

ESP for Theology: Teachers Must Go the Extra Mile

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Abstract

This article describes teacher research in an EAP context, teaching English for theology at the United Theological College, Bangalore, India, an international, liberal, and ecumenical institution. Conceptually grounded in the theory and practice of genre teaching, and discourse analysis of large pieces of texts such as the thesis, inspired by Swales (1990) and Hoey (1983), this article analyses NNS-students' struggle to conform to the academy and seeks ways to enculturate unskilled L2 learners in the art of thesis writing.

Introduction

The research presented here raises two questions:

1. How do students who are weak in English manage to overcome their limitations in the language in the period of 18 months prior to thesis writing?
2. How can the ESP teacher meet them halfway in their attempts to succeed?

I attempt to deepen my understanding of my own practices in collaboration with subject teachers and employ tools of empirical research such as questionnaires, interviews, portfolio analysis and observation and participation. The two questionnaires administered ([Appendix A](#) and [B](#)) have yielded sources of information not usually available to the teacher. A PowerPoint presentation I created ([Appendix C](#)) provides a practical solution to the problem being researched. These methods of teaching academic reading and writing are easily replicable by others. Recognizing the need for such teaching at post-graduate level, based on the data analysed of both expert and unskilled users of the language, and having analysed the intricacies of academic writing this article makes a plea to teachers to be willing to identify with student apprehensions at this advanced level of research writing.

The Context

I have taught English to students of theology at both undergraduate and masters levels [1] for 26 years at the United Theological College (UTC), Bangalore, South India. The English

taught is for Academic Purposes (EAP), not for mission or evangelism [2]. Recognising the "high seriousness" of the subject and the equally serious manner in which the students in the age group (25-45 years) wished to master English to excel in theology, I experimented during my first five years in creating relevant teaching materials. There were no books that I knew of to teach this particular group or subject, and I had to rely on both intuition and experience.

For example, to teach writing, I used Lawrence (1972), in which methods of logical organisation are taught based on cognitive psychology; I adapted them to students' needs. I wrote my own exercises based on church-related and current Christian issues such as 'Women's Ordination', and offered them as samples to explain these methods.

Students claimed that this method of teaching writing was a revelation to them and had helped them to overcome their fears of writing in English within the first two weeks of class. Such feedback could not be overlooked, as it was from adult students with high motivation to succeed.

Knowing the students' prior educational background and training in secular colleges, I could not ignore the value of the notional-functional method and the product approach to teaching writing despite new theories that had set in, in the West, regarding teaching writing. I persisted in the product approach at the remedial level of teaching and noted with satisfaction that, over the years, the debate regarding the process versus product and genre-teaching approach has continued and some teachers have now begun to combine the two approaches (Flowerdew, 2000; Badger & White, 2000; Weber, 2001).

However, as demands were constantly made on me by subject teachers and students to help with the M.Th. thesis drafts, I realised that even though I am a language teacher with no formal degree in theology, I was able to refine, reshape, and make more coherent what students had written both at the macro-level of organisation and at the micro-level with obvious lexico-grammatical errors. Subject teachers had no time to help in this area of re-drafting. This experience has given me the status of "informed-insider-outsider".

Further, I had observed that M.Th. students who were required to do a pre-sessional Remedial English (RE) course with me had always done well in the thesis, obtaining distinctions for the same, even if their performance in written exams was less impressive. This led me to question how such unskilled L2 learners could undergo this "academic osmosis" within a two-year period. Surely, a six-week RE course in which I had taught essay writing along with other skills could not account for their mastery of the thesis as a genre. I consulted the faculty again, more specifically than I had before, regarding students' performance in thesis writing.

Pursuing the question as to how the unskilled learner faced and overcame the challenges posed by writing a thesis in theology, I wrote a structured questionnaire with which I interviewed faculty who guide research in this institution. All of them, NNS Faculty, have been trained abroad in the U.S.A., Canada, U.K., Germany, and Australia. The questionnaire

contains twenty-six questions ([Appendix A](#)) on their expectations of students at this level of study and on aspects of writing. I also distributed a questionnaire ([Appendix B](#)) to students after they had written the thesis, from which I have gained specific insights into student apprehensions regarding writing the thesis in theology. This has proved very informative of both the faculty views and students' high motivation.

Yet, I have been told that this ESP research has implications for other subjects in the other universities of India, where academic writing is not taught specifically to post-graduate students. There have been public declarations from a local university of resolutions to help students with the "art and science of thesis writing" (Bangalore University Panel, 2003).

My investigation into the theses written by NNS students has for its theoretical basis Swales' description of introductions (1981) and genre analysis (1990) and Hoey's (1983) Problem-Solution pattern for analysing the underlying patterns of discourse. These models of discourse analysis have been applied to the Introductions first as Swales' "moves-analysis" has proved to be of invaluable help to M.Th. students and Hoey's method applied then to the entire thesis. The latter, which has proved useful for decoding texts and for précis-writing, has also great significance for the 'social action' (Miller, 1984) aspect of theses written in Post-Colonial India. Moreover, as the college is an old one with its own well-established traditions, I have also analysed to what extent student theses are governed by the Senate's regulations for thesis writing. As each thesis I have examined runs to about 30,000 words, the corpus surveyed was about 300,000 words.

Brief Literature Review

Three areas of recent research--genre analysis, teaching writing, and teaching genres to NNS students are areas that I am concerned with in my research. My thinking has been influenced by the following:

As mentioned above, Swales' (1981) has been the springboard of this research. Since theology is considered part of the humanities, I found this way of analysing discourse meaningful. Along with his subsequent work on genre analysis (1990), his underlying empathy with NNS students' struggles to write academically (Swales, 1985; Swales & Feak, 1994), and his theory-cum-pedagogical research supports my own interests to improve and make relevant my teaching and to help students in the completion of the task ahead of them.

Swales' descriptive approach has been followed by many others in the West, as shown by the following:

Table 1. Swales' Influence in ESP

Author	Year	Area
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Bhatia	1981	Legal English
Dudley-Evans	1986	M.Sc. dissertations in the sciences
Brett	1994	Results sections in sociology articles
Dos Santos	1996	Abstracts in applied linguistics
Samraj	2002	Wildlife behaviour and conservation biology
Bunton	2002	Generic moves in Ph.D. thesis introductions

This type of study had become so common that Candlin (1999) refers to the study of workplace writing as "something of a cottage industry." These studies also include discussions of the "process and product" approaches to teaching writing and "genre-theory."

Hoey's (1983) analysis of discourse patterns in text has proved equally enriching. Students have responded with enthusiasm to these patterns and have tried to write accordingly. Both these semantic inputs are little known in India among Indian ELT teachers, as few of us get the opportunity to study abroad and access to British/U.S. libraries is only in the metropolitan cities. Thus, such research by applied linguists in the West and especially, the U.K., undergirds my own research.

Casanave and Hubbard's (1992) useful survey of the writing tasks of doctoral students includes a questionnaire to the faculty on a large scale, and concludes with the observation that more 'in-house' research needs to be done.

Allison, Cooley, Lewkowicz, and Nunan (1998) and Dong (1998) have all identified the writing needs of NNS students at advanced levels and endorsed the view that this is an area that needs to be researched. Others who have worked in these areas of helping post-graduate students write their theses are Paltridge (1997, 2001), who explicitly guides writing thesis proposals and also analyses the published materials that exist in such areas. Hyland (2001 & 2002) talks of identity and voice in writing, Cadman (1997) discusses the loss of identity, along with Myers (2001), who describes the place of personal views in undergraduate writing. Thomson (2001) discusses the important skill of interaction while arguing in academic writing. These writers discuss valuable and "yet-unrecognised-by-subject-teacher-issues" inherent in thesis-writing. My own questionnaire (1999-2002) thus highlights them.

Closely related is the larger question of how best to teach L2 academic writing; this has had a long history in the West. However, now very practical ideas regarding academic literacy, not recognised earlier, have been introduced and show a concern for the underprivileged or NNS students working in an additional language and in an alien environment.

Most relevant to my research, however, is Horowitz's (1986) call for more realistic ways of teaching EAP than advocated by the process-approach supporters, and Zamel's (1995) article which discusses the frustrations involved in teaching/learning English. The notion that to lack English proficiency is to be deficient in intelligence is here dispelled. Zamel's empathy with NNS students' struggles is similar to that of Swales' and is echoed in Spack's (1988)

essay. Here, she cites Bizzell (1982), who introduces factors that are non-academic when assessing students, for example, socio-cultural factors that disturb academic performance even among native-speaker students. This notion finds support in some of Elbow's essays (1991, 1995), which challenge conventional notions of academic writing and also a parallel in the current Indian scenario where academic concessions are made for students from the backward or underprivileged sections of society to whom English is EFL.

Spack (1988) raises the further question as to who is best suited to teach academic writing, and asserts that English teachers should only teach general academic writing and not venture into ESP areas. This is a view that is debatable, though I see the difficulties in English teachers teaching in all subject areas. In addition, voices from the classrooms found in Kroll (1990) and Johns (2002) present multiple perspectives on L2 writing and genre teaching.

My Response

My first response was to talk to the faculty and ascertain what they felt about their students' written work and learning processes while writing the thesis.. Another questionnaire on the processes of composition (pre-writing, writing and post-writing) was given to students while writing up their research. The return rate from students has not been good, especially from students who did not study remedial English (RE) with me. On submitting their theses, they resent having to think about it analytically, as fatigue has set in. An RE student said, in his speech made at a valedictory function, that while writing the thesis: "We felt like Daniel in the Lion's Den."

I also participated in the three workshops organised for post-graduate students led by subject teachers and observed how they are enculturated into the genre, into academic study and discussion, and defending their thesis titles. I do not attend departmental workshops as the subject-methodologies are specialised and students are confident in these areas.

I have studied the manual compiled by the faculty after years of conducting workshops for them to correlate their requirements with the Senate's mandates. The manual resembles an ESP document and is edited by a missionary-professor citing many Indian books on social and theological topics (Mabry, 1999, 2003).

Results

As a result of my close and critical observation of this entire process of how M.Th. students are indoctrinated into thesis writing, I have created a PowerPoint Presentation (PPT), appended here ([Appendix C](#)), for the unskilled L2 learners, based on Swales' 4-moves analysis of the introductory sections of theses, and his later 3-moves model. I related it to the Senate's requirements, which the students already follow. I have also linked it to Hoey's (1983) pattern of text analysis.

The Power Point Presentation

In an effort to make the six-week remedial English class more supportive for the students, I created a PPT in 2002 to introduce them to the principles underlying the creation of academic discourse of which they, just as many expert writers, are often unaware. It is an attempt to study whether analysing the structures of student-authored-discourse and then offering a template based both on theory and on one's analysis is *a stranglehold on creativity* or *an aid to writing*. It is recognised that often the subject with which the author grapples in itself shapes or determines content and form and yet the need to conscientise the weaker student of this aspect seemed imperative.

The PPT contains forty-eight slides explaining Swales' moves analysis and Hoey's text-components, and the Senate's official requirements as endorsed by UTC. The last document is by the gatekeepers and teachers, who as Swales puts it, "act as counsel in the process and judge of the finished product" (1990, p.188). It is accompanied by my commentary, in which the seriousness of the task before them is emphasised. The slides have been made easy to recall with some clip-art, which helps to lessen the tension for the weaker students who might otherwise be awed by the task ahead.

The PPT takes about one to one and a half- hours to explain as the students take down notes. There is a little deliberate repetition as students are slow but handouts have been avoided to ensure that comprehension takes place at once. This is a synthesis of the *descriptive* findings from applied linguistics and the *prescriptive* nature of 'rules' given by the administration and explicit advice from the college's own handbook for researchers. The PPT is the first conscious step on my part to ascertain the validity of genre-teaching, by the ESP teacher, which is my main argument here.

Number of Presentations

The PPT presentation has been given nine times to three groups of students over a period of three years. Initially made to the Remedial English Group as an important genre-teaching input, it was later made to the second year M.Th. students who were beginning to write the thesis. This was done to ascertain its effectiveness and to observe their response after two years of rigorous study at UTC. In addition, it has been shown three times to some non-UTC candidates studying a similar course in theology, and who must also write a thesis. The numbers attending in each group have been between eight to sixteen and so, on an average of twelve, there have been about 108 students who have seen this presentation. Three more presentations were made to the current M.Th. second year group, the YMCA class, and the next M.Th. RE group in the period 2005-6, bringing the total to eleven presentations and about 130 students.

As the students are mature, have high motivation, and some are teachers themselves, their feedback and comments are valuable evidence of the effectiveness of this presentation and the exercises which follow it.

The Accompanying Commentary

The introduction to the PPT begins by ascertaining the students' attitude to writing the thesis. A question based on the issue raised by Olsen and Drew (1998) is asked at the outset, as it is pertinent: *"Do you see the thesis as the last big assignment that you must do for your teachers, or do you see it as your first scholarly writing in which you address your peers?"* Student responses are varied ranging from timidity and reluctance to appropriate scholarly roles for themselves, to seeing the thesis in a novel light and affirming that they are scholars in the field. Rarely, there is the one who is indifferent to the task.

Swales' Moves analysis of introductions (1981) and semantic steps are then explained with the rationale for this made clear. I offer both versions of Swales models (1990) to observe their reactions and notice that some prefer the latter. This is followed by The Senate's requirements, which is new information for students doing pre-session Remedial English but known to older students, the M.Th. second year. The latter group finds it easier to make the connection. However, Hoey's (1983) method, familiar to students of RE as a decoding device to enable swifter reading speeds, but not to the older group (whom I did not teach RE), is now explained and applied to the entire text of the thesis.

All this is accompanied by illustrations, both of serious errors that have been avoided by former students, after guidance from subject teachers and ESP teacher, and of excellent writing by former students of the college. As the faculty questionnaire also corroborates, some of the major problems with academic student discourse are: copious citations with no intervening interaction with them, descriptive writing with no critical comments, a good table of contents page which is not actually followed, that is, failure to keep to an organizational plan. This too amounts to teaching by demonstration based on 'inner knowledge'.

With the non-UTC classes samples of their writing, long essays, were read earlier to understand their particular needs as their training is different: the YMCA course caters to different goals and the other two theological organisations are more mission-oriented than UTC in their ideology which affects their style of writing.

Table 2. Work Assigned on PPT

<p><i>Exercises based on the PPT have only been given to UTC's R.E. class as it is they who need such help and guidance and are the focus of my research. Two exercises requiring two critical essays based on analytic reading were given to them in the final weeks of the RE course.</i></p> <p>Ex. I</p> <p>a) Read the introductions of four theses in your subject area from the college archives.</p> <p>b) Apply Swales' moves to the introductions or Ch. I along with the Senate's requirements and identify and mark clearly the moves as they appear in the theses. You may mark either four moves (Swales) or six moves incorporating UTC's/Senate's requirements.</p> <p>c) You must make mention of moves that are missing in the introduction or Ch. I.</p> <p>d) Write a 1000-word essay of a few paragraphs regarding the moves analysis that you have just done and add a final paragraph of critical evaluation of the four introductions.</p>	<p>--> Ex:II.</p> <p>a) Re-read the same four theses entirely, from introduction to the conclusion applying Hoey's text-patterning to each thesis.</p> <p>b) Write one 1000-word essay to describe the patterning that you have observed in the four theses, pointing out the sequence of the moves or the absence or the merger of some moves.</p> <p>c) Write one final critical paragraph of evaluation of the four theses that you have read critically.</p> <p><i>N.B. Hoey's method had already been introduced to the students as an aid to decode difficult texts with practical library work in the second and third weeks of RE.</i></p>
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Students' Response to the PPT

These exercises were done enthusiastically each time, except for one rare case when the student did not understand the rubrics. Based on the student responses, both verbal and in a "mini-questionnaire" that I had given out, it was seen as:

- A pleasant way to be inducted into academic writing by reading, polished and approved work;
- A privilege to read students' work in the archives with ample time provided for it within class hours and with no other requirements;
- An aid for reading closely and with high returns. It helps to view the Introduction as a blue-print for the thesis and Hoey's situation-problem model as another aid to organising the entire thesis;
- An aid to view writing as something to be read by another and the need for clarity in communication;
- As making the relationship between parts of the thesis apparent and of showing how logic and clarity are achieved by semantic devices;
- An effort by the ESP teacher to help them overcome their limitations in writing in English; and
- As a fitting level at which to conclude the RE course as it helps them to overcome their feelings of inadequacy as RE students and to understand faculty expectations even before they have actually met the faculty.

My Response to Their Responses

Subsequently, I ask for a photocopy of their work as a validation of their capacity to write academically. The effect of this on their morale is positive, and is mentioned as having pedagogical merit. I have about forty such documents.

I have created a subject-specific model for future students, based on a modification of Hoey's pattern, incorporating my own findings in theological prose (See [Appendix C](#)). Some faculty had shown interest in this model as they saw the need for 'neatening' or improving the introductions just as the need for 'tightening' the entire thesis. If, however, faculty members object to this as stifling creativity in the better student, I shall still offer it as a template for the RE students alone, as I do now, as they clearly need to be taught semantic skills in the organisation of written work. Thus, my own teaching has improved ever since I took up this research to trace the metamorphoses of weak students into scholars.

Reflection

Since my research is interdisciplinary, it usually meets with indifference from both English teachers and subject area teachers. Yet, I see it as important as language specialists and literature professors and theologians did work together in the past, where Biblical scholarship was concerned, though their purposes were different. Hoey (1983, p.193), speaking of the work of Bible translators such as Beekman, Longacre, and Callow declares, "All is for them subordinate to the needs of translation."

I see a striking link between applied linguists' interest in genres of non-literary writing today and Biblical scholars concern regarding both 'literary' and 'non-literary genres' ever since Gunkel, an Old Testament scholar, raised the issue of Form-Criticism in 1901. Even today, when New Testament scholars consider the genre slot into which the Gospels may be cast,

they debate whether they are biographies or narratives or have liturgical elements, and so forth. Genre theory is as much their concern as it is applied linguists' such as Swales (1990, pp. 33-45) and Paltridge (1997, pp. 5-23).

Discussing the 'slipperiness' of genres (Johns, 2002, p. 11), English teachers are asking whether genres should be taught at all. But since students of theology are familiar with genre theory as it applies to Biblical scholarship, it seems appropriate to make them aware of research genres, too. For teachers in this ESP field, as well as for those in other fields in non-Anglophone areas, the primary need, I believe, is training in applied linguistics and ESP to teach language successfully. The reluctance among teachers to read theological or specific subjects to teach English calls for great persuasion.

This answers the troubling question of who best should teach ESP, and there are two views here. Spack (1998) argues that only teachers with the specific subject backgrounds--be it science or engineering--can handle ESP teaching and that others with a humanities background will be at a disadvantage and vice versa. However, I am convinced that ESP teaching necessitates working with authentic materials, and requires teachers who are willing to meet the students halfway on their path to academic literacy, teachers who are willing to go the extra mile.

Notes

[1] B.D. = Bachelor of Divinity and M.Th. = Master of theology. Theology spelt with a small 't' is generic whereas a capital "T" would refer to the specific department of Systematic Theology.

[2] There has been debate in the TESOL Quarterly regarding teaching English via mission, which was derogatory to the Christian Educators in TESOL caucus. I wish to make it clear that in a theological college in India these arguments do not apply at all. Nor have the Christian schools in India come under such criticism.

About the Author

Iris Devadason teaches ESP theology at the United Theological College, Bangalore, South India. She taught literature at several universities in India. She has an M.A. from Delhi University, an M.Sc. in TESP from Aston University, Birmingham, UK, and is now doing research for a Ph.D. from Mysore University, South India. She is the author of *Why Calcutta?* a collection of short stories published by Writers' Workshop, Calcutta, 1994.

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Appendix A

QUESTIONNAIRE to the UTC Faculty*

Your Name:

Department.....

Your students.....

M.Th. I yr 1) 2).....3).....

M.Th. II yr 1) 2)..... 3).....

Q.1. What kind of assignments do you give to the students at this level?

I year	II year
<i>Please indicate when they do these assignments: Term 1, or 2 or 3.</i>	Term I or 2 or 3
Read & Report in class: Length of reading? How do they present it? Number of words? Time allowed? Asking questions of a text? Short Essays? Long essays? Literary Criticism? Word Study? Case Study? Verbatims? Surveys/Histories? Explaining concepts? Narratives? Analytic & descriptive pieces? Book-reviews? Thesis Titles (Drafts)? Integrated papers? Any other?	

** Editor's note: The space for responding to questions was eliminated in order to economize space. The original had additional space for responses. --MES*

Q.2. When does English language pose the greatest problem in your opinion?

- a) Participation in class presentations?
- b) Participation in seminars?
- c) Written assignments?
- d) Interaction with you?

Q.3. What is the worst aspect of English at such points?

- a) Grammar? (details in the next question)
- b) Vocabulary?
- c) Lack of academic phrases/cohesive devices in writing?
- d) Paragraphing?
- e) Logical argumentation?
- f) Spelling and punctuation?

Q.4. What common grammatical errors prevent the communication of meaning?

- a) The use and abuse of the article?
- b) The agreement of the verb with the subject?
- c) Prepositions?
- d) Present Continuous used for the simple present tense or vice versa?
- e) Absence of the perfect tenses? Using the simple past instead.
- f) Active and passive voice?
- g) Absence of relative pronouns such as *Who, Which, That etc?*
- h) Overuse of relative pronouns (people₊ those₊ who), or which we must remember it...?
- i) Sentence structures: sentences fused into one

or subject omitted in the 2nd part of a compound sentence

or too many simple sentences with no attempt at synthesis.

e.g. x wasx didx went to.....

x saw.....x saidetc

- j) Little variety in Conjunctions apart from “and”, “ but”.

Q.5. The process of Composition

Do you insist on detailed outlines?

For each chapter?

Do you ask for an overall outline?

Do you ask for redrafting more than twice?

Do you help in drafting? Redrafting?

Do you help with the thesis proposal in the same way?

The Opening Chapter

Q.6. Do you encourage writing an “opening conclusion”?

i.e. Should Chapter I say it all?

Or

Should the reader wait till Chapter 5 or the very end to know what the researcher is saying like “the clash of cymbals in an orchestra”?

Q.7. Do you recommend that opening Chapters have QUOTATIONS, ANECDOTES, or QUESTIONS?

Do your students follow this advice?

Do you advice writing Chapter I last as many of us have “starting problems”?

Q.8. What do you require in the Introduction or Chapter I ?

.....

Other matters

Q.9. Must students wait for your correction/guidance before proceeding or can they work ahead?

Q.10. Do they work in sequence always?

Q.11. What is your main concern while reading drafts of chapters?

Content.....

Language.....

Style.....

(I was told that the Senate allots 5 or 15 marks for style?)

Q.12. What is their response if you ask for rewriting?

Gratitude.....?

Anger.....?

Confusion.....?

Q.13. Do you help them in rewriting/editing or would you rather send them out to find help?

Q.14. Do you recommend

Dr. Mabry's book for guidance?

Or

Dr. Kate Turabian's book?

Or any other?

Q.15. What problems do they usually have with paragraphing?

..... too many long paragraphs?

..... too many short paragraphs?

..... No Topic sentences?

.....No cohesion within the paragraph?

..... any other problems?

CITATION

Q.16. Do they cite others because:

They need to support their views?

They need to fill in pages?

Others say it better?

Q.17. Do they always acknowledge quotations?

Q.18. Do they ever question a Quotation?

Q.19. Do they merely quote with no critical comments?

Q.20. Are all quotations relevant?

Q.21. Do their quotations further their argument?

Q.22. Where do you find the maximum number of citations?

Introductory parts?

Middle sections.....?

Concluding parts.....?

Q.23. When do students give up the tendency to depend heavily on citations?

I year: Term ITerm IITerm III.....

II year: Term I..... Term II..... Term III.....

(i.e. Does the tendency to cite too much and too often decrease as they learn more and gain confidence in their own opinions)

Q.24. Indicate the rhetoric devices that they might use in your subject:

- a) Definition
- b) Comparison and contrast
- c) Classification
- d) Hypothesis
- e) Prediction
- f) Analogy
- g) Refutation
- h) Any other

INTERACTION in ACADEMIC PROSE

Q.25. Do you encourage the use of a personal or impersonal tone in writing? Do you approve of the use of “I”?

If you do, state why.....

If you do not, state why.....

Do you recommend total neutrality by saying “the researcher”?

Do you encourage the passive voice? E.g., It is believed.....

Do you encourage “hedging”? (shifting responsibility or commitment) by using words such as ‘ might’/ ‘maybe’ or other modal auxiliaries such as ‘would’, ‘could’ etc?

Q.26. Do you think factual writing can be emotive?

Is there place for emotion in academic prose?

And

Do you think there is place for Imaginative writing in theological prose?.....

What kind of imagination does this writing call for ?.....

Or

Is there place for creativity in academic prose?

.....

Thank you so much for your time and patience.

Appendix B

To

All M.Th. II year students

United Theological College

Bangalore.

From Mrs. Iris Devadason

Your Opinion... Please!

Dear Students,

As you are all busy now in the "act of creation" -- I mean your thesis writing, I am very interested to know how you are all going about it----from a totally different angle, different from your subject teachers' and guides' point of view.

Being an English teacher I am interested in the process of composition not so much in the end-product though even that is important and I will read it next year when it is in the archives.

I'm interested in your attitudes to:

a) writing\creating

b) writing\creating in English which is not our Mother Tongue

My interest in this is primarily because I am myself embarking on a research programme in the near future before I retire, and my area of research is Discourse Analysis of STUDENT TEXTS, what you write at this advanced level of composition. I have been helping M. Th.

Students since 1980 here at UTC and I continue to be interested in your academic development.

Would you therefore be kind enough to fill in this Questionnaire for me from Day I-when you put pen to paper or fingers to keyboard though some of you, I know, have started already. I request you to fill in, till the very last day---not when you give it for typing-but when typed and bound and handed in the Registrar's Office you breathe with relief!

Maybe one entry the day after that too would be interesting, when you feel the pride of authorship and a sense of accomplishment!

I look forward to receiving your Questionnaires in FEBRUARY or MARCH.

Thanking you for your co-operation,

Yours Sincerely,

Iris Devadason

Name: _____

Sl. No.



Section (I) Starting to Write

Q.1 Did you look at other theses in the Archives before you started your own work?

Yes / No

Q.2 What aspects of these finished theses did you scrutinize in particular:

Opening Chapters _____?

Organization of Chapters _____?

Methodology used _____?

Tables and illustration _____?

Development of topic _____?

Concluding chapters _____?

Bibliography _____?

Appendix _____?

Q.3 What was your point of entry or what inspired and impressed you in the work of others to write your own thesis?

Q.4 *Did you feel obliged to change your original plan or modify it because of others' work?*

Yes / No

Q.5 *Did you find any thesis beginning with
a question ? ____
a quotation? ____*

Q.6 *Did you find it difficult:
To get started on your own thesis? ____
or Were you 'dying to write'? ____*

Q.7 *Have you heard of the term " writers' block", the inability to put pen to paper? If you said it was difficult to get started how did you overcome it:
struggled to meet deadlines? ____
sat down to rethink your subject? ____
drew a plan, an outline to follow? ____
discussed it with a friend? ____*

Q.8 *Do you believe in the virtues of an "opening conclusion" ?
i.e. will you state here in chapter I what you claim to offer as NEW in your research or do you intend to declare your findings in the last chapter "like the clash of cymbals in an orchestra"?*

Section (II) Pre-Writing

Q.9 *Does your plan or outline of writing restrict your freedom while writing?*
Yes / No

Q.10 *Do you tend to forget your outline sometimes?*
Yes / No

Q.11 *Do you deliberately ignore it as meaning gives a natural shape to your writing whereas an outline tends to dominate you and prevents new options while writing?*
Yes / No

Q.12 *Did you draw your outline like a flow chart?*
Yes / No

Q.13 *Do you think of the outline as merely a means to an end, as something flexible?*
Yes / No

Q.14 *Did you find yourself changing your outline as you worked?*
Yes / No

Q.15 *Did you create outlines for each chapter?*
Yes / No

Q.16 *Did you put all the chapter outlines together and review them before you wrote your last chapter?*
Yes / No

Q.17 *Does Pre-Writing (outline-making) help you to discover:*
Ideas Yes / No
Detect underlying patterns and the connections between them? Yes / No

Q.18 *Did reviewing your outlines help you to :*
Add links between ideas? ____
Omit diffuse portions? ____

Discover weak points in your work? ____

Rearrange profitably? ____

Section (III) Chapter 1

Q.19 Does your CHAPTER I contain any or all of the following:

Introduction? ____

Statement of the problem? ____

Background ? ____

Methodology to be used? ____

DPR (Description of Previous Research) ? ____

i.e. to point out all that has been done by others yet what is lacking in their work and what you hope to do which will fill in the gaps of past research.

Q.20 At this stage of writing have you thought out what you will be writing in:

CH.2 ____

CH.3 ____

CH.4 ____

CH.5 ____

CH. CONCLUDING ____

Q.21 Do you find yourself working ahead of your plan in areas that interest you?

Yes / No

Q.22 Did you start CH.2 after handing in CH.1 or did you wait for comments?

Started / Waited

Q.23 How did your guide respond to CH.1?

Approved entirely? ____

Asked for rewriting? ____

Commented on Content? ____

Commented on Language? ____

Commented on Style? ____

Q.24 *How did you respond to your guide's response?*

with gratitude? ____

was confused? ____

was upset ? ____

felt it was unfair in some ways? ____

any other response _____

Q.25 *What did rewriting parts of Chapter I involve?*

Re-reading the subject?

Re-organising the matter?

Loss of time?

*Any other aspect. (Please specify)*_____

Section (IV): Continuing to Write

Q.26 *Are you still:*

Reading books? ____

Attending lectures? ____

Meeting your guide? ____

Seeking outside help? ____

Q.27 *How many hours do you actually write each day ?*

Q.28 *What do you consider satisfactory work?*

Writing 1-2 pages a day? ____

Writing 2-4 pages a day? ____

Writing 4-6 pages a day? ____

Writing a full chapter? ____

Q.29 *Did you have problems with any of the following:*

Thesis title?

Content pages?

Headings and sub-headings?

Footnotes?

End-notes?

Bibliography?

References?

Abstract?

Any other aspect of academic writing?

How did you overcome this ?

Q.30 *Do you have "chronic" problems with any of the following:*

The use of the article (a, an, the)

Spelling

Vocabulary

Verbs

Tenses

Section (V) *The shape of Discourse*

Q.31 How did you indent your prose? If for logical connection, was it

To shift to a new idea? ____

To shift to a different perspective? ____

To provide additional support to an idea? ____

To restate a point? ____

To emphasize a point? ____

If for formal considerations, taking the reader into account, was it:

To avoid a very long paragraph? ____

To avoid a very short paragraph? ____

Q.32 Do you re-paragraph when you rewrite or when you actually compose?

Q.33 Do you think FORM dictates your writing (what you were taught in the English classes) or do your IDEAS and PURPOSES dictate form ?

i.e. that a writer is like a sculptor who DISCOVERS form and not a builder who ADDS brick upon brick in a preconceived way?

Q.34 Do you find your paragraphs overlapping sometimes?

Yes / No

Is this due to:

Narrative being incorporated in Description? ____

Definition being supported by Examples? ____

Comparison involving Classification? ____

Other similar features? ____

Q.35 Do you:

Worry about this & stop and edit? ____

Ignore it as this is a natural process of thinking & writing? ____

Q.36 Do you think that there is a relationship between paragraphs of Co-Ordination and Sub-Ordination just as there is Main Clause and Sub-Clause relationship within a sentence?

Yes / No

Section (VI) Re-Writing

Q.37 The English novelist and critic E.M.Forster said, "How do I know what I think until I see what I say?"

Can you identify with his words or do you find them frivolous?

Q.38 Do you associate rewriting with:

Punishment? ____

An unpleasant & messy job? ____

Crucial to the process of creation? ____

Merely rewording? ____

Narrowing the topic or delimiting ideas? ____

Q.39 Do you think rewriting:

Is not going to improve your work? ____

Is the same as editing or proof-reading? ____

Involves reviewing ideas you have had throughout the composing process? ____

Involves the reader's expectation? ____

Involves realigning meaning with linguistic forms? ____

Q.40 When asked to rewrite a chapter or a part of your chapter do you feel these sentiments:

I have no time to rewrite ____

My first draft is the best I can do. I can't improve it ____

I don't know where to begin and I wouldn't know where to stop. Frankly, I'm lazy ____

When I retouch my sentences they get worse ____

Rewriting is my guide's responsibility ____

I'm so weak in English I feel like giving up ____

Rewriting is so painful. I can't stand the agony ____

If my first draft is bad I must be a very poor student ____

Words seem to manipulate me instead of my manipulating words ____

Q.41 Have you developed a special strategy for rewriting? If so, describe it briefly.

Q.42 Rewriting is reading in a series of purposeful cycles each with a different emphasis as follows:

To check the relationships established between writer, reader and subject ____

To check the overall organisation of the discourse, rediscovering the message & strengthening the relationships between inner parts & outer shape ____

To examine paragraph structure ____

To examine sentence construction and diction ____

To examine surface features such as punctuation and spelling ____

Do you consider these 5 cycles of rereading as:

Good ____ Tedious ____ Worth trying ____

Any other comment _____

Q.43 *Have you ever share your first draft with your friends?*

Yes / No

If yes, what insights did you gain?

If no, what prevented you from doing so?

Section (VII) Sentence & Paragraph Problems

Q.44 *Do you know how to establish subordinate or coordinate relationships between sentences and paragraphs thus reducing the emphasis on one aspect while subordinating it to another ?*

Yes / No

Q.45 *Do you know how to tighten your writing by using synthesis i.e.by using compound-complex sentences rather than a series of simple sentences of the affirmative \ declarative kind?*

Yes / No

Q.46 Do you always begin your sentences with **NOUNS** (Subjects) or do you also begin with:

Adverbial phrases ____

Conjunctions ____

Citing opinions of others (according to etc). ____

Guiding comments of your own ____

Infinitive structures (To write a thesis etc) ____

Participial structures (Writing a thesis etc) ____

Q.47 Are you guilty of composing “throwaway sentences” like: “X was born on 6th June 1897, in Germany.” which would provoke the reader to say “So what?”

Yes / No

Q.48 Do you look at your sentences in isolation? i.e. perhaps write it on a separate sheet of paper and **LOOK** at it?

Yes / No

Q.49 Do you ever **LISTEN** to your prose?

Yes / No

Q.50 Does looking & listening to your work help to find new implications in the subject?

Yes / No

Q.51 Do you allow your work to "cool" before you hand it over to your guide?

Yes / No

Q.52 What do you think is the advantage of letting it cool before you hand it in?

Miscellaneous

Q.53 Are you using a computer for writing? Yes / No

Q.54 Are you trained in this or are you learning by practice? Yes / No

Q.55 Are you aware of the disadvantages of using the computer? Yes / No

Q.56 Are you scared of using the Computer? (Be honest, we all are at first) Yes / No

Section (VIII) The End of the Road

Q.57 Looking back at your work, did you find yourself using language to impress the reader?

Yes / No

Q.58 Have you been careful in acknowledging all sources and quotations?

Yes / No

Q.59 Do you resent having to write in English feeling you would have done better in your mother-tongue?

Yes / No

Q.60 Do you think writing is a magical talent only teachers and guides and some select students have?

Yes / No

Q.61 Or do you think that you too can excel in writing by doing a little pre-writing, working sincerely and doing a lot of rewriting?

Yes / No

Q.62 Did you experience a "EUREKA MOMENT", a moment of illumination at any time of writing? (theologically speaking, an epiphanic moment)

Yes / No

Q.63 Comment on the following views of famous writers:

C.Day Lewis: We do not write in order to be understood, we write in order to understand.

True? ___ Don't agree? ___

W. Churchill: Writing (a book) was an adventure. To begin with, it was a toy, an amusement; then it became a mistress, and then a master, and then a tyrant!

Can you identify with this writer's view on writing? Yes / No

Q.64 To check your spelling have you ever read your script backwards?

Yes / No (Try it. It helps)

THE LAST QUESTION! Answer this after submitting the thesis.

*Did you experience the sense of being put together by the process of putting together?
"We have composed, and in a sense we are composed."*

Thank you for your co-operation. I do appreciate your help.

Appendix C (PowerPoint/Web Only)

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