A New Categorisation of University Student Writing Tasks

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Outline

- 1. Earlier classifications of student writing
- 2. Earlier classifications of education genres
- 3 A classification of genre families for the BAWE corpus
  - purpose, generic stages, genre networks, examples
- 4. Implications for university EME

1. Classifications of Student Writing

1.1 Theoretical

1.1.1 Bain (1890) argumentation, exposition, narration, description

1.1.2 Kinneavy (1969): Expressive, Persuasive, Exploratory, Scientific, Informative, Literary

1.2 University Writing Tasks

1.2.1 Surveys/ Student reporting
e.g. Bridgeman & Carlson 1984, Casanave & Hubbard 1992, Rosenfeld, Courtney & Fowles 2004, Ganobcsik-Williams 2004

1.2.2 Analysis of writing prompts, questions set.
Horowitz 1986: 54 tasks, 17 departments [38 / 750 faculty responded]
Canesco & Byrd 1989: 84 Business courses [=modules BE]
Carson et al. 1992: UG History course
Braine 1995: 80 tasks, 17 courses, 12 departments, Engineering & Natural Sciences
Hale et al 1996: 162 courses from 5 disciplines in 8 universities

Braine 2001: 29 tasks from Engineering; 0 Science …
[CUHK, 5 faculty responded positively, 80 responded; 223]

Moore & Morton 2005: 155 1st year tasks from 28 Depts (58% Essays)

2. Earlier Genre Classification Studies

2.1 What Primary School Children Write (Martin & Rothery 1980s)

1500 texts, only 15% factual writing (Reports, Procdures, Explanations, Exposition) (Martin 1989:53)

Narrative/ Expressive writing
Factual writing:

- Procedure how something is done
- Description what some particular thing is like
- Report what an entire class of things is like
- Explanation a reason why a judgment has been made
- Exposition arguments why a thesis has been proposed

Martin 1989:15

+Narrative, News Story, Recount: 8 Key Genres for WAC in schools

2.2 Secondary School (1990s)

English, Science, Mathematics, Geography, and History (e.g. Coffin 2004):

Chronicling History: Autobiographical Recount, Biographical Recount, Historical Recount

Reporting History: Descriptive Report, Taxonomic Report, Historical Account

Explaining History: Factorial Explanation, Consequential Explanation,

Arguing History: Analytical Exposition, Analytical Discussion, Challenge

An Investigation of
Genres of Assessed Writing
in British Higher Education

E·S·R·C ECONOMIC & SOCIAL RESEARCH COUNCIL

RES-000-23-0800
2004-2007

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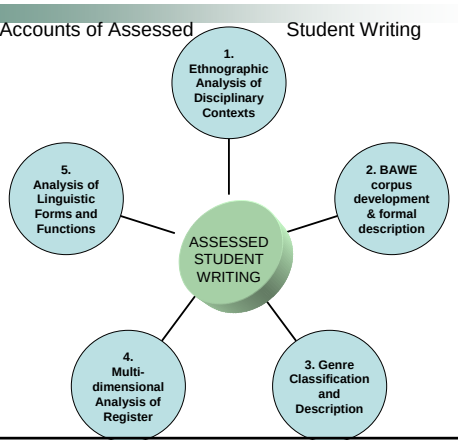
THE UNIVERSITY OF WARWICK · The University of Reading · OXFORD BROOKES UNIVERSITY

Project Aims

- Develop a Corpus of British Academic Written English (BAWE)
- Characterise proficient student writing across disciplines and years

Five Accounts of Assessed Student Writing



1 Disciplinary Context

a. Departmental documentation
b. Tutor interviews
c. Student interviews
d. Assignment submission forms

Tutor on Engineering Projects:

- In year four they have a team project with **tasks similar to what they'll get in employment**. They work in teams with students from a range of engineering disciplines to tackle various complex engineering problems. They produce a **document with costings targeted at a Venture Capital company**.

On Engineering Reports:

- There is a standard structure.. They have a layout of headings and a description of the sorts of things that would go under each of those headings, and they map whatever they've done onto that.
- Although a third-year project may be similar in structure to a laboratory report written in the first year, the writer will have to assimilate, evaluate and integrate a wider range of information.

Engineering Students:

"Basically we make a summary first the reasons are if someone in industry wants to know what we're doing, they haven't got time to read through they just want to know what's going on. Then the introduction .. Contents .. Then a theory which takes a huge chunk it's explaining everything…"

"It doesn't matter how good the project is, if it isn't well written, it won't get good marks"

Engineering assignments:

- Laboratory reports
- Project reports
- Reflective journals
- Posters (e.g. for transport museum)
- Summaries of analysis + recommendations
- Site investigation reports (both factual and interpretative)
- Funding proposals
- Business plans
- Essays

History Student

"I try to use different opinions. I say someone's opinion, then counter it with someone else's. I weave my own perception in but I'd never say "this is what I think" directly. I use some arguing and counter but I always go back to my introduction stance.

… I put across my argument always and a. you have to consider the popular argument at the time. You don't want to go against the flow completely as you don't have the skill to do that. But b. I consider what the professor will think."

Disciplinary Context Investigation

Informs classification of genre families through disciplinary views on assignment

- Purpose
- Audience
- Structure
- Relationships between genres
- Nature of evidence
- Values
- Thinking behind the writing…

Strand 2

Corpus Development

- Collect assignments (Alsop & Nesi)
- Tag files to submit to ESRC and OTA Text Archives (Heuboeck et al)
- Develop interfaces for end users (see www.coventry.ac.uk/bawe)

30 Corpus Disciplines

Arts & Humanities	Archaeology, Applied Linguistics, Classics, Comparative American Studies, English, History, Philosophy +
Life Sciences	Agriculture, Biological Sciences, Food Sciences, Health, Psychology, Medical Science +
Physical Sciences	Architecture, Chemistry, Computer Science, Cybernetics & Electronics, Engineering, Mathematics, Meteorology, Physics, Planning +
Social Sciences	Anthropology, Business, Economics, HLTM (Hospitality, Leisure and Tourism Management), Law, Politics, Publishing, Sociology +

BAWE Corpus: 2896 Texts

Level / *Disciplinary Group*	1	2	3	4
Arts & Humanities	254	232	160	82
Life Sciences	186	203	92	246
Physical Sciences	201	156	159	121
Social Sciences	215	205	165	210

Contextual and Textual Information

Each corpus file includes information on the

- writer (age,L1,gender,schooling, course),
- module (title, **department**, **disc. group**)
- assignment (title, **level**, date, **grade >60**)
- number of words, s-units, p-units, tables, figures, block quotes, formulae, lists, listlikes, abstract, w/s, s/p, …
- and **genre family**

Strand 3

Classification of Genre Families

- We read 2896 texts
- Assigned them to genres
- Grouped genres with similar purpose and similar structure across disciplines, and gave these genre families a name

E.G. The Critique Family includes

book review (History)
product evaluation (Engineering)
results interpretation (Biology) +

Why genre families?

- To be able to compare across disciplines by ‘genre’
- To be able to compare across levels by ‘genre’
- To provide a framework for more detailed analysis
  - of genres
  - of register
  - of context

13 Genre Families

1. **Case Study**
2. **Critique**
3. **Design Specification**
4. **Empathy Writing**
5. **Essay**
6. **Exercise**
7. **Explanation**
8. **Literature Survey**
9. **Methodology Recount**
10. **Narrative Recount**
11. **Problem Question**
12. **Proposal**
13. **Research Report**

1. Case Study

to demonstrate/develop an understanding of professional practice through the analysis of a single exemplar **[purpose]** description of a particular case, often multifaceted, with recommendations or suggestions for future action **[generic stages]** typically corresponds to professional genres (e.g. in business, medicine, and engineering) **[genre network]**	**[examples]** •business start-up •company report (starts with executive summary) •investigation report •organisation analysis •patient case notes •patient report •tourism report

2. Critique

to demonstrate/develop understanding of the object of study and the ability to evaluate and / or assess the significance of the object of study [purpose] includes descriptive account with optional explanation, and evaluation with optional tests [generic stages] may correspond to part of a research paper, professional design specification or expert evaluation [genre networks]	•academic paper review •approach evaluation •business / organisation evaluation •financial report evaluation •interpretation of results •legislation evaluation •(legal) case report •policy evaluation •product/ building evaluation •programme evaluation •project evaluation •review of a book/ film/ play/ website •system evaluation •Teaching evaluation

3. Design Specification

to demonstrate/develop the ability to design a product or procedure that could be manufactured or implemented typically includes purpose, component selection, and proposal; may include development and testing of design may correspond to a professional design specification, or to part of a proposal or research report.	•application design •building design •database design •game design •label design •product design •system design •website design

4. Empathy Writing

to demonstrate/develop understanding and appreciation of the relevance of academic ideas by translating them into a non-academic register, to communicate to a non-specialist readership may be formatted as a letter, newspaper article or similar non-academic genre may correspond to professional writing	•expert information for journalist •expert advice to industry •expert advice to lay person •information leaflet •job application •letter (e.g. reflective letter to a friend; business correspondence) •newspaper article

5. Essay

to demonstrate/develop the ability to construct a coherent argument and employ critical thinking skills discussion (issue, pros/cons, final position); exposition (thesis, evidence, restate thesis); factorial (outcome, conditioning factors); consequential (input, consequences, restatement); challenge (opposition to existing theory); comparison (series of comparative points or arguments); commentary (series of comments on a text) may correspond to a published academic or specialist paper	•challenge •commentary •comparison •consequential •discussion •exposition •factorial

History Issue and Thesis Extracts

- Issue (Discussion)
- ***This essay will look at*** *continuity and departure through these two periods thematically,* ***and attempt to form a conclusion as to whether*** *the 'Age of Braudel' conserved* ***or*** *contradicted original Annales historiography.*
- Thesis (Exposition)
- *I* ***will attempt to show why I agree with*** *scholars such as Craig Calhoun* ***that it was*** *primarily artisans that resisted the changes brought by industrialization and who seemed to have more of a sense of unity* ***in comparison to*** *the factory workers.*

6. Exercise

to provide practice in key skills (e.g. the ability to interrogate a database, perform complex calculations, or explain technical terms or procedures), and to consolidate knowledge of key concepts data analysis or a series of responses to questions may correspond to part of report or research paper	calculations data analysis mixed (e.g. calculations + essays) short answers stats exercise

7. Explanation

to demonstrate/ develop understanding of the object of study; and the ability to describe and/or account for its significance includes descriptive account, explanation may correspond to a published explanation, or to part of a research paper or professional design specification	Overview of a •business •concept /job/ legislation •instrument •methodology •organism / disease •product development •site/ environment •species / breed •substance / phenomenon •system/ process

8. Literature Survey

to demonstrate/develop familiarity with literature relevant to the focus of study includes summary of literature relevant to the focus of study and varying degrees of critical evaluation may correspond to a published paper or anthology, or to part of a research paper	•annotated bibliography •anthology •literature review •notes taken from multiple sources •summary book chapter •summary series of articles

9. Methodology Recount

to demonstrate/develop familiarity with disciplinary procedures, methods, and conventions for recording experimental findings describes procedures undertaken by writer and may include Introduction, Methods, Results, and Discussion sections, or these functions may be realised iteratively may correspond to a section within a research report or research paper	•computer analysis •data analysis report •experimental report •field report •forensic report •lab report •materials selection report •(program) development report

Variation in Methodology Recounts across Disciplines [Gardner & Holmes]

Biological Science	Computer Science	Engineering	Food Science	Physics	Psychology
(Abstract) (32/52)	(Abstract) (16/64)	(Abstract) (44/83)	---	(Abstract) (15/18)	(Abstract) (5/10)
Introduction	1. Introduction	Introduction	Objective	1. Introduction	Introduction
---	2. Theory	Theory	Introduction	---	---
Materials and Method	3. Design	Apparatus and Methods	Method	2. Experimental Details	Method
Results	4. Implementation	Observations and Results	Results	3. Results	Results
Discussion	5. Results and Analysis	Analysis of Results	Calculation	4. Discussion	Discussion
(Conclusion)	6. Conclusion	Discussion	Discussion		
(Future Work)		Conclusion			
(References) (22/52)	(References) (29/64)	(References) (63/83)	(References) (53/69)	(References) (15/18)	(References) (8/10)

10. Narrative Recount

to demonstrate/develop awareness of motives and/or behaviour in individuals (including self) or organisations fictional or factual recount of events, with optional comments may correspond to published literature, a professional proposal or a report, or to part of a research paper	•accident report •account of literature search •account of website search •biography •character outline •creative writing: short story •plot synopsis •reflective recount •report on disease outbreak •urban ethnography

11. Problem Question

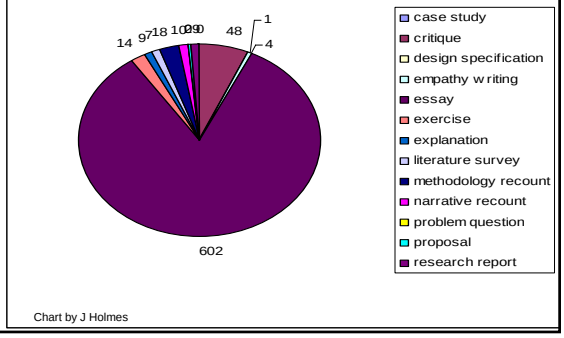
to provide practice in applying specific methods in response to simulated professional problems problem (may not be stated in assignment), application of relevant arguments or presentation of possible solution(s) in response to scenario problems or situations may resemble or be based on real legal, engineering, accounting or other professional cases	•law problem question •logistics simulation •medical problem

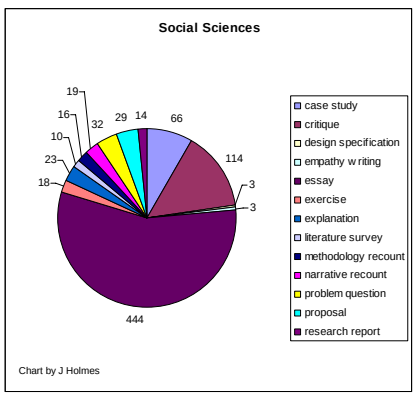
12. Proposal

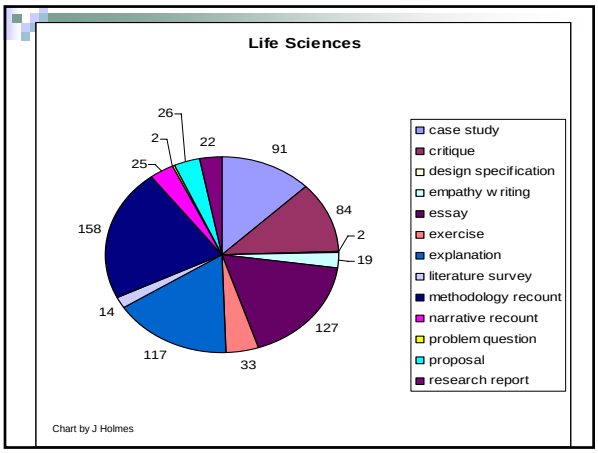
to demonstrate/develop ability to make a case for future action includes purpose, detailed plan, persuasive argumentation may correspond to professional or academic proposals	•book proposal •building proposal •business plan •catering plan •legislation reform •marketing plan •policy proposal •procedural plan •research proposal

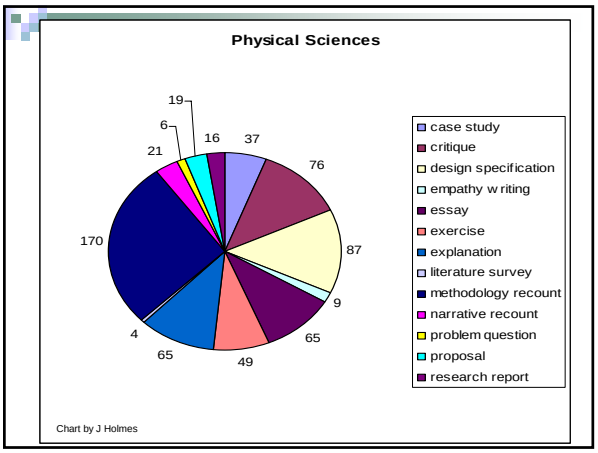
13. Research Report

to demonstrate/develop ability to undertake a complete piece of research including research design, and an appreciation of its significance in the field may include Literature Review, Methods, Findings, Discussion; or may include several 'chapters' relating to the same theme may correspond to a published experimental research paper or topic-based research paper	•research paper •topic-based dissertation









Genre Family by Level

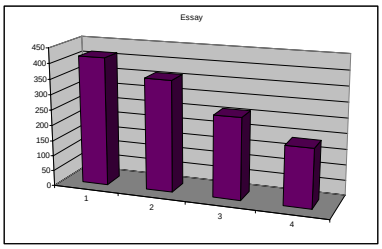
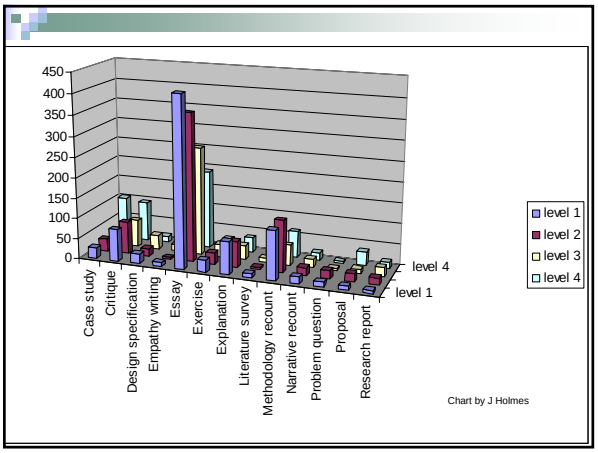


Chart by J Holmes



Engineering Genres Classification

Genre Families	Genres	Purpose
Methodology Recount	1.Lab report 2.Design report	To test…To discover… To design and test
Exercise	3. Calculations 4. Short Answer	To practise or demonstrate competence in discrete skills
Explanation	5. Design concept overview 6. Industry overview 7. System overview	To explain a concept, entity or system
Critique	8-13 Evaluations of products, techniques, performance, systems, tools, and buildings	To demonstrate understandings of and the ability to evaluate and/or assess the significance of the object of study
Case Study [table incomplete Also design proposals, research papers…]	14 Company Report 15 Accident Report	To assess a company and recommend an investment strategy To review an accident and recommend prevention strategies

Engineering Learner Pathway

- 1. Short Answer, Exercises
- 2. Lab Report, Explanation
- 3. Design Report, Product Evaluation
- 4. Design Proposal (with costings)
- 5. Research report

Strand 4

Multidimensional Register Analysis

Biber's team in Arizona

tagged 67+ lexicogrammatical features

identified dimensions of variance

Biber's general dimensions, eg Narrative:

NARRATIVE
|
6+ General fiction
|
[.....]
|
0+Popular non-fiction
|
|FACE-TO-FACE CONVERSATIONS
|Religion, Editorials
-1+PUBLIC CONVERSATIONS, ***classics*** **NARRATIVE RECOUNT**
|
|Press reviews, ***history***
|
-2+TELEPHONE CONVERSATIONS ***archaeology, health***
|Professional letters **LIT. SURV., ESSAY**
|Academic prose ***publishing, sociology*** **EW, PQ**
| **CASE STUDY**
-3+Hobbies, ***law, mathematics***
|BROADCASTS **CRITIQUE, RR, EXPLANATION**
|***economics*** **MR, EX, PROPOSAL**
|***engineering, food science, chemistry, biology***
-4+ **DESIGN SPECIFICATION**
|
NON-NARRATIVE
Key: CAPS = oral genres; ** = BAWE disciplines

Features of Narrative/Non-narrative dimension (Conrad and Biber 2001):

positive features

- past tense verbs
- third-person pronouns
- perfect aspect verbs
- public verbs
- synthetic negation
- present participial clauses

negative features

- (present tense verbs)
- (attributive adjectives)

Biber's Dimension 1: involved vs informational

INVOLVED
|
35 FACE TO FACE CONVERSATIONS
[.....]
20 Personal letters, INTERVIEWS
[.....]
5
| Romance fiction
0 Mystery fiction,
| Professional letters
-5 **NARRATIVE RECOUNT**
|
|Religion
|
-10 Editorials
|
| **PROBLEM QUESTION**
| **DESIGN SPECIFICATION**
| **ESSAY**
|
-15 Press Reportage **CRITIQUE, EXPLANATION**
| **METHODOLOGY RECOUNT, RESEARCH REPORT**
|Official Documents **CASE STUDY, PROPOSAL**
| **LITERATURE SURVEY**
-20
|
INFORMATIONAL

Involved/Informational dimension (Conrad & Biber 2001):

positive features

- private verbs (eg *think, feel*)
- That deletions
- contractions
- Second person pronouns
- First person pronouns
- …

negative features

- nouns
- word length
- prepositions
- type/token ratio
- Attributive adjectives
- …

Figure 4: Genre Families on Dimensions 4 and 5

More Persuasive	0.7, 6.8 Design Specifications	1.3 Proposals -0.5 Case Studies	
Less Persuasive	-2.4, 7.1 Research Reports -2.5, 7.3 Methodological Recounts	-1.6, 6.3 Critiques -1.8, 5.9 Essays	Narrative Recounts 4.0
	More Abstract		**Less Abstract**

Strand 5

Further Analyses

- Descriptive statistics (TTR, word length, sentence length, text length)
- Word frequencies (*history, historians*)
- Collocations
- Ngrams / lexical bundles (Eberle & Leedham)
- Theme (Wickens)
- Reporting processes (Holmes)
- And more ….

Progression in History (WordsmithTools)

	Year 1	Year 2	Year 3
Type/Token Ratio standardised	42.50	41.34	39.98
mean sentence length (in words)	22.32	24.04	27.63
Essay length (in words)	1500-3000	3000-5000	1500-5000, 12000

Progression in History (WS Freq)

	Rank	Raw Freq	**Freq/1000wds**	Texts	%Texts
'History' Yr 1	74	75	**1.3**	15	75
'History' Yr 2	52	151	**1.8**	16	73
'History' Yr 3	24	304	**4.1**	14	87
'Historians' Y 1	172	34 (+5) = 39	0.6 (+0.0) = **0.6**	9 (2)	45 (10)
'Historians' Y 2	204	45(+11)= 56	0.5 (+0.1) = **0.6**	13 (7)	59 (32)
'Historians' Y 3	139	52(+33)= 85	0.7 (+0.4) = **1.1**	8 (6)	50 (37)
(+ 'Historian')					

4. Implications for EME

A **classification** of student writing which is:

Substantial: across disciplines and levels

Illustrated by actual texts; on-line search capacity

Organised by genre families [typology]

manageable [lists of genres are unwieldy]

allows other comparisons [topography]

suggests sequencing [learner pathways]

Evidence base: proficient student (not faculty) writing (not tasks)

"The Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL) 2000 Spoken and Written Academic Language Corpus, for example, which claims to represent "the full range of spoken and written registers used at United States universities" (Biber et al., 2002, p. 11), contains textbooks, course packs, university web pages, and similar expert sources, but **no examples of student writing."**

(Nesi, Sharpling, Ganobcsik-Williams 2004:440)

Implications for EME teaching

Framework for engaging with **variation** within families, within genres, and across genres

Framework for engaging with **register**

(abstraction, modality, hedging, nominalisation)

Framework for engaging with **components/stages** (Summary, evaluation, description, ..)

Framework for being **explicit**, for consciousness-raising about specific genres

Classification needs to be internationally tested…

Michigan Corpus of Upper-level Student Papers (MICUSP). University of Michigan, USA
http://www.micusp.org/home

Viking Corpus of Student Academic Writing, Portland State University, USA
http://web.pdx.edu/~conrads/online_corpus.html

(Also Japan, Singapore, Belgium, Malaysia)

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