

CED WEBINARS

Academic writing – your own and your students'



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CENTRE FOR EDUCATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

AGENDA

- Why is academic writing difficult for students?
- Decoding your own writing practice
- Transforming your own writing practice into teaching/supervision

■ The opinion is often expressed that the standards of student writing are falling...

- *Students need to be critical, to evaluate, to try and reach some sort of synthesis and then simply summarize and conclude*
- However, the descriptive tools he employes (...) could not be explicated further.

What do they want!?

A common practice in HE:

Telling students what the text is supposed to look like; e.g. handbooks: How to write your thesis in 2 months ...

Ex: What does argue, discuss, or critical mean? How do I separate voices? How do I make my own voice clear? Etc. (Lillis, 2001: 59)

Institutional practice of mystery:
... this strangeness is compounded by the fact that such conventions are treated as if they were 'common sense' and are communicated through wordings as if these are transparently meaningful (Lillis, 2001: 75)



What the readers want ...

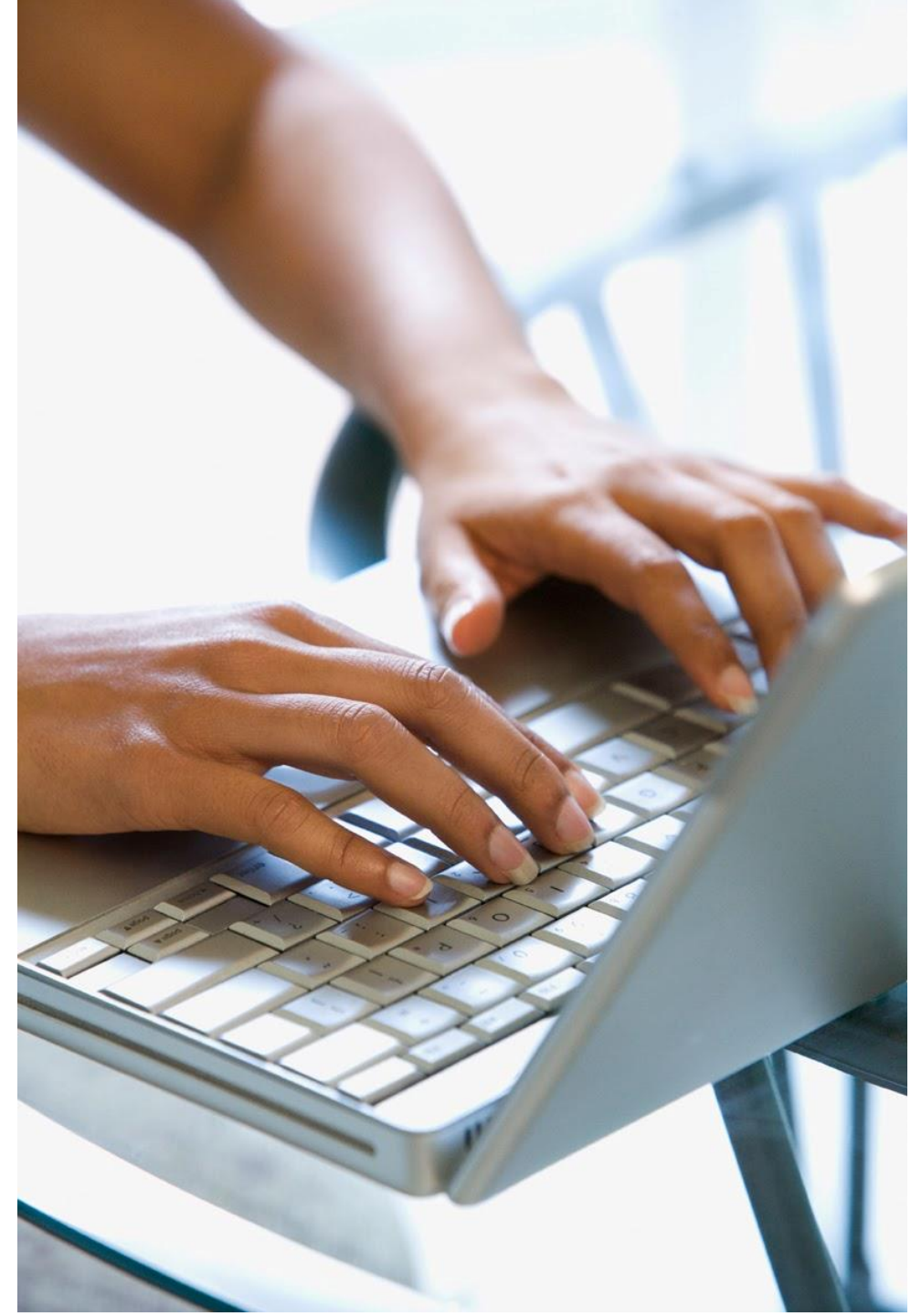
The purpose of scientific writing is to contribute to discussions of disciplinary knowledge

(e.g. Ask, 2007, Hyland 2004, Wingate 2015, Dysthe 2006)

Learning to write

Learning to write academic genres essentially means developing an understanding of the social practices of one's discipline

(Hyland, 2004: 145)





Decoding the Disciplines Wheel

[Business - Webflow HTML website template \(decoding.webflow.io\)](https://www.decoding.webflow.io)

Pace & Middendorf, 2004
Middendorf & Shopkow, 2018



STEP 1: Identify bottlenecks - an example

INFORMATICS

Vague: Students are unable to program a web application.

More Specific: When constructing a web application, students struggle to understand the flow of logic and data through the application triggered by user interactions.

Step 1: Define a Bottleneck

STEP 1: Identify bottlenecks in your field

- Think about the latest written assignments you have received
- Write down:
 - How does the students' discussions not meet your expectations? What are the 2-3 main difficulties your students have in relation to the discussion part?
- Share the main difficulties/bottlenecks in the chat

STEP 2: Decoding mental tasks



- **Because** experts process information more quickly and holistically, divide it into larger chunks than novices
(Middendorff & Shopkow, 2018: 36)
- **The goal** of decoding is not to understand the content, but to grasp the mental process faculty rely on to operate within their field (ibid.: 37)
- **Many methods** for decoding (both individually and in teams)

STEP 2: Your decoding (reflective writing)

How do you deal with this bottleneck?

Describe how you/an expert in your discipline would proceed when confronted with this bottleneck. What steps would you/an expert take to overcome the bottleneck? What would you/an expert do?

Note:

Many of these steps may seem so self-evident to you that they remain unconscious. Try to make these steps conscious and break down big steps into as many steps as possible. For example, a professor of literature asks his students to “observe” before they “interpret.” The next question would be: What does a professor of literature do when he “observes?”

STEP 3: Modelling

A row of ladders of varying heights is positioned against a teal wall. The ladders are arranged from left to right, increasing in height. The tallest ladder in the center is highlighted with a white glow, while the others are a light blue color. The background transitions from teal on the left to white on the right.

Principles:

- Make analogies
- Demonstrate mental actions (scaffolding)

EX: How to write a discussion - before decoding

Explain [author's] theory of [...] **and discuss** how the theory is used in relation to the analysis of concrete empirical evidence. Choose between [xx] and [yy].

By discuss, we mean that you must describe in your own words and interpretations:

- 1) what the authors specifically use [author's] theory and concepts for in their analyses
- 2) how [author's] theory can be said to influence/strengthen the authors' view of the chosen field/theme
- 3) what strengths and/or weaknesses you find in the authors' argumentation and conclusion. It is not about assessing whether the authors' study and focus "fit in" with [author's], but more about showing that you can convey the essence of a [subject] scientific study in your own words and assess the study's overall argumentation.

EX: How to write a discussion - after decoding

Steps before the discussion:

1. Choose a central concept from text A
2. Describe how the author uses this concept and in which context
3. Describe how the concept is used in text B and in which context

Steps in the actual discussion:

4. Are there coincidences between how this concept is used in text A and text B? How?
5. Are there differences between how this concept is used in text A and text B? How?
6. Find quotes documenting coincidences as well as differences.

Sum-up



”However, the descriptive tools he employes (...) could not be explicated further.”

- Identify students’ challenges
- Describe your own practice (decoding)
- Invite students into your own practice



Questions or comments?

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CED WEBINARS

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Date: 29.01.2025

Generative AI in the feedback process – implications of introducing adaptable and scalable GAI feedback
Date: 05.03.2025



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