

# Thinking And Writing In College: A Naturalistic Study Of Students In Four Disciplines

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## Genre analysis of essays in the Social Sciences: The case of Botswana students



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Writing is a challenging but requisite skill at university and other life situations. At university, essay writing is generally challenging to first-year students across disciplines or faculties. This study therefore describes the writing challenges of the Faculty of Social Sciences students at the University of Botswana. To that end, this study asks the following research questions: (1) What writing tasks are first-year students in the Faculty of Social Sciences given? (2) What problems do the students encounter when writing essays in the Faculty of Social Sciences? (3) What kind of assistance do students receive on writing essays? This article is underpinned by the English for Academic Purposes genre analysis framework. All in all, the findings of this study point to the need for a more intensive writing programme for first-year students at the University of Botswana in which both faculties and the Communication and Study Skills Unit will cooperatively assist students with writing. Students' responses clearly indicated the need for such collaboration.

### Introduction

Writing is a challenging but requisite skill at university and other life situations. At university, essay writing is generally challenging to first-year students across disciplines or faculties (Ahmed 2010; Nesi & Gardner 2012; Nkateng 2013). In the light of that, this study describes the writing challenges of the Faculty of Social Sciences students at the University of Botswana. At the University of Botswana, essays are written in English, the official medium of instruction at the university and other levels of education in Botswana. As second language learners, Botswana students across all levels struggle to write in English. To address this problem, the University of Botswana offers compulsory Communication and Study Skills courses to all first-year students. Briefly, these courses teach subject-specific academic and professional communication topics using relevant teaching and assessment approaches selected by the lecturers who teach them. These courses are informed by the English for Academic Purposes (EAP) discipline. To provide context for this study, it is important to note that Botswana is a Southern African country located between South Africa, Namibia and Zimbabwe.

### Literature review and theoretical framework

This article is underpinned by the EAP genre analysis framework. EAP is a branch of the English for Specific Purposes (ESP) discipline (Robinson 1991). ESP is goal directed and propounds that learners do not learn the English language for the sake of it. They learn it because they use it in their specific professional or academic lives. EAP's foci are language and associated institutional and disciplinary practices, such as referencing and writing, which people need to undertake to study or work in English medium higher education. The main objective of EAP courses is to teach the language, both general academic language and subject-specific language, as well as language-related practices such as summarising and writing introductions. EAP courses usually focus on the process of writing – planning, organising, presenting, rewriting, and proofreading. Typical writing skills that are the foci of EAP include research and using sources, writing different text types as well as different genres and using an appropriate style with some degree of accuracy.

### Genre analysis

Genre analysis has been defined by various scholars such as Miller (1984), who defines it as a classification of typical acts of communication (cited in Ferring, Schmidt & Wright 2004). However, this study is premised on one of the most influential researchers on genre analysis, John Swales, who, with his analysis of the rhetorical structure of the introductions of research articles, established a method for the analysis of the rhetorical structure of different genres (Luzon 2005). According to Swales (1990):



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