

THE POTENTIAL OF SECOND LANGUAGE WRITING IN HIGHER EDUCATION: EXPECTATIONS FOR GRADUATE STUDENTS

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This article discusses how a focus on expectations and application of the Teaching and Learning Cycle (TLC) can help L2 graduate students become familiar with the different kinds of texts expected in graduate school. The author uses examples of typical texts that L2 graduate students are required to write, describing some experiences of how she used different phases of the TLC in deconstructing and jointly constructing these texts with students.

Keywords: genre-based approach, graduate students, second language writing, systemic functional linguistics

Writing in higher education for graduate students at the master's and doctoral levels who are second language (L2) writers can be a daunting task. This can be particularly true if mentor texts that show various expectations for the genres these new scholars need to be able to produce in school are not available for them. Knowledge of the essential genres and their expectations typically required in graduate programs is important. In this article, I discuss how a focus on expectations and application of the Teaching and Learning Cycle (TLC) (de Oliveira et al., 2020; de Oliveira & Smith, 2019; Martin, 2009; Rothery, 1996) can help L2 graduate students become familiar with the different kinds of texts expected of them in graduate school. I then use some examples of typical texts that L2 graduate students are required to write, describing some experiences of how I used different phases of the TLC in deconstructing and jointly constructing these texts with them.

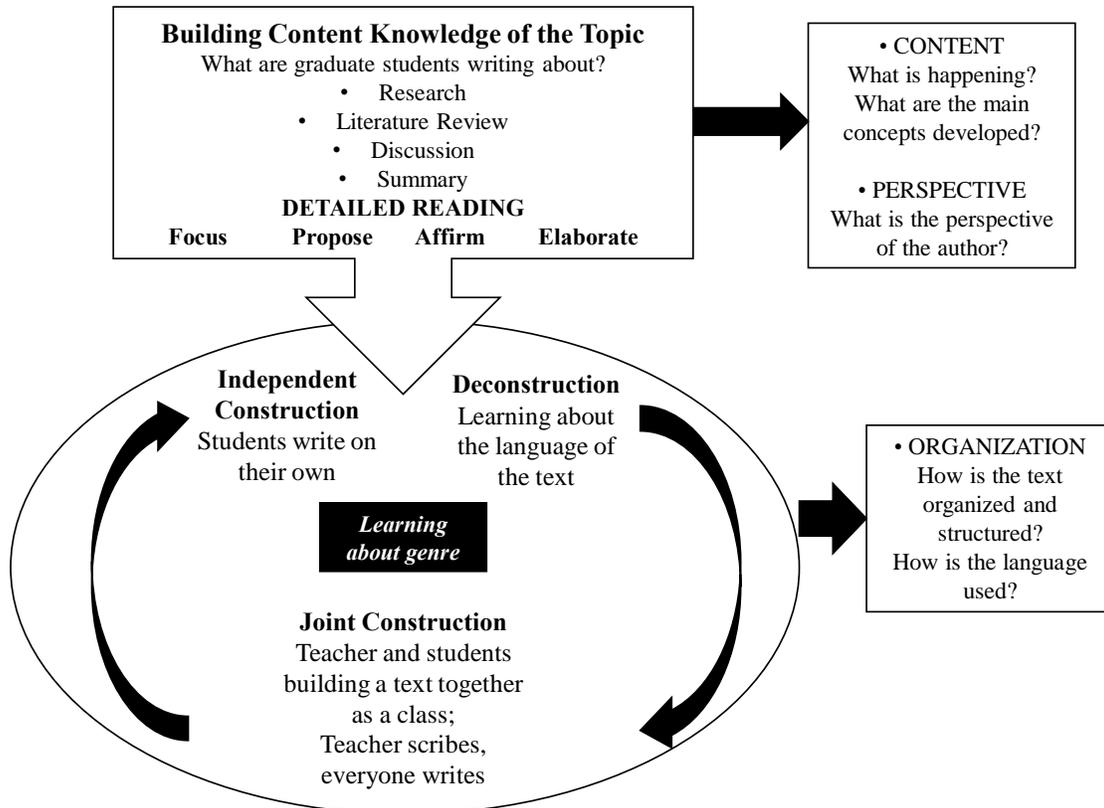
Not all graduate students are equally prepared to face the task of constructing the genres expected in their programs in expected ways—for example, using academic prose and linguistically constructing defensible, reasoned arguments are typical expectations. Simultaneously, not all graduate students share the same understanding that certain ways of demonstrating their knowledge through language are expected by their professors. One approach that I have found particularly helpful in working with L2 graduate students is a genre-based approach to writing.

The genre-based approach that I have used most is often referred to as the Sydney School genre approach, rooted in *systemic functional linguistics* (SFL), a theory that positions genres as staged, goal-oriented social processes (Martin & Rose, 2008). As writers, we go through steps to reach our writing goals, in the form of genre stages, for particular audiences and social purposes. Genres have specific language and organizational patterns used to achieve social purposes in particular contexts. Using genre pedagogy to guide L2 writers provides a method to help graduate students gain familiarity with the expectations of each genre.

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Even if professors do not explicitly scaffold understanding of genre characteristics, L2 graduate students can use some of the principles put forth by the genre approach in their own practices as writers. For instance, analyzing mentor texts helps L2 writers understand various expectations for the texts they are expected to write. Ideally, there would be a writing course that is required of all graduate students in which a specific genre-based approach to writing could be implemented, through the TLC, that scaffolds L2 graduate students by gradually releasing responsibility to them during multiple phases (see Figure 1). This approach can differ based on contextual factors and students' needs, described next.

Figure 1
Teaching and Learning Cycle Applied in Graduate Education



Deconstruction is the first phase and introduces students to the genre in which they will be writing. This phase involves the teacher unpacking a mentor text in the target genre for the students, explicitly drawing their attention to language and organizational patterns. *Joint Construction* is the second phase, in which the teacher guides students in jointly writing a text in the same genre that they previously deconstructed. The teacher and students discuss how to incorporate the language features and organizational structure characteristic of the genre. The third phase, *Independent Construction*, provides students with an opportunity to apply what they learned, now independently. Students have the most responsibility during this phase, as they draw on their previous experiences and learning to create a text in the same genre on their own (Derewianka & Jones, 2016). The TLC, when applied with graduate students, enables them to see how different language features create meaning and how the types of texts they are expected to write in graduate school are organized. The next section examines the kinds of texts that are typically expected of graduate students.

Typical Texts Required in Graduate Education

This section is based on 14 years of experience working with graduate students in higher education settings. It describes some texts that are typical requirements in graduate programs.

Proposals for Professional Conferences

Proposals for professional conferences differ in their expectations depending on the kind of conference to which graduate students are submitting. There are more research-oriented conferences that require almost a full paper as their proposal; other, more practitioner-oriented conferences may require an abstract of 50 words or less and a summary of 200–300 words. The type of presentation may also differ within each conference, so they can be more research-oriented, more teaching/practice-oriented, a panel, or a symposium. Therefore, graduate students would need to know not only the expectations for the particular proposal but also the kind of conference to which they are submitting. This can be very difficult for novice scholars.

I have mentored many graduate students through writing their first proposals, and I usually start by providing mentor texts in the proposal type and conference type. We deconstruct the mentor proposal, discussing the language and organizational structure of each proposal. We then jointly construct a new proposal, keeping in mind what we just discussed. Typically, when graduate students are submitting more than one proposal, they then independently write another proposal and I review it after that, providing feedback on the language and content.

Thesis and Dissertation Proposals

A second very common type of text that graduate students are required to write is their thesis (for master's students) or dissertation (for doctoral students) proposal. Different kinds of proposals also have different expectations, and it is difficult for graduate students to know what these are. Iddings et al. (2014) describe the genre expectations of a dissertation proposal and how applying a genre analysis to a mentor text can help doctoral students understand what is required of them as they engage in writing their own dissertation proposals for qualitative research specifically. It would be very helpful for master's and dissertation committee chairs to apply the first phase of the TLC with their graduate students. Deconstructing mentor proposals is extremely important for L2 graduate students to understand the expectations of what they need to write.

Literature Reviews

A literature review is typically a synthesis of research on a particular topic. It is a very common type of writing task in graduate programs. To conduct and write a literature review, L2 graduate students must be familiar with the actual process of selecting the research literature to review, starting with narrowing the topic. Describing the actual process through which they went in order to review the literature is an important (and often missed) step that needs to be included in the text they are writing.

To scaffold the writing of literature reviews, I provide mentor texts for my graduate students so they become familiar with the expectations. Even before we deconstruct these mentor texts, we discuss the entire literature review process, from defining and narrowing a topic, to finding articles and other scholarly work to review, to summarizing these articles, and finally to starting the writing of the literature review. My students have found this process to be extremely helpful for them as novice scholars, and this is especially significant if they are starting their graduate programs.

Writing for Publication: Journal Articles and Book Chapters

For doctoral students especially, writing a journal article and book chapter is a significant step toward attaining their degrees and going on the job market. Writing for publication can be a very intimidating task for L2 graduate students unfamiliar with the entire publication process. I have used different

strategies to help my L2 graduate students write for publication, but they all involve the phases described in the TLC.

After working together on research projects and deciding what we will likely write about, we discuss possible outlets for the work—specific refereed journals or books (if calls for chapter proposals are available). If we choose a journal, we start by looking at published articles in the journal and selecting a mentor text for us to look at very closely, doing a deconstruction of the article so we understand its content, perspective, and organization (see Figure 1) and get a better idea about the kinds of articles the journal publishes. We often follow the same outline as the article that we deconstructed—and sometimes we read and deconstruct more than one article. We then have used collaborative writing tools (such as Google Docs) to co-write the manuscript—and many times we try to meet at the beginning of the writing task so they can see what I am doing as we begin to write, similar to a joint construction kind of activity. They then feel better able to write on their own as we continue to develop ideas for the manuscript together. This scaffolding of writing for publication has been very valuable for my L2 graduate students, as they learn from start to finish the entire publication process, including writing, revising, and re-submitting letters and addressing editors' and reviewers' comments in purposeful and respectful ways.

Conclusion

Certainly there are other texts that L2 graduate students are often required to write in graduate school—the ones above are just some examples. For all of the texts required, though, implementing a genre-based approach has shown to be a successful way to introduce novice scholars to various writing tasks and to provide the kind of scaffolding they need as they engage in multiple activities.

A genre-based approach is flexible and can be implemented at various levels. The TLC can be adapted based on L2 graduate students' specific academic needs. Its iterative nature allows L2 graduate students to engage with a genre for a sustained period of time, developing knowledge of language and the social purpose of texts.

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