

Evidence-Based Learning of Academic Report Writing in English

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Abstract

Academic writing encompasses all the types of discursive writing that undergraduate and graduate students engage in to satisfy academic requirements at tertiary education institutions. It includes writing essays, literature surveys, research reports and theses. Academic writing also covers writing of research and scholarly papers for journal and conference publications. Academic writing is difficult for students to learn and do well, and difficult for teachers to teach. Writing of research papers in the English language is of particular concern in PhD programs in Asian universities, where students need to publish in international journals in English, whereas English is not the native language of most students.

The vast amounts of academic texts available online is a gold mine for carrying out text mining to derive linguistic, semantic and argument patterns and examples that can support evidence-based teaching of academic writing and support academic writing itself. This ongoing research project is carrying out in-depth linguistic and content analyses of the Introduction and Literature Review sections of research articles published in top journals in three fields (sociology, biological science and mechanical engineering), to identify the linguistic, informational and argumentation strategies used. Based on the results of the analyses, a catalog of linguistic, informational and argumentation patterns found in high-quality research papers, together with specific examples, is being constructed.

An online tool for guiding students in writing research papers, focusing on the Introduction and the Literature Review sections, is being developed. The tool guides the student in planning the rhetorical structure of the research paper and to select appropriate discourse markers, with example sentences from the corpus, to guide the student in constructing sentences that realize particular rhetorical functions. The online tool also suggests metadiscourse functions (with associated discourse markers and example sentences) that signals the information organization in the text and guides the reader to understand the text content. Future development of the tool will guide the student in planning the argument

structure of the research paper. A preliminary prototype of the tool is available at <http://acadwriting.sg>.

Collaborators are sought to participate in two phases of the study:

- Phase 1: to collect research papers and research proposals (in English) by PhD students, and contribute to a corpus of student-written academic reports for linguistic and content analysis.
- Phase 2: to make use of the online Evidence-Based Academic Writing Assistant, being developed in the study, to guide students in writing the Introduction and Literature Review sections of research papers, and contributing the resulting paper to a second corpus of student-written academic reports, for comparison and evaluation.