

# Teaching Lower Level Academic Writing Using a Graduated Text Approach

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## What kind of academic writing do students do?

- Undergraduates at US universities generally need to be able to
  - summarize
  - write reaction papers.
  - critique the work of others,
  - construct an academic argument.
  - write lab reports
- Graduate Students need to
  - evaluate scholarship
  - write up research results in the form of reports
  - write a master's thesis and perhaps a dissertation,
  - prepare manuscripts for publication
  - Other writing: Statements of purpose, teaching philosophies, conference abstracts, biostatements

## When should students engage in EAP writing ?

- The *what* is very helpful, but *when* should students begin writing for an academic purpose?
- What level proficiency do students need?

Virtually, I'd like to buy goods such as clothes, shoes, and books through online buying system for saving my valuable time. I try not to use it, however, after buying soccer shoe two years ago. According to my memory, I could get soccer shoe before even passing 2days from that day ordering it. It was very good to get quickly. However, a received soccer shoe was smaller than ordered that. As wanting to change larger one, I called seller the next day. Even though taking my call which is to order it 3days ago, his telephone number didn't exist anymore. The situation that I couldn't exchange another thing with large size made me embarrassed. As a result, I had to buy another soccer shoe with offline system as not knowing whether I could buy it in online system or not. Because of bad experience from online trade system, buying things directly in stores is more comfortable and reliable than ordering them using it.

## Do We Have a Choice ?

- We may not have a choice as to whether we teach academic writing to lower level students.
- Institutional factors may require us to offer an academic writing course.
- Students may want an academic writing course.
- Institutions charged with teaching academic English need to fulfill their obligation.

### The Case of the University of Michigan

Ongoing discussion: how we can fulfill our mission of teaching academic English when we have students who do not seem to be ready for it.

#### The University of Michigan

- Some students are admitted to the University of Michigan who have very weak English language skills.
- They have minimum required TOEFL score of 560 on the Paper-Pencil TOEFL or 220 on the Computer-Based TOEFL (and in many cases having much higher than the minimum scores).
- Students take a re-evaluation test (Academic English Evaluation) identifies weak students (about 10% of examinees).
  - low level students are required to take a four hour per week EAP writing and grammar class usually along with a separate speaking class.
  - ELI mission: to teach academic writing—we are **not supposed** to teach general English courses
- Low level writing-grammar class goal is designed to help students
  - develop and use strategies for making appropriate academic language and style choices
  - use source material appropriately and effectively in writing.
  - separate four-hour classes for the undergraduate students and the graduate students because their needs are different
- No books for the classes, but there are files of materials, which broadly reflect different perspectives towards *what* should be taught and *how*.
- Despite the low level of the students we do indeed teach academic writing.
- Guiding teaching strategy: genre and discourse analysis

### Why Take a Genre Approach?

- Students have had many years of traditional General English language instruction.
- Students are often resentful that they must take an English course.
- We need to get students to “buy into” the class.
- Students report that
  - ☐ General English instruction has largely focused on decontextualized grammar and vocabulary teaching.
  - ☐ General English writing is often very personal.
  - ☐ General English writing seems too rigid—five paragraph essays with topic sentences.
  - ☐ General readings are trivial and therefore are not engaging.
  - ☐ They are bored and have lost interest in learning English.
- Students are coming into my class thinking that they will be getting the same old stuff.
- A genre approach is helpful in putting together a course that is new and different.
- look at a variety of real texts along with their roles and purposes
- discuss the context of writing
- look at language use at the whole text level
- discuss language use in terms of strategies and choices

### Which Genres?

- Popular science articles found in magazines or newspapers?
- Academic articles?
- Parkinson & Adendorff (2004) argue that popular science articles are a good choice for lower level students because they
  - do not assume background knowledge
  - focus on simple topics
  - clarify terminology
  - are not mathematically based
  - present content in the form of a debate (give both sides of an issue)
  - include illustrations that are not so abstract and thus easy to comprehend

### Characteristics of Academic Writing

- *Academic writing is more “formal” than non-academic English*

Tendency to avoid phrasal (verb + particle) or prepositional verb (verb + preposition) combinations:

According to some biologists, *coming up with* clear proof of the decreasing numbers of frogs has been difficult. (less formal)

According to some biologists, *offering* clear proof of the decreasing numbers of frogs has been difficult. (academic style)

**Features of Academic Writing**

- *Preference for formal vocabulary*

In Hong Kong there is one cell phone for *just about* every two people.  
 In Hong Kong there is one cell phone for *nearly* every two people.

- *Preference for as few words as possible*

The competition in the cell phone industry *has gotten more intense*.  
 The competition in the cell phone industry *has intensified*.

- *Preference for more formal sentence connectors: as a result (rather than so)*

PeopleSoft Inc., acquired its business software rival, Oracle Corp. for \$10.3 billion after a bitter takeover battle, so 5,000 jobs will be lost.

PeopleSoft Inc., acquired its business software rival, Oracle Corp. for \$10.3 billion after a bitter takeover battle; as a result, 5,000 jobs will be lost

- *Avoid Contractions*

<i>The economy won't improve until more jobs are created.</i>	⇒	<i>The economy will not improve until more jobs are created.</i>
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- *Formal Negatives*

<i>Not any</i> <i>The book didn't provide any new insights.</i>	⇒	<i>No</i> <i>The book provides no new insights.</i>
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<i>Not many</i> <i>This problem doesn't have many viable solutions.</i>	⇒	<i>Few</i> <i>This problem has few viable solutions.</i>
--	---	---

<i>Not much</i> <i>Not much research has been done.</i>	⇒	<i>Little</i> <i>Little research has been done.</i>
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- *Avoidance of you*

<i>You can see the results in Fig. 1.</i>	⇒	<i>The results can be seen in Fig.1.</i>
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- *Few or no direct questions*

<i>What can be done to encourage the use of sustainable building materials?</i>	⇒	<i>It is necessary to consider how to encourage the use of sustainable building</i>
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- *Adverbs are close to the verbs being modified*

<i>The difference between the two materials can be seen in the figure clearly.</i>	⇒	<i>The difference between the two figures can clearly be seen.</i>
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- *Efficient use of words*

<i>It may be difficult to make a decision about which materials we should use.</i>	⇒	<i>Choosing the proper materials may be difficult..</i>
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### **Other Features**

- \* Citations
- \* Transparent titles
- \* Metadiscourse
- \* Unique patterns of organization  
(IMRD, Problem-solution, CARS model for introductions)

### **“Non-academic” aspects of the article**

- \* Title?
- \* First paragraph use of *you*
- \* Journalistic subheadings

### **Use of informal language (e.g. *not on your life, a flick of a turn signal, pesky fly*)**

- \* Quote from a teenager (no expert quotes) and use of her first name.

### **Organization?**

- \* This article is typical of most articles from the popular press which tend to
  - be organized according to who, what, when, where, why and have an inverted pyramid organizational pattern which begins narrowly and then broadens
  - have little metadiscourse and use a less formal style

### **Risks of Using Popular Science Texts**

- \* If students model their writing after such a text they may produce a text unlike the target forms of our language teaching (Academic English).
- \* Popular articles focus on people and what they say and think.
- \* Research articles focus on what was found through experimentation and analysis, how

the findings fit within the existing body of knowledge, and what these findings mean.

- \* Students need to be developing an awareness of the value and goals of academic research.
- \* Popular articles can be quite challenging in terms of language.

### **Challenges to Using “Driven to Distraction”**

- \* Title--Driven to Distraction
- \* Clever plays on words
- \* Unusual expressions

- *not on your life,*
- *a flick of a turn signal*
- *pesky fly*

### **Should we abandon popular magazine articles?**

- \* not necessarily
- \* focus on elements that are a good fit with our teaching goals
- \* paragraph 3 seems to be written more academically than other parts
- \* engage in judicious text analysis

### **Focus on Academic Aspects**

- \* What is the main message of this text?
- \* Who is the audience of this article? How did you decide this?
- \* (focus: audience, purpose, strategy)
- \* How does the intended audience affect the author’s choice of content? Consider the opening paragraph and then any other part of the text in answering this question.
- \* How does the author introduce the research from the NHTSA and Harvard University?
- \* (focus: citation and reporting verbs)
- \* Why did the author mention the NHTSA and Harvard by name?
- \* (focus: citation)
- \* In the second paragraph the author wrote two sentences that begin with *of*. Do you think this is a very common way to start a sentence? Why do you think the author started the sentences with *of*? Can you rewrite the first sentence so that it follows normal word order?
- \* (focus: choosing grammar for emphasis)

### **Focus on Academic Vocabulary**

Let’s take a closer look at the word *risk*.

*Which of the following adjectives can complete the sentence?*

1. Young people have a \_\_\_\_\_ risk of getting into car accidents than older people.

bigger            greater            stronger            better    more

Which of the following verbs can complete the sentence?

2. Young people \_\_\_\_\_ the risk of getting into an accident when they drive and talk on the phone.

face    have            meet            run

Which of the following activities do you consider risky? Why?

traveling by plane	smoking
gambling	getting married
buying things on the internet	something else?

### **Factors influencing the use of cellular (mobile) phone during driving and hazards while using it**

*Accident Analysis & Prevention* [Volume 37, Issue 1](#), January 2005, 47-51

Mobile phones are now widely used in the car and, with operators producing more and more services that are very useful for drivers, the total time and exposure to risks of using mobile technology while driving is bound to increase. For example, two thirds of Finnish drivers ([Lamble et al., 2002](#)) and 85% of American drivers ([Goodman et al., 1999](#)) use their phone while driving. Over the last several years, the impact of mobile communication technology on traffic safety has been a target of interest.

The epidemiological studies give two to six fold risk crash estimates for phone use while driving ([Violanti and Marshall, 1996](#); [Redelmeier and Tibshirani, 1997](#) and [Sagberg, 2001](#)) but these studies considered the time when phones were principally used for speaking only. Hands-free equipment, although now obligatory in many countries, seems not to offer essential safety advantage over hand-held units (e.g. [Redelmeier and Tibshirani, 1997](#); [Lamble et al., 1999](#); [Sagberg, 2001](#) and [Nunes and Recarte, 2002](#)). It may even induce drivers to be more on the phone and if older or less skilled drivers think that it makes phone use safe they may decide to start using it while driving. . . .

Age is a decisive factor when considering phone-related risks in traffic. In the years to come, car phone use will probably increase among older people as well as among new aging cohorts who will be increasingly more practiced both in car driving and the use of mobile phones. Occupation is expected to influence exposure to risk, in terms of mileage and phone use, as phones and other mobile devices become increasingly more important in providing a mobile office platform. Driving skills also probably have a major effect on drivers' phone use and risks. A driver's perception of their own skills probably influence whether they use a phone while driving and in what kind of situations they choose to use phone. Highly skilled drivers would be expected to be more willing to incur demanding multitasking, which would often be the case when using a phone in heavy traffic. However, driving skills do not alone determine safety. Safety is dependent on how drivers use their skills, as influenced by their goals, motives and safety orientation in driving ([Naatanen and Summala, 1974](#) and [Naatanen and Summala, 1976](#)). Safety

orientation reflects general safety attitudes and safe driving practices in general. The two facets of driver self-image, the skill level and safety orientation, have a close connection to safety related aggression, sensation seeking, and the sense of coherence.

Safety orientation in turn is negatively related to sensation seeking and aggressive behavior ( [Lajunen and Summala, 1995](#) and [Lajunen and Summala, 1997](#)).

The aim of this study was to assess the factors that influence phone-related decisions at two levels. First, what factors determine whether a driver chooses to use or not use a phone while driving? This is a strategic decision taken by each driver who owns a mobile phone, either specifically restricted to car driving or possibly reflecting overall less active phone use. The second question concerns tactical decisions among those who have decided to use their mobile phone in car: what factors predict safe and "appropriate" use, as measured by phone-related hazards in traffic?

### **Issues Surrounding the Use of the Academic Text**

- \* Vocabulary?
- \* Perhaps sentence complexity?
- \* Density of information?
- \* Length?

Work with a smaller, revised section of the text

Age is *an important* (change from decisive) factor when considering phone-related risks in traffic. In the years to come, car phone use will probably increase among older people as well as among *new older individuals* (change from aging cohort) who will be increasingly more *experienced* (change from practiced) both in car driving and the use of mobile phones. Occupation is expected to influence exposure to risk, in terms of mileage and phone use, as phones and other mobile devices become increasingly more important in providing a mobile office platform. Driving skills also probably have a major effect on drivers' phone use and risks. A driver's *opinion* (change from perception) of their own skills probably influence whether they use a phone while driving and in what kind of situations they choose to use phone. Highly skilled drivers would be expected to be more willing to *handle* (change from incur) demanding multitasking, which would often be the case when using a phone in heavy traffic.

### **A Discourse Analysis Approach**

- 1, The authors talk about factors that influence the risk of talking on the phone and driving at the same time. What does the term *factor* mean?
2. According to the article, what factors can influence the risk of using a cell phone while driving?
3. Are these factors presented as definite factors (facts) or possible factors? Underline the words or expressions that helped you decide this.
4. Take a look at the first paragraph. Did the authors use any words or expressions that soften the strength of their points? Underline any words or expressions that you think

soften a point.

5. The authors have included many references or citations to other authors. For example, we see (Lamble et al. 2002) and (Goodman et al. 1999). Why do the authors include these references?
6. Do these references mean anything to you? Do you think they are meaningful to readers in the field of accident analysis?
7. What does *et al.* mean?
8. The authors state that “over the last several years, the impact of mobile communication technology on traffic safety has been a target of interest.” What does the expression *a target of interest* mean? What topics are a target of interest in your own area of study?

### **A Focus on the Word *Interest***

- \* *One problem of particular interest is \_\_\_\_\_.*
  - \* *It would be of interest to know/ identify/ understand/determine whether \_\_\_\_\_.*
  - \* *Of particular interest is whether/how/to what extent \_\_\_\_\_.*
  - \* *There is growing interest in \_\_\_\_\_.*
  - \* *\_\_\_\_\_ has attracted considerable interest since (YEAR).*
  - \* *The researchers main interest is in \_\_\_\_\_.*
- |                    |                    |                   |                   |
|--------------------|--------------------|-------------------|-------------------|
| <i>growing</i>     | <i>higher</i>      | <i>frequent</i>   | <i>good</i>       |
| <i>little</i>      | <i>substantial</i> | <i>important</i>  | <i>increasing</i> |
| <i>significant</i> | <i>small</i>       | <i>widespread</i> | <i>huge</i>       |
| <i>unimportant</i> | <i>particular</i>  | <i>large</i>      |                   |
- \* *Recently there has been \_\_\_\_\_ interest in the use of the internet as a teaching tool.*
  - \* *The development of hybrid electric cars is a topic of \_\_\_\_\_ interest.*
  - \* *In the past there was \_\_\_\_\_ interest in constructing earthquake-resistant buildings.*
  - \* *Describe one issue in your field that is of interest to you. Of how much interest is the topic? Why is it of interest?*

### **Strength of Claim**

Our study has shown that football referees tend to favor the home team. For example, they are much more likely to award (legitimate) penalties to the home team than to the visiting team, i.e. visiting teams are refused a legitimate penalty significantly more often. One possible explanation for referees' bias is that they are likely to penalize home teams less often for the same type of tackles than they do visiting teams. In addition to this difference in awarding penalties, in some cases referees add significantly more extra time when the home team is behind by one goal than when it is ahead by one goal or when there is a draw after 90 min. This bias is very clear in Spain where referees add almost 2 min more extra time when the home team is behind than when it is ahead by one goal. However, the difference is only slightly more than half a minute in Germany.

Because about 85% of penalties committed in the box result in a goal, awarding a penalty generally has much more influence on the result of a match than adding half a minute or

minute more of extra time, where the probability of scoring a goal in 1 min of extra time is 2%.

~~~~~  
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### **Strength of Claim**

Probability

\* Use a modal auxiliary

\* Notice how the claim progressively weakens in these sentences.

Sleeping 7–9 hours each day *will* result in better academic performance.

Sleeping 7–9 hours each day *may* result in better academic performance.

Sleeping 7–9 hours each day *might/could* result in better academic performance.

### PROBABILITY

Stronger	It is certain that	sleeping 7-9 hours a day will improve academic performance.
	It is almost certain that	
	It is highly likely that	
	It is likely that	
Weaker	It is possible that	

### STRENGTH OF CLAIM

Stronger	There is a definite possibility that	sleeping 7-9 hours a day will improve academic performance.
	It is a strong possibility that	
	There is a good possibility that	
Weaker	There is some possibility that	

### STRENGTH OF CLAIM

#### Distancing

Based on limited data available,	bamboo is a suitable substitute for structural timber.
In the view of some experts,	
According to previous studies,	
Some studies have suggested,	

#### Generalization

One classic verb for qualifying (or defending) a generalization is the verb *tend*.

Poor children have a history of health problems.

Poor children *tend to* have a history of health problems.

Another way of to defending a generalization is to qualify the subject.

*Many* poor children have a history of health problems.

*A majority of* poor children have a history of health problems.

*In most parts of the world* poor children have a history of health problems.

#### Weaker Verbs

Compare:

Weak government policies *led to* the financial crisis. (stronger)

Weak government policies *contributed to* the financial crisis. (weaker)

#### Task Two

Underline the verb making the *weaker* claim.

1. The results indicate/establish that there is a link between smoking and lung cancer.

2. Table 9 suggests/shows that the number of articles written and published by nonnative speakers will continue to increase.
3. The latest series of studies question/challenge the conclusions of much previous research.
4. The results in figure 4 validate/support the second hypothesis.
5. The test results create/suggest a basis for product modification.
6. Changes in room ambient temperature may have influenced/distorted the test results.

### **Other Academic Writing Topics**

- \* Citations
- \* Plagiarism
- \* Highlighting the importance of an issue

### **Writing Activities**

#### *Group Writing*

- \* “Translate”, i.e. rewrite, the last paragraph of “Driven to Distraction” in a more academic style.

#### *Group discussion prior to individual writing:*

- \* Do you think it’s dangerous to talk on the phone while driving? Why or why not? Do you know of anyone who does this? Does it cause any problems? How serious is the problem?

### **Benefits of Using a Graduated Set of Readings**

- \* Main considerations
  - interest of the students
  - familiarity of topic
  - potential of the texts to generate discussion and ideas
- \* Published research papers are available on just about any topic
- \* Very interesting journal articles can generally be found online.
- \* Find articles that students can handle.
- \* Begin with popular articles, if necessary, but beware that they
  - are not the right models for students in an EAP writing course.
  - include a much higher number of human participants in popular texts than do textbooks or journal articles and are also far more likely to personalize
  - focus on people and what they say and think
- \* Academic papers focus on what was found through experimentation and analysis, how the findings fit within the existing body of knowledge, and what these findings mean.
- \* Students will gain an understanding of expectations.
- \* A genre approach can move students from the more accessible popular articles to real academic writing and
  - challenge both strong and weak students (in mixed ability classes) to acquire and develop strategies for academic communication and language learning
  - be informed by a practical understanding of possible future academic contexts.
- \* By using a genre approach moving from the more accessible popular articles to real academic writing we can

- situate the students' language learning in meaningful engagement with those future academic contexts and
  - integrate current interdisciplinary insights derived from linguistic, sociological and educational research.
- \* Finally, students can see that the texts they are using focus on real research topics that are meaningful beyond the classroom and that these topics are worth investigating.
- \* Students become engaged with the texts and work through a discovery process which can result in more learning.