

## **An Interactive Online Academic Writing Resource for Research Students in Engineering**

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**Abstract :** English academic writing, it has been argued, is an acquired language even for English speakers. For research students whose English is not their first language, however, the acquisition process is often more challenging. Instead of hoping that students would acquire the conventions themselves through extensive reading, there is a need for the explicit teaching of linguistic conventions in academic writing, as explicit teaching could help students to be more aware of the different generic conventions in different disciplines in science. This paper presents an interuniversity effort to develop an online academic writing resource for research students in five subdisciplines in engineering, upon the completion of the needs analysis which indicates that students and faculty members are more concerned about students' ability to organize an extended text than about grammatical accuracy per se. In particular, this paper focuses on the materials developed for thesis writing (also called dissertation writing in some tertiary institutions), as theses form an essential graduation requirement for all research students and this genre is also expected to demonstrate the writer's competence in research and contributions to the research community. Drawing on Swalesian move analysis of research articles, this online resource includes authentic materials written by students and faculty members from the participating institutes. Highlight will be given to several aspects and challenges of developing this online resource. First, as the online resource aims at moving beyond providing instructions on academic writing, a range of interactive activities need to be designed to engage the users, which is one feature which differentiates this online resource from other equally informative websites on academic writing. Second, it will also include discussion on divergent textual practices in different subdisciplines, which help to illustrate different practices among these subdisciplines. Third, since theses, probably one of the most extended texts a research student will complete, require effective use of signposting devices to facilitate readers' understanding, this online resource will also provide both explanation and activities on different components that contribute to text coherence. Finally results from piloting will also be included to shed light on the effectiveness of the materials, which could be useful for future development.

**Keywords :** academic writing, English for academic purposes, online language learning materials, scientific writing

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