

CHAPTER 15.

FROM WORKING WITH STUDENTS TO WORKING THROUGH FACULTY: A GENRE-CENTERED FOCUS TO WRITING DEVELOPMENT

By **Lotte Rienecker and Peter Stray Jørgensen**
University of Copenhagen (Denmark)

In this article we point to the core of the Academic Writing Centre's teaching of academic writing: a genre definition of research papers, and the research paper as a main genre. We model our teaching academic writing practice on a "pentagon model" of basic elements in the research paper as a highly formatted genre across disciplines on a structural level. The work with text formats and heuristics ("box- and fill-in-forms" pedagogy) lays the foundation of our favourite teaching activities at all educational levels from BA to PhD students. Students need to recognise standard structures and conventions before they will be able to break or supersede academic writing conventions successfully. Lastly, we focus on the current next step in our local version of teaching academic writing across the curriculum: mandatory accreditation courses for all thesis supervisors at our institution and our work with assessment-aligned, formative supervisor feedback on PhD students' drafts.

This article is about the Academic Writing Centre in the Humanities Department of a big Scandinavian university. We would like to start by sharing our best advice for the writing programme director or consultant. Our best advice: align your activities with your institution's most important assessed writing: genres, formats, criteria of quality, inquiry, reading and writing processes. Work genre-based: Break down the genres you teach into their basic elements: text types, structures, argumentation, documentation, language features, etc. Demonstrate tried-and-true templates that students may depart from as they

develop their rhetorical practices. Your job is to relieve students (and faculty) from designing “deep plates” all over again. Write and publish textbooks, articles, research papers, reports, pamphlets, leaflets, websites. Write at least one textbook on (an aspect of) academic writing! Be a writer yourself, not merely a teacher of academic writing. Take the time for it. The last piece of advice is based on our experience of the impact our publications on academic writing and supervision had on our work. Especially our authorship of two textbooks: Rienecker & Stray Jørgensen et al. (2005): *Den gode opgave* [*The Good Paper, a research paper manual for students*], and Rienecker, Harboe & Stray Jørgensen (2005): *Vejledning. . .* [*Supervision of MA Theses, a handbook for supervisors*], and the many books and on-line materials that were authored by the Academic Writing Centre staff 1992—2010, became the foundation of our teaching-academic-writing activities today, as we will explore further in this article. These two publications reflected and set the platform for our work with students, especially thesis writers, and heralded the work we now do with and through the thesis writers’ supervisors.

THE FOCUS, THE PROBLEM, THE QUESTION: MASTER’S THESIS WRITING AND COMPLETION

The foremost question that caused our university management to open our writing programme in 1992 was “How do we bring our master’s thesis writers to timely completion, without selling out on the quality of their inquiries and their writing?” This is still probably the hottest issue in student writing in the eyes of university management and staff, even as one major change was implemented by the Research Ministry: a six-month deadline on thesis completion from the day a thesis contract is signed.¹ The six-month deadline was and is a revolution to a system that never worked under any time constraints until 2007. The role of faculty who supervise thesis writing is very pivotal. In the final six months of the masters degree program, many students and faculty members see the real development of the young disciplinary writer truly unfolding. The transition to writing under deadline pressure is not easy, and it brings to the fore any discrepancies there may be between supervisor expectations and student writing and project management competencies. By 2007, when the deadline was imposed, the writing centre staff was busy with MA Thesis Writers Workshops and tutorials. How our centre focuses this advising of students is the main subject of this essay.

We will later turn our attention to advising of thesis supervisors: how an accredited, mandatory 30-hour course for all thesis supervisors builds on the con-

tent of what we offer students; namely, research processes and the genre-bound documentation of the inquiry students do for the MA thesis. We will conclude this article with an account of the Academic Writing Centre's latest genre-based project: designing a feedback tool—a rubric—for supervisory feedback on PhD students' dissertation drafts.

Facts about Academic Writing and the Academic Writing Centre, University of Copenhagen

- The University of Copenhagen has 35,000 students, including 15,000 students in the Humanities Department, and approx. 500 faculty.
- University educations in Denmark build heavily on the writing of long term papers, generally one or two long papers per semester. The Humanities are a monoculture with very few Danish as Second Language-students. Most writing is in Danish, though a substantial number of MA and PhD theses are now written in English.
- There are no general, credit-giving writing courses in Denmark, and all activities are on a voluntary basis as extracurricular support services. In all of Danish higher education, there are fewer than 10 small units to support student writing (staffing by one to three academics, often on a part-time basis, no student tutors) offering courses, workshops, online writing labs (OWLs), one-on-one-tutorials on academic writing, study skills, and oral presentations. Subject teachers are in charge of writing and writing development, and it is up to their initiative to discuss writing during classes, in tutorials or on the intranet facilities, and to give feedback on writing. Supervision of major writing tasks is provided by faculty (typically two hrs. on a BA thesis, and five to seven hours one-on-one supervision on an MA thesis).
- Student, faculty, and management interest in writing competency centers on the writing of the BA (25 pages) and especially MA thesis (80 pages) —that is: product- as well as process-centered, academic, scientific research paper writing. First and second year papers and essays attract some interest. Creative and professional writing are very minor issues.
- The authors of this article initiated and ran the first writing centre in Scandinavia from 1992, with staffing at its high point by four academics. Student-centered writing activities are now part of Student Services, whereas faculty-centered activities reside in the Academic Writing Centre.

THE RESEARCH PAPER GENRE AS A BASIS FOR TEACHING UNIVERSITY WRITING

The core concept of our teaching and supervising is the notion of the research paper as a genre, defined below:

The research paper should document the research of a *relevant problem*, using concepts, theories, and methods from scientific disciplines to argue a case and to convince a colleague of the validity of the results and the conclusions of the research in an exposition that is acceptable in the targeted discourse community. (Rienecker & Stray Jørgensen, 2005)

Students will be assessed on the degree to which they demonstrate

- learning and mastery of scientific inquiry and writing
- knowledge transforming (Bereiter & Scardamalia, 1987)

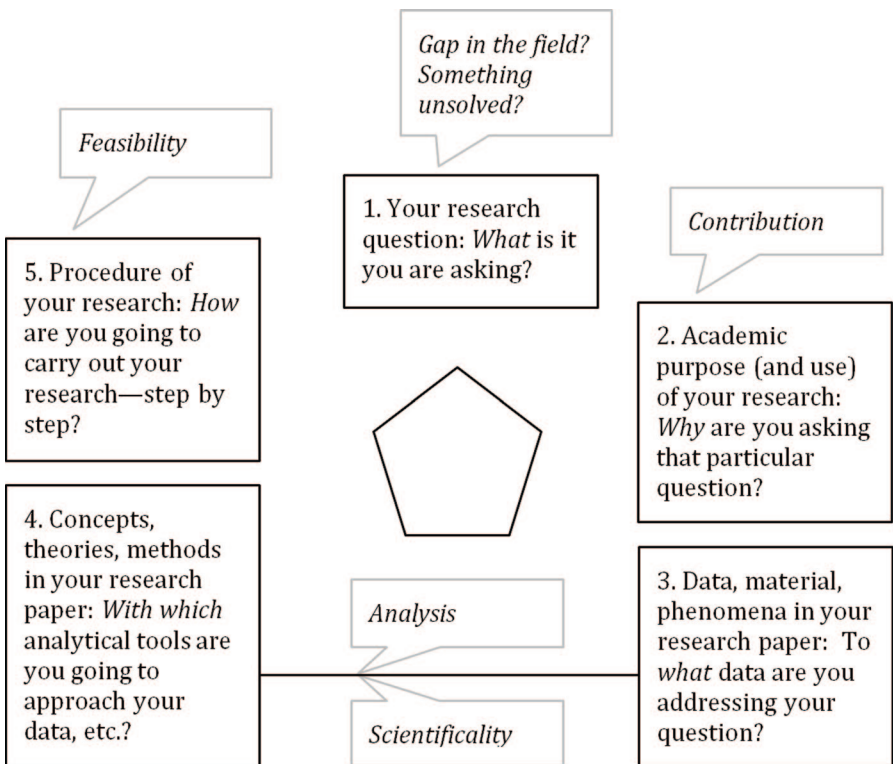


Figure 1. Pentagon model of the basic elements of the research paper.

- problem inquiry
- sound analysis
- explicit or at least clear methodology in data selection and analysis
- theory- or at least concept-based analysis and discussion
- documentation
- use and critical appraisal of sources
- coherent argumentation
- language suitable to the purpose

The master's thesis is meant to be a demonstration of the ability to research and write a small-scale model piece of conceptually and methodologically sound scientific work, even if that be not substantial enough to qualify as a "contribution to research." To simplify the core elements of the research paper genre, we use a pentagon (Rienecker & Stray Jørgensen, 2005) as a graphic model of the elements and choices every writer needs to consider before getting far into literature searches, reading, and drafting (Figure 1).

Figure 2 shows examples of kinds of information that might be in each corner. The first corner (the problem box) represents the problem to research, the gap in the field. The second corner (the purpose box) is the rhetorical corner where relevance to the field and the world at large, purpose, and targeted

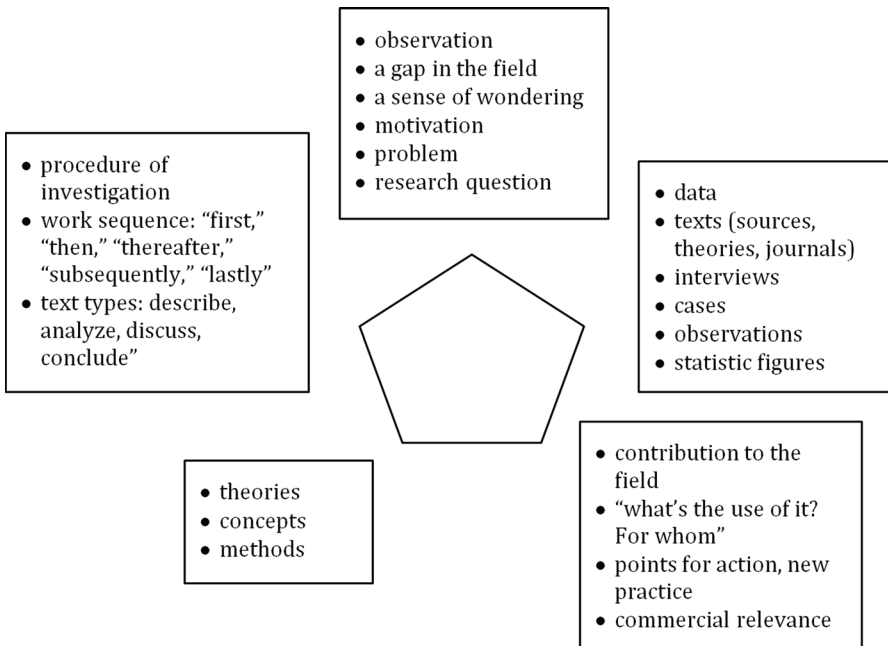


Figure 2. Pentagon model expanded.

audience should be stated. In the third corner (the databox) is an overview of the data, the objects to be examined. The fourth corner (the tool box) is the theories, concepts, and/or methods with which to collect, categorize, analyze, and interpret the data.

The science in the writing springs from the connection between the data corner and the discipline's tool corner. Tools from the writer's discipline (or adjacent, relevant disciplines) are used in the treatment of data (in the humanities: often primary sources, texts) and that connection secures that conceptualizations, points of analysis, results, your argument, and reasoning can be understood by others. The fifth corner (the methodology box) aims to set up a research design that is feasible, realistic, and logical. It often depicts the line of reasoning and argumentation—and the outline of the research.²

Writers and their teachers/supervisors may use the filling-in of the boxes at any stage of the design phase of writing a research paper or an extended piece of research, as a departure point for dialogue, or for more research. It is a planning and revising tool that has spurred a host of pedagogical activities, reflecting the need for early planning and supervision of student research. Experience has demonstrated amply for us that students who will experience serious problems with an MA thesis almost always have one or more “empty boxes” or vague formulations a long way into the designated six months' MA thesis time frame. Issues with genre and with higher order concerns (structure, argumentation, major elements such as methods, theories, data, etc.) are quite frequently the major writing issues of students, even at advanced levels; hence, that is where we have placed major effort. Even the language issues (lower order concerns) that we have seen presented at the writing centre often relate to the writer's being a novice to scientific writing, in the sense of having little available explicit knowledge about academic, scientific forms and formats for writing—even though they may very well have written many research papers prior to the MA thesis.

THE RESEARCH PAPER STRUCTURE

Another big concern over our years of tutoring thesis writers has been their difficulty structuring major written work (on both macro- and micro-levels). Therefore, principles and possibilities for structuring papers form a theme with supervisors who often find their students without ready models. Hence, we have designed a number of activities with students. Again we work with various fill-in-forms and preformatted standard structures that may later be tailored by the writers to their individual projects.

BOX- AND FILL-IN-FORMS PEDAGOGY

A favourite workshop activity for all study levels, from first year to PhD, has been and still is for the writer in the planning stage to fill in a sheet or file with a format for research paper design, and we have made a number of forms (for all major elements of a research paper within a standard structure).

Fill-in-forms are on our website, can be mailed to students before tutorials, and are available to supervisors and can be filled in on the spot and discussed and shared in writing workshops. A piece of software, Scribo—A Guide to Research Questions and Literature Search (Rienecker & Pipa, 2009), on the intranet in many Danish universities and other higher education institutions represents the digital version of a comprehensive design tool for research papers' basic elements. The idea is not merely to regularize or mainstream students' writing, but to get their thinking and planning started within tried-and-true, working conventional frameworks that the writer can then always develop, challenge, expand, surpass, or discard if writers have other options that work better for their topics and material. A filled-in form is a short list that facilitates supervision and can lead to library searches, to more detailed structuring, drafting, and revision.

ACADEMIC WRITERS' DEVELOPMENT ACCORDING TO RESEARCH

A host of recent, major, empirical works on writer development underpins a genre approach to teaching university writing. Blåsjø (2000), Thaiss and Zawacki (2006), and Steinhoff (2007) support the idea that discernible writer development occurs from a pre-conventional stage (in which the novice writer is unaware of existing norms and conventions) to a conventional stage (in which the writer may rely too heavily on formats and “boxes” for required genres) to a post-conventional stage, where the student has become an academic writer: the desired end result of all education, in which the writer is able to use his or her judgement aptly to produce reader-oriented, suitable text for every occasion, using and transforming formats adequately. The development towards a rhetorical awareness of a multitude of textual possibilities is in fact aided by an awareness of genre conventions made explicit; our “boxes” and formats are helpful tools in passing from not knowing appropriate conventions for any given target audience to addressing each writing task with a rhetorical awareness of the specifics of the communicative content, purpose, and audience. Many

students report benefiting from following preformatted schemata at least once: the template is just good to have in mind in contemplating subsequent tasks, but not needed as the final structure for the paper.

THESIS SUPERVISOR'S MANDATORY ACCREDITATION COURSES

Since 2009, the Academic Writing Centre has employed only faculty. We have fused with the Teaching and Learning Unit, and have the teaching of supervision, feedback to students, assessments, and teaching writing, as well as general teaching skills, as our work area. Part of our teaching portfolio is the MA Supervisors' Accreditation Course. Accreditation of supervisors is mandatory at our department and in the Department of Social Sciences at Aarhus University, Denmark, but is otherwise unique in Scandinavia. We have been commissioned by the dean's office to accredit all thesis supervisors at the department—i.e., the majority of faculty will go on a supervisor's course, totalling three hours plus preparation and essay writing on theses supervision. "Mandatory" means that successful completion of the course is a prerequisite in the department for supervising MA theses in the future. This means that we now teach, discuss, workshop, inform, and casework on themes related to academic inquiry, writing, project planning, etc. through the supervisors and comprehensively, getting in contact with each and every supervisor, as opposed to reaching a couple of hundred students each year out of the 15,000 in the department, and having only sporadic contact with staff. Through 2011, more than 80 out of some 500 supervisors will have been accredited. The supervisors' course focuses on the MA thesis genre and format requirement and criteria; on formative feedback on thesis designs and drafts; on supporting students through their research, reading, and writing work; on negotiating mutual expectations, and on problem writers and problem texts. The overall focus is on what individual supervisors and what departments can do to support timely and qualified submission. The course activities entail a number of case-based discussions with the theme "What can the supervisor do to assist the writing and the writer in this case?"

Many supervisors report that they adopt some of the activities with writers that served us so well, particularly using the heuristics of the pentagon model as the basis for the research paper/thesis. Supervisors request of thesis writers that they fill in and submit a pentagon for supervision early on, as a point of departure for the crucial discussion of research design and the alignment of research question with choice of data, concepts, and methods. Many supervisors also

bring their own heuristics to the course, their lists of criteria for the good thesis, their supervisory practices, and their supervisory concerns, and these get shared in the course. We report the supervisor input back to heads of studies and the vice dean of education, in the hope that supervisor experiences and concerns will eventually affect curriculum design. We aim to ensure that every student is prepared through prior work and writing experiences for thesis writing, before the student signs a contract with a six-month deadline.

IN DIALOGUE WITH THESIS SUPERVISORS

How do the thesis supervisors in the Humanities Department—among the most apt and able writers and teachers of theses and dissertations and a host of other genres—react to the genre definitions and the rather restricted “box pedagogy,” the formulaic and schematic suggestions concerning what the supervisor might ask for in text planning and production? We meet a range of supervisor angles and attitudes, from “but you don’t quite seem to address the individual writer who happens to be an original, a young genius in the making, and who needs to be unbound by conventions and formats to freely explore his ideas in writing—and to have that very freedom in content and form acknowledged and supported by his supervisor” to “Thank you for this tool, I am going to use it” —and even further to “Yes, I’ve read your stuff and used it, and I have developed a tool myself, and I should like to have the supervisors’ course participants’ reactions to it.” We welcome all input to the dialogue on writing from those who really own university writing: the writers and their supervisors/teachers. The mandatory accreditation of thesis supervisors has made possible the explicit foregrounding of the department’s 500 supervisors as the true collaborators with students concerning thesis writing. We aid this process rather than substituting for absent supervisors. Accreditation courses for MA thesis supervisors are but one example of our work with academic writing with and through faculty.

THE PHD DISSERTATION AS A GENRE—AND A RUBRIC FOR FORMATIVE FEEDBACK TO PHD-STUDENTS

PhD supervision is a targeted area, not just for Danish, but for all European university education, and many institutions are implementing mandatory courses for PhD supervisors. It is our aim that the PhD dissertation as the most visible product of the PhD education should be thoroughly addressed in all supervisor preparation at our department. We want writers to explore textual

options before submission rather than get negative summative feedback in the all-important assessments. We would welcome a systematic and pro-active supervisory style over a more reactive—and possibly more random—style, which is the local norm. New supervisors need to be prepared for helping their candidates plan, assess, and revise their research and their thesis, to be prepared for giving formative feedback on PhD drafts, for sitting on assessment committees, and for writing PhD assessments that are useful to the candidate, to the university, and to future employers. As a point of departure for PhD supervisor courses, we now work on a project of alignment (Biggs, 2007) of PhD assessments with the supervision of PhD students and the courses offered from the graduate school. The PhD assessments (five to ten page long summaries plus evaluation) and the PhD vivas are the most comprehensive assessments done in the university system, and when read/witnessed in bulk, give deep insight into the criteria used to assess, and also the lacunae in the desired learning outcomes when it comes to university writing. These documents reveal how well university candidates are able to write and communicate according to scientific standards, what they have learned and turned into practices of their own, and what they might not have absorbed. In our department's case, assessments from the years 2007-2008 show interesting patterns in strong and weaker features of scholarly writing. We analysed all of the departments' 2009 assessments, from which we record all evaluative remarks. The patterns emerging from the survey point to areas of (local? or more global?) PhD supervision and feedback practices that could be strengthened and reinforced to alert PhD writers to elements of dissertations that tend to be underdeveloped, and hence attract sometimes severe and clearly well-documented and justifiable criticism of dissertations.

DEVELOPING A RUBRIC FOR FEEDBACK ON PHD DRAFTS

The analysis of PhD assessments in a genre-frame results in a 25 page rubric feedback tool for PhD supervisors and candidates, inspired by and adjusted from Barbara Lovitt's work (2007) with feedback rubrics at the PhD level. The feedback tool alerts the feedback-giver and receiver to most-used assessment criteria, and even if all the rubrics in the feedback tool are not filled out or explicitly addressed in the supervision, they may serve as a reminder or checklist to be discussed, negotiated, embraced, or rejected as relevant, in each supervisory dyad.

The feedback tool is still under testing and revision, using several supervisor pairs as test-persons. This piece of work represents a juncture between our work until now on genre, on feedback and criteria for "the good paper," and on supervision of academic writing. It is embedded in our local Graduate School's

larger scheme for enhancing the quality of dissertation writing, as well as the quality of supervision.

The integration of writing centre support with faculty activities toward student writing relies on political and management initiative and a steady drive from the dean's office to implement new routines, just as this integration relies on our work.

FUTURE TRENDS IN TEACHING ACADEMIC WRITING IN DENMARK

Supervisor education is certainly a central issue for higher education and for our policy makers. But also in other theatres of the educational system we observe movements: professional educations (e.g., teachers' and nurses' training) are becoming "academized," and also at the upper secondary level students write research papers, sometimes complete with scientific theory, research questions, data analysis, and discussion of methods. Inquiry and research become democratized and so does academic writing. Now everybody with a high school diploma has done mini-research, and with any luck they arrive at university with experience in writing in many genres--and also with a general knowledge of genres. In the next generation all our students might be adept not just at producing qualified work in one core genre but in juggling genres.

NOTES

1. The deadline can be expanded twice with an extra 3 months. This practice, however, is discouraged.
2. Similarly a pentagon model for the short essay (Signe Skov in Stray Jørgensen & Rienecker *Studiehaandbog* [*Study skills handbook*], 2009 serves as a heuristic and fill-in-form for essay writers.

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