage, the writer checks for consistency of argumentation in the paper and may rethink some of the decisions that have been made regarding language and structure.

Editing

The final stage of the writing process involves the writer reviewing the text in order to check it one final time, usually just before submitting it to meet a deadline.

4 Chapter guide

The following section provides a user-friendly explanation of what to expect in each chapter of the book:

Introduction

Each chapter begins with a summary of what has already been learnt and what should be expected from the current chapter.

Orientation task

In the introduction to the chapter, a guided task urges learners to use their background knowledge to reflect on the next stage(s) of the writing process. This reflective task stimulates ideas that lead to a set of specific goals in the next section.

Scaffolded goal setting

After viewing a model text and completing an orientation task, students are guided towards choosing a set of specific short-term goals that they would like to achieve with their **developing text** by the end of the chapter. Goal setting involves the transfer of the thoughts that are activated in the orientation task to the learners' own piece of writing. For this reason, this section is related to the Section Developing your text.

Theory and practice tasks

Each chapter explains a set of skills, and it then challenges learners to apply these skills by completing **practice tasks**, which are coded according to Neuner's typology (see below). These shorter tasks give learners a chance to practise the writing techniques discussed in the model samples of the chapter. As

described above, these practice tasks shift gradually from heavily guided to more autonomous as each chapter progresses.

Instructors can use this section in one of two ways:

1 Do all the practice tasks consecutively (One Wing to Four Wing tasks).

2 Choose only the level of task appropriate for their learners. For instance, in a mixed level group, certain learners could prepare One Wing tasks in preparation for a lesson, while for others this may be unnecessary.

Developing your text

The long-term writing assignment, or **developing text**, is produced gradually, from chapter to chapter, in this section. The aim of the Developing your text Section is for the learner to further apply the skills developed through the practice tasks in each chapter, producing an academic paper by the end of the book. The learners build on their work on the developing text in previous chapters and on other exercises in each chapter that may contribute to the long-term writing assignment. Each Developing your text Section is preceded by a corresponding Four Wing task for those learners who are not working on a single writing assignment.

Peer feedback

Each chapter provides learners with an opportunity to analyse and discuss their writing with each other. This section can be linked to the developing text and/or the corresponding Four Wing task, depending on the aims of the course.

Evaluation

In the final section of each chapter (Evaluation), learners are asked to reflect on previously defined goals, peer feedback, and writing samples in order to assess their progress and future needs. This section can be linked to the developing text and/or the corresponding Four Wing task, depending on the aims of the course.

5 Coded practice tasks

All the tasks in this book have been labelled with Wing icons. The number of wings in the icon symbolises the degree of autonomy required for the task. One Wing tasks are the most heavily guided, demanding little autonomy on the part of the learner. Four Wing tasks, on the other hand, offer very little guidance, giving the learner more freedom and the opportunity to take more

responsibility for the product. This system is based on Neuner's typology (Neuner, Krüger & Grewer, 1981).

The Wing icons should be interpreted as follows:

One Wing tasks are **receptive tasks** for reading comprehension and are only used in the presentation phase. At this stage, the emphasis is on recognising and understanding the material that is offered. Two, Three and Four Wing tasks are **productive tasks**. Of these, Two and Three Wing tasks belong in the repetition phase and Four Wing tasks in the transfer or exploitation phase.

Two Wing tasks are **strongly guided productive and reproductive tasks**. The learner is encouraged to reproduce elements of language (sounds, words, structures, functions) in the same context as the one in which they are offered. Typical examples are: reciting or copying texts; spelling exercises; and the reproduction of meaning-directed exercises, such as selecting given words or sentences and using them for blank-filling on the basis of their meaning in the context provided.

Three Wing tasks are **less guided productive tasks**. At this stage, the learner is expected to (re)produce the language elements in a different context than that which was previously provided. Typical tasks include finishing sentences or texts, answering questions about a text, and describing or writing what is shown in diagrams. Although Three Wing tasks are still focused on form, they may be called more "communicative", as situational meaning plays a bigger role.

Four Wing tasks are always focused on meaning and may be seen as **fully communicative tasks**. These tasks are hardly guided or not guided at all (open). At this stage, learners are expected to produce pieces of writing in a context that has not been predefined. The composition of parts of a text is a typical Four Wing task.

6   Peer feedback

This section explains the peer feedback procedure that can be found towards the end of each chapter. It is possible to use this book without the peer feedback procedure if time constraints make such use impossible. However, we strongly recommend the use of peer feedback both as an alternative source of information for learners and as a means for them to develop self-critical and reflective skills. Peer feedback also functions as a very useful opportunity for instructors to gauge the needs and development of individual learners.

What is a peer review?

A peer review is a systematic way for learners to view and comment on each other's work. The kinds of commentary that can be offered vary greatly, and the three most helpful comment types are categorised below (Cho, Schunn & Charney, 2006, p. 268).

Directive = specific change suggested

Praise = positive description of a specific part of paper or language function

Summary = recaps main points without offering suggestions

Why is peer reviewing an important part of the writing process?

There are numerous advantages to incorporating a peer review in the writing classroom. First of all, the opportunity to review the work of peers in a guided fashion can increase awareness of different aspects of one's own writing. Style, technique, vocabulary, and syntax are just a few areas that might be considered by the peer reviewer. The act of text analysis could also sharpen logical and critical thinking skills which are crucial to the writing process in terms of structural organisation. Another advantage of the peer review is that it is an opportunity to practise the lessons discussed in class. If, for example, transitional sentences are discussed in class one day, and a learner is expected to conduct a peer review that evening, this learner might be more likely to notice and compare the application of this skill in his/her peer's writing with that of his/her own. When consistently guided by the instructor in this way, learners can develop into more autonomous writers.

Defining the partner and carousel approaches

Each peer review section will offer two possible approaches to organising a peer review: (a) the partner approach and (b) the carousel, or team writing, approach.

Whereas the partner approach consists of two learners exchanging and commenting on each other's work, the carousel approach involves a team of four to six learners collaborating on the reviewing process. The partner approach allows each author to receive just one review, while the carousel approach utilises a multiple peer review. In other words, in the team writing approach, each author's work will be reviewed once by every peer in the "carousel", or three to five times in total. The added value of multiple feedback sources is that each learner in the carousel will receive a richer variety of comments, and certain points will be reinforced several times. The instructor should bear in mind that the carousel approach is more time-consuming for learners.

How do we teach learners to peer review?

a Scaffolding

It is imperative that learners receive training on how to do a peer review (see the Peer feedback Sections of Chapters 1, 2, and 3). In our experience, a lack of prior training can lead to a superficial use of the procedure, which in turn results in a loss of credibility in the approach.

Firstly, the instructor explains that conducting a peer review will enhance the writing skills of the reviewer as well as the author. Secondly, learners are familiarised with the kinds of comments that are considered most helpful and effective. Finally, learners are guided on what aspect of writing to focus on. Learning how to review academic writing is a gradual process that is highlighted systematically throughout this course. A main aim of the peer review is to develop learner autonomy, meaning that the instructor will gradually play a more peripheral role in this process as learners progress through the book.

b Method

As you can see in the Table below, this book will integrate a multiple step approach to peer feedback. In each Peer feedback Section, there will be options for both the partner and the carousel approach.

The five steps to effective peer feedback	
Step 1:	First draft (Learners write papers.)
Step 2:	Feedback (Each learner provides peer feedback.)
Partner:	Two learners exchange commentary on each other's writing and discuss the comments.
Carousel:	A group of four to six learners exchange and review each other's writing. For a group of four, each learner will do three reviews. For a group of six, each learner will do five reviews, and so on. The group will then meet during or outside of class to discuss their writing with each other.
Step 3:	Revision (Authors revise their first drafts, using both verbal and written peer feedback.)
Step 4:	Helpfulness rating (Authors rate the written peer review comments: 1 = not at all; 5 = very.)
Partner and Carousel:	Reviewers and authors reflect on their comments and discuss why these were not helpful, thereby training each other to target their individual needs.

Step 5:	Feedback (Peers provide feedback for revised drafts.)
Partner:	Two learners exchange commentary on each other's writing and discuss their feedback.
Carousel:	A group of four to six learners exchange and review each other's writing. For a group of four, each learner will have done three reviews. For a group of six, each learner will have done five reviews, and so on. The group will then meet during or outside of class to discuss their writing with each other.

7   The Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR)

It is common practice in Higher Education to relate the work produced in language-related courses to the Common European Framework of Reference for languages (CEFR). The process-based approach means that the materials in this book can be used with the broad band of students studying in Higher Education through English as a Second Language (ESL), English for Academic Purposes (EAP), or English as the Medium of Instruction (EMI). The material in this book will be challenging to learners entering writing courses across the broad B2 and C1 bands of the CEFR, with the ultimate aim of raising a course participant's active use of English in academic texts to a consistent C1 level. This aim is in line with current understanding of the linguistic demands of academic environments as described by Green in relation to the English Profile project (Green, 2008):

> "Passing from B2 to the C level should enable the learner to access higher education, professional fields of employment and the literary culture associated with a language."

The CEFR contains general Can Do descriptors for the writing of reports and essays. These descriptors (see below) provide a useful point of reference when considering these levels (Council of Europe, 2001, p. 62), drawing attention to the need for greater linguistic skills as subject matter becomes more complex. This also highlights the need to challenge learners at these levels with tasks of sufficient complexity for them to be able to demonstrate their individual proficiency in English.

C1 Can write clear, well-structured expositions of complex subjects, underlining the relevant salient issues. Can expand and support points of view at some length with subsidiary points, reasons, and relevant examples.

B2+ Can write an essay or report which develops an argument systematically with appropriate highlighting of significant points and relevant supporting detail.
Can evaluate different ideas or solutions to a problem.

B2 Can write an essay or report which develops an argument, giving reasons in support of or against a particular point of view and explaining the advantages and disadvantages of various options.
Can synthesise information and arguments from a number of sources.

Introduction to academic writing

1

This Chapter provides an overview of many of the issues that will be addressed in this book. We provide introductory information and exercises (we will call them Tasks) on the following topics, which will be dealt with in greater detail as the book progresses:

- writing as a process
- academic style
- circular organisation: introduction, thesis statement, main body, conclusion
- types of academic texts: the expository essay, the argumentative essay, the research report, the investigative business report
- plagiarism
- academic vocabulary and resources supporting academic vocabulary
- peer feedback

One of the biggest challenges for students in higher education is to write an academic paper that may be reviewed by one or more peers and then will be submitted to their instructor to be assessed. Writing a paper is particularly demanding if the language in which you are writing is your second language. In that case, you are engaged in two complex processes simultaneously:

1. You are becoming familiar with the processes involved in academic writing, so you need training in the strategies that are required to become a good writer.
2. You are learning to write English for Academic Purposes (EAP), a specific form of your second language, which is in many respects quite unlike the spoken English or other forms of written English with which you are familiar.

This book addresses the writing issue from both of the above perspectives. Firstly, it takes you through the series of steps that comprise the writing process. Starting with the pre-writing stage, this book guides you through the several stages of drafting and revising that every text should undergo in order to produce a quality that is thoroughly convincing to the reader. Secondly, this book introduces you to the conventions of written English in the academic genre, encouraging you to be your own critic by comparing your work both to the representative models presented in the book and to the work of your peers.

1.1   Orientation

TASK 1

Answer the following questions.

1 What experience do you have in writing in the academic genre (in English or in your first language)? What have you found most difficult or challenging about it? What was easiest?
2 Before reading on, what do you think are typical features of academic writing? Mention at least four features of academic writing that are not usually found in journalistic text or in speeches and lectures.

1.2   Goal setting

Before writing an academic paper, there are some preliminary steps that should be taken. It can be helpful to break up the writing process into smaller sets of goals. It is important to remember that a goal should be specific and achievable within a realistic time period.

TASK 2

In order to make your own goals for this Chapter:

1 Read through the introduction one more time. Review your answer to Task 1.
2 Based on the introduction and the Orientation Section, make a checklist of writing skills, strategies, and processes that you think you will have learnt by the end of this Chapter (see example below).
3 Now formulate a specific goal for yourself concerning each item on the checklist.
4 Finally, place a tick beside each goal *later on*, when you feel that it has been achieved.

Goal checklist		
Writing skills, strategies, and processes	**Your specific goal**	**Tick when complete**
1		
2		
3		
4		
5		
6		
7		

TASK 3

Once you have created your checklist, discuss it with a fellow learner. Look at the goals that your learning partner has listed. What advice might you give? Consider adding the advice of your learning partner to your checklist.

1.3 Perspectives on the writing process

The writing process has been studied in many different ways, for different purposes. Most studies of the writing process distinguish pre-writing activities, writing activities, and post-writing activities. Many models have been developed for teaching the writing process, and they represent the writing process as a linear process. This book is organised in accordance with such a model.

The linear model used as a basis for this book distinguishes pre-writing, drafting, revising, fine-tuning, editing, and post-writing. These stages are reflected in the titles of the chapters. Following the steps in this process, you will learn what is important at each stage. The book will guide you through

each stage of the writing process, informing you where you are, what you should pay attention to, and what will come next.

For many authors, however, the writing process is chaotic and messy rather than linear and neat. Ideas do not always come up in a conveniently logical way. This means that, as a writer, you may be busy writing different parts of the same document simultaneously, and you may return to the pre-writing stage even after the first draft is complete. To make you more aware of the cycle of phases that many writers experience, we present a more recursive model of the writing process below.

The recursive model distinguishes exploring, structuring, polishing and publishing, incubating, and unloading – it is a non-linear dynamic process that takes time (Haas, 2009). Although this recursive process cannot be used as a structure for this book, the Developing your text Section towards the end of each chapter does aim to allow you to process your writing in this recursive way. This will be particularly evident starting with Chapter 4 as we ask you to take a layered approach to your text that involves drafting, revising, fine-tuning, and editing (Seow, 2002, pp. 315-320). This layered approach will be implicit in the Peer feedback and Evaluation Sections that appear at the end of each chapter, during which you will see how your text develops through several drafts and revisions. The model reflects the idea that experienced writers do not write each part perfectly before moving on to the next; rather, they work with different parts at different stages of development simultaneously as they move towards a final version of their text.
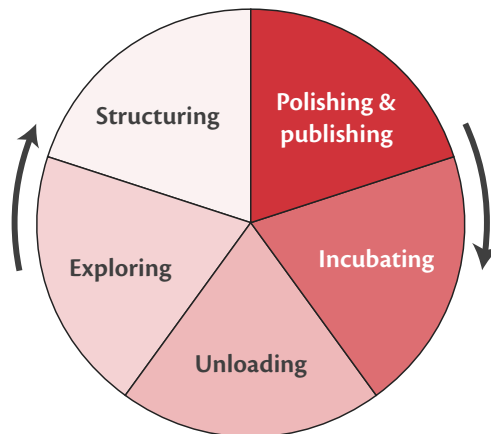

Figure 1.1
The writing process: Spinner Model (Haas, 2009)