Academic Writing

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By

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For Ken and Averil,
Lara and Neil,
Tom and Lily

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INTRODUCTION

Writing is about communicating with words, and academic writing is about choosing words carefully to communicate complex ideas to a range of readers and audiences. The purpose of the fourteen chapters of this book is to provide an introduction to the practice of academic writing for both print-based and online media, with an emphasis on prose writing in English. Each of the fourteen chapters explores different aspects of academic writing in English from practical, professional and theoretical perspectives.

Chapter 1 explores essay-writing skills and describes, from a practical viewpoint, the basic steps that an academic essayist needs to take in order to produce an adequate essay. The chapter highlights the best procedures and practices involved in academic essay writing. Chapter 2 discusses oratory and the power of speech, exploring the various techniques and instructional purposes that have been attributed to oratory in classical antiquity and in current professional spheres such as public speaking and lecturing. Chapter 3 discusses the techniques and best practices in the online writing medium of the *World Wide Web*. Chapter 4 discusses the emerging interdisciplinary rubric of the digital humanities. Chapter 5 is an exposition on the "authoritative character," a writing style, and the rhetoric of legal reasoning. Chapter 6 is concerned with describing, from a good-humoured point of view, the various errors in reasoning that give rise to argumentation bias in critical writing. Chapter 7 discusses persuasive rhetoric in argumentation, setting out the best techniques and practices for rhetorical prose writing. Chapter 8 comments on the practicalities of straightforward prose writing, and posits a style of writing in English that is useful, plain and ubiquitous. Chapter 9 discusses primary academic concepts of the philosophy of language—what language does and how it works to shape ideas and thought. Chapter 10 explains the complex ideas of language evolution—how languages evolved and how they have shaped human society and development. Chapter 11 is concerned with "psycholinguistics" and discusses, from a cognitive perspective, how languages are conceived of and used. Chapter 12 is about language diversity, delineating some of the main issues and the consequences that have arisen from consideration of the number and kinds of language patterns that have spread throughout human society and what they mean

from a socio-political perspective. Chapter 13 discusses the concept of genre theory—how different characteristics and types of writing may be collocated in characteristic collections of language use, termed genres. Chapter 14 explores the concept of creativity in writing—how language use is generated by complex patterns of thinking, and the way in which thinking may inform language use to create new meanings and to solve articulatory problems. The aim of this monograph is to inform, entertain, discuss, explain and promote ideas about the salient characteristics and features of language use in academic writing in English. The writer hopes that the reader will gain some stimulation and usefulness from it.

CHAPTER ONE

ESSAY-WRITING SKILLS

The origins of prose writing are probably coeval with the use of alphabets to form narrative statements. As Martin (1994, 8) writes:

> Writing arose among agricultural peoples, usually peoples settled along the banks of fertilizing rivers or on lands whose intensive cultivation required a clear division of labour and a rigorous hierarchy.

Despite the fact that language might be becoming increasingly oral and visual, and despite the effect of mobile technologies as shaping devices of how language is used (leading towards the "casualisation" of communication), essay writing is still one of the foundational building blocks of academic research, teaching and learning. As Schmandt-Besserat (1996, 1) states:

> Speech, the universal way by which humans communicate and transmit experience, fades instantly: before a word is fully pronounced it has already vanished forever. Writing, the first technology to make the spoken word permanent, changed the human condition.

The reason writers (students, teachers, researchers) write essays is manifold. First, in any academic enterprise it is the fundamental means through which ideas are organised and communicated. Essays reflect comprehension, writing skills, and organisational skills. People write essays for a variety of reasons—to communicate, to persuade, to argue, to pass exams, and to research. Second, writing essays is both a skill in itself (as the product of reading and writing) and also a life skill—it reflects learning and intellectual, social, cultural integration. As Martin (1998, 87) suggests in the context of cultural evolution, writing is valued for two main reasons. First, because culture is primarily "what the thought of successive generations has produced" and so writing permits thought to be stored; second, "writing casts speech onto a two-dimensional space and fixes it there, thus permitting speech to be an object of reflection outside any context." The fundamental quantum of essay writing is "thinking"—essays reflect thought, consciousness and ideas. Consequently, writing

makes thought visible and quality thought clearly visible, thus enabling new cognitive connections to be made.

Readers of essays are as varied in their taste as is any group of subjective and critical thinkers. Given that certain standards of composition, legibility, spelling, punctuation (and, in an academic context, referencing) are met, the expectations of readers of essays include such factors as: quality of content; focus on a set topic; critical reading; logical argument; adherence to format (and, again, in an academic context, writing an essay to schedule often involves meeting a due date). In return, writers of essays are sometimes offered feedback on their writing in the form of reviews or letters (or in some academic contexts marking feedback, a grade, and advice from their tutor or instructor).

The three main factors involved in the expression of contemporary essay writing are based on considerations of fair representation of ideas, concepts and parties to an argument or situation; the avoidance of biased thinking; and the avoidance of over-reliance on self-referential language. Three examples of such pitfalls include the need not to plagiarise (copy material which is not the author's own and is unattributed), the need to avoid sexism (discriminating negatively or positively on the basis of gender), and the need to avoid self-referential language which detracts the reader from the subject of the essay. These three writing correctives have been observed since at least the 1960s and represent standards which may be compromised under some writing conditions.

The essay-writing process

The first task in any essay-writing activity (particularly in the academic context) is usually locating sources that will be used to ground, reinforce and scaffold the essay's argument. There is a difference between primary and secondary sources. Primary sources include articles, websites, reports, experiment results and first-hand knowledge/experience that form the basis for sources on a particular topic and provide data, information and enhancement for specific problems. These need to be acknowledged in references. Secondary sources include a larger group of sources and comprise materials that provide general views of a subject area, which advance possible arguments. These are acknowledged in bibliographic references. An important part of essay preparation is then to make a reading list on which references are based. The purpose of the reading of primary and secondary sources is to help compile evidence and reasons that reinforce your argument, and also on the advantages and disadvantages of the position for and against your argument.

Note-taking

Once the primary and secondary materials are assimilated, notes are taken. This is a written substitute for memory and comprises the basic fund of evidence to use in an argument. Note-taking is regarded as the first step towards the organisation of an essay and is a process of selection. Note-taking strategies differ amongst people. Some writers take very brief notes while others take lengthier notes. Brief notes might act as important signposts for idea in essay writing. Taking lengthier notes ensures capture of material but necessitates meticulous referencing. The two main features of essay note-taking are: first, to maintain the clarity of reason and record, faithfully retaining the basis of an argument's plot and pattern; and second, to maintain accuracy in the notation and quotation of a source, which is important when taking notes that contain direct quotations that might be used in your essay.

Essay planning

Making a plan for an essay involves the principle of "scaffolding," which means deciding which basic arrangement of arguments and fundamental points the essay will make and arranging them according to a pattern that will give the essay structure. The essay is then composed of layers—sentences explaining ideas, concepts, viewpoints, and arguments which comprise paragraphs that are the "building blocks" of the essay composition. An essay plan provides the essay structure. Almost all essays have the basic structure of an introduction, a middle argumentative section and a conclusion, but within that structure a plan provides the sequential points that form the basis of the essay's argument. The argument should follow the points of the essay plan. Essay planning needs to be progressive and to lead the writer to an essay's beginning and end sections. Formulating the essay plan involves dividing the essay into paragraphs or groups of paragraphs that might differ according to the subject that is being dealt with or the complexity of an issue raised. Making an essay plan involves knowing how an essay should proceed, what pattern it will follow, and the particular thesis or proposition it will argue.

The concept of "argument"

All academic prose essays—even those that have both qualitative and quantitative elements—are based on the concept of forming an argument. Arguments promote a particular opinion, point of view, or belief. An

argument carries the basis of the message (set of attitudes, propositions, beliefs, concepts or ideas) that the essay will advance. A difference between the essay and other forms of argument is that in the essay the opponent or opposing proposition or belief is not present, so it is necessary to anticipate their argument(s) but it is also necessary to represent their arguments fairly. The essay argument may be based on the confirmation or refutation of a particular set of ideas, concepts or beliefs (or of some inter-relation of these). Writing an essay argument is also an act of persuasion. If the refutation of a set of ideas is used as the cornerstone of the argument, then two alternative strategies to use in an essay are to point to the shortcomings of a particular opposing belief at the beginning, or to demolish an opposing argument by making use of individual points as you proceed to defend your argument. The advantage of this strategy is to let points produced by the opposition construct one's own argument. However, the writer needs to be careful that his or her argument is not merely an attack, refutation or indeed counter-attack without introducing anything new into the area of debate. Thus, there are two forms of essay argument. One treats argument as an orderly presentation of linked ideas throughout the essay; the other treats "argument" as a brief statement of the proposition to be confirmed/refuted (i.e., the thesis statement). Thus, the essay argument contains the proposition or position that the argument is going to be proved or argued for or against, and states in a sentence or two the exact nature of the argument that the essay is attempting to promote or refute. At the beginning of the essay is the thesis statement, which must be closely related to the problem you are challenged on by the topic to solve or the ideas, concepts and set of inter-relations that you are asked to demonstrate. The thesis statement must be an arguable proposition.

Essay structure

Many essays, particularly those written for professional academic contexts, require an abstract to summarise the essay. An abstract may be defined by five characteristics: completeness, precision, objectivity, clarity, and brevity (Ebel et al. 2004, 146). It includes a synopsis of the scope of the topic investigated in the essay, a description of the methods used, and descriptions of results and conclusions (147). The first paragraph of the essay begins with an introductory statement that tells the reader what the essay is about and the proposition that the essay argues. At the opening stage of the essay the reader will not usually see the fruition of the argument or necessarily how the essay writer came to form his or her

opinions. The remainder of the essay is devoted to showing the reader how the thesis statement may be asserted, proved and defended. Thus the logic of the argument shapes the paragraph structure. Paragraphs are influential in demonstrating the shape and process of a particular argument. Paragraphs are logical structures (the equivalent of the logician's table): thus, a paragraph does more than state something—it provides an idea and demonstrates the truth of the idea by using evidence.

There are generally three types of paragraphs. These are termed *deductive paragraphs*, *inductive paragraphs*, and *linking paragraphs*. Deductive paragraphs present a main idea first, and then develop sequential ideas. Inductive paragraphs present and explore ideas developed from research and lead to the main conclusion of the paragraph which is a topic sentence—usually the final sentence. Linking paragraphs present support for the thesis statement or argument and lead logically into the following paragraphs (Grellier and Goerke 2010, 122–3). Aside from differing argument types, essays basically have a three-tier paragraph structure—an introductory paragraph; middle paragraphs (the body); and end paragraphs (the conclusion). The introductory paragraph provides the essay opening—it is used to attract readers to a particular topic. Opening paragraphs also develop an argument; they provide the approach to a particular thesis and prepare a way from a thesis statement, which is usually the last sentence of an introductory paragraph, to a sketch of the essay argument development. The middle paragraphs (or body of the essay) are standard paragraphs that comprise a list of topics with sequential (or parallel or alternative) points in order to prove a thesis of an essay. The paragraph ending comes to a conclusion about an idea so that the reader can move on to the idea in the next paragraph. It is important that these paragraph topics are ordered and that there is a logical connection between concepts and ideas in the paragraph. The middle or body paragraphs provide the essay's evidence—the proof of the essay's argument. The point or concept with the strongest evidential proof is usually reserved for the final paragraph of the essay body. The final section of the essay contains the end paragraphs. The end paragraphs contain the reworded thesis, with general statements of issues which assess and state their importance and their implications. The final sentence of the end paragraph is usually brief and makes a strong impression. The whole essay is an expansion of the process of the paragraph. The writer should avoid writing "one-sentence" paragraphs; however, as a result of the increasing use of Information and Computer Technology (ICT) and increasing communication with mobile technologies, the one-sentence paragraph is becoming increasingly common.

The draft essay

The essential group to keep in mind when writing essays is the essay's audience. In academic contexts the audience for a student's essay is the lecturer or tutor who sets the course that the essay is written for, or who allocates a grade or delivers feedback. Where an essay does not have a specific intended audience, the essayist must consider the group of people who might read the essay. However, in most situations it is generally best to write an essay according to what the material is and your understanding of it and what this asks of you. Thus the essay writer might treat the audience as a group of generally intelligent persons who have some interest in the topic being discussed, but who might nevertheless not yet be in a sufficiently informed position to agree or disagree with your point of view. In most academic contexts it is also likely that the reader will have some knowledge of the texts discussed by the essay writer. So it is important to assume that the readers will have read the texts and don't need a summary of them; on the other hand, you need to convey to them that you know more about the topic than they do. As an expert the essay writer needs to be a leader who will direct the reader through the essay. Consequently it is important to keep the reader's interest and to give clear direction to the argument.

From the writer's perspective, choosing the authorial voice to use will depend on a combination of the subject material and the audience. As Chambers and Northedge (2008, 183) state:

> Writing is a very special form of "conversation." As you write, you are talking to someone you cannot see and who does not reply. You have to assume that he or she is "listening"… you have to take all the responsibility for deciding what is to be said and how, and for sustaining the other person's interest.

A writer has to maintain a form of relationship with the reader. A more formal voice or register may be used for "official" contexts and a less formal voice for more "generalist" or popular audiences. In the academic essay-writing context, there is no ban on using "I" in an essay, but overuse of that pronoun can distract the reader. Too frequent use of "I" will emphasise the presence of the writer at the expense of the subject matter of the argument. After all, the essay's argument is the primary consideration of the essay. Similarly, both writing style and writing tone may also be adjusted according to the audience and content matter of the essay. Style might be influenced by previous writing experience, knowledge and ability

to use language, and an understanding of the context in which the writing may be read or used.

Constructing a winning argument

Arguments are best constructed on sound organising principles. These organising principles may have three main interconnected features. First, an argument needs to be developed in stages towards a conclusion; second, an argument needs to have a link to the subsequent stage so the sentences and paragraphs lead the reader in a particular direction: and third, the main points of the argument have to be organised into a satisfactory sequence within each stage of the argument (Chambers and Northedge 2008, 165). Creating an argument may have a multiplicity of motivations. An argument might be a riposte—a reply to something with which the arguer disagrees; it might be an act of persuasion—a writing that tries to convince the reader of how something should be, be seen, or be interpreted; or it might be a considered disagreement with a particular point of view. But in each case an argument is not to be considered as an end in itself. As Spence (1995, 25) suggests: "Argument is the mechanism by which we reveal the truth—the truth for us. It is [counter-intuitively] the incomparable art by which we connect and interact successfully with the *Other*." Whatever the "other" is, however, presumably, fundamentally, the other is at one level the reader. Arguably the basis of any good argument is authenticity. The truth often wins out. The flipside of this argument about argument is that those who lie create unnecessary risk for others. It is difficult to protect oneself from an undiscovered lie. Thus any essayist should be arguing towards a state of truth.

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CHAPTER TWO

ORATORY: THE POWER OF SPEECH

The purpose of speech is to use words or gestures to communicate with others, and to transfer meaning from one person to another or from one or more people to a group of other people. However, speech can be distinguished from writing although it is quite common for the two modes to overlap; hence speech is produced from writing and writing is produced from speech. By making speech, people use language to articulate thoughts, to clarify, instruct, or demonstrate in the communication of ideas. Speech can be used to convince or influence others and often carries a performative element—it connotes or denotes a set of propositions about ideas, concepts or relations in the world. Speech is one of the fundamental building blocks of civil society, although any one-time speeches may be listened to wholly, partially or not at all.

Most speeches in professional contexts are ordered somewhat like a conventional essay, although the context of speech presentations varies tremendously—for example, from school reporting contexts to boardroom business meetings, or from asking for directions to a valedictory speech given at a graduation. Hence styles of speech presentations fall on a continuum between the conversational and declamatory. As Hjelmquist states, "a 'speech act' should be described, among other things, as a constellation of intentions" (1979, 221). Thus speech is multivalent—it affords the possibility of communicating a variety of meanings and it might contain several different scales: one concerns the length of the speech; another, the depth of knowledge evident in it; and the third concerns the style of speech made.

Any aspect of the speaker may also be made apparent in the speech, including delivery, style, intonation and inflection. It is rare for a speech to be emotionless, although in some dramatic contexts speeches can be made to appear emotionless for oratorical effect. Any speech must have a purpose, whether it be specifying the items on a grocery list or delivering a lecture. The Roman politician, lawyer and pre-eminent orator Cicero,

whose dialogues were published in the year 55 BC, suggests that oratory is also deeply linked to human thinking:

> A knowledge of a vast number of things is necessary, without which volubility of words is empty and ridiculous; speech itself is to be formed, not merely by choice, but by careful construction of words; and all the emotions of the mind, which nature has given to man, must be intimately known, for all the force and art of speaking must be employed in allaying or exciting the feelings of those who listen. (Cicero 1884, 147)

Other important elements of good oratory include variety and contrast within the wording of the oration. According to Golden (1965, 185), distinguishing characteristics of oratory include highly compelling ideas, clarity, a vivid style and versatility in performance. General and concrete ideas make for good speech content, as well as arguments that are either logically or psychologically appealing to a reading audience. A further element of good oratory is polished or conversational delivery. For Cicero (1884), this could be summed up by deciding on a topic, arranging and organising the speech material, defining the speech style, elaborating the points in a persuasive argument, committing them to print or memory, and delivering the speech with "dignity and grace" (178). The speech is a performative act that carries human intention.

As James points out in his writings on oratory, Cicero divided the speech into six main sections. These are: first, the *exordium* or introduction; second, the *narration* or statement of facts; third, the *partition*—the separation of points agreed and points in dispute; fourth, the *confirmation*—the presentation of arguments; fifth, the *refutation*—the response to opposing arguments; and sixth, the *peroration*—a conclusion and appeal to an audience (James 2007, 91). Cicero (1884, 157) believed that in presentation of speeches, "power and elegance" which accommodate "feelings and understandings" are significant. It is a matter of debate to what extent a good orator needs to have personal involvement in his or her topic. Most good orations involve topics that are timely, fresh and engaging, and that make appeals to basic motives and drives. However, all good speeches need to assimilate materials and provide supporting evidence or proof. As Golden (1965, 188) suggests: "If a speaker's ethical and logical proof constitute the shaft of the arrow of persuasion, it is … pathetic appeal which represents the flinty cutting edge that penetrates into the cassock of the listener's heart." There is also a need for careful paragraphing, in which, much like the essay writer, the orator engages in solid reasoning which provides cause-to-effect relationships, all of which sequentially support and link to the overall import of the

paragraph. Furthermore, it is essential that all forms of oratory have a solid and convincing ending. Such an ending should be free from "excessive abstractions, empty high-sounding words, histrionics or flamboyant rhetoric" (Golden 1965, 185). The connotation effect of a persuasive speech is one in which the listener may feel moments of empathy in which he or she feels "engaged" with the speaker. At such times the listener may perceive himself or herself as being lost in a "psychological crowd" of absorbed people. In order to achieve this, a good speech needs to be organised. The construction of the speech must contain the various strands of the argument and supporting proof, which carries what the speech denotes in a coherent narration. Thus the basic organising elements of a good speech include a central idea delivered with supporting evidence, organised in a consistent way, expressed in meaningful language, and delivered in an engaging, understandable manner (Gehring 1953, 101).

Giving a speech is one of the central functions of public relations, addressing conference audiences and groups, and providing counsel to others. As Smith suggests:

> …in theoretical terms, the speech is doubly encoded. First the writer provides the words that encode the meaning to be shared with the receiver. The speaker, who gives a tone and temper to the text, provides a second encoding. The speaker brings to it a verbal interpretation, an attitude. (2012, 334)

Speeches require a message, an informational content bearing knowledge of what is said, a central topic, and a purpose; second, speeches have an audience—it is a basic principle that the audience is known, and also that the context in which the audience finds itself is known. The structure of address (what is related in the speech to whom) will differ according to whether the speech is a keynote, a summary, or a closing reflection. Speeches also contain both plans and schemas—plans which identify the interests and needs of the stakeholders, and schemas which identify any objectives held. Speeches also need to be informed by relevant research.

Elements of a speech

A good speech will be a fluid composition of different parts. Generally a speech may be composed a little like an essay and have a beginning, a middle section and a conclusion. The introduction of a speech presents the central idea and sets the tone for what follows. It establishes a rapport between the speaker and audience and establishes the speaker's credibility.

The second feature of a speech is a proposition—a position which is being argued towards. The third element is the argument, the assertion of what is claimed and the reasons for it. The conclusion restates the purpose of the speech and brings it to a close. Thus the introduction, argument and conclusion bear the thesis statement, logical exposition of the argument, and the summation. Smith (2012, 341–3) has ten tips for good speech writing. These are:

- Keep to the topic
- Write for the "ear" and the audience
- Begin well
- Vary the structural elements
- Use quotations sparingly
- Allude to relevant events
- Avoid clichés
- Avoid common errors in logic
- Prepare a clean manuscript
- Maximise impact by being selective and concise

The delivery of a good speech involves effective and engaging presentation. Presentation frequently involves elements of emotional power that bring the speaking tone to a climax, but also employs a conversational mode exhibiting both grace and "ordinariness," attention and control, specificity and generality, spontaneity, intimacy and foresight, and a directness of address. Other factors of good speech quality include simplicity, measured tones and a sincerity of persuasion (Golden 1965, 191; Gehring 1953, 102). Thus simplicity is the key to poignant speech-making: knowing an audience, knowing a topic, and appealing on the basis of genuine persuasion.

Speech delivery is also an essential part of lecturing. The "stand and deliver" lecture has been criticised and modified on many counts but it remains the academic's stock-in-trade pedagogical tool. It is also the means of teaching that is of direct benefit to students. As McDaniel (2010, 290) puts it, "listening to someone speak for an hour or so and then being able to remember the salient points is a valuable life skill, regardless of your field." One criticism that has been made of the standard lecture format is that it encourages a form of passive learning. However, Malik and Janjua (2011, 966) argue that the passive can be converted to the active by modifying the traditional lectures through integration of "active learning strategies." These can include brief demonstrations, discussions, Socratic question and answer conversations, and ungraded written

exercises (963). Students using this method might develop listening skills, and lectures help them to recognise and understand important facts and provide a narrative pathway through learning (McDaniel 2010, 291).

White argues that the purpose of interactive lecturing is manifold. Lectures allow teachers to show enthusiasm for a topic, to contextualise the content of the lecture within a broader subject area, to help students integrate information, to cover course content, to explain difficult concepts, to form student connections, and to model state-of-the-art thinking. Arguably, interactive lecturing also produces higher-order thinking that synthesises related information, or creates new ways of learning and teaching (White 2011, 231). While interactive lecturing is in one sense an "ancient" art, harking back to the classical Socratic question and answer method, it is also a primary means of engaging an audience, be it through a spoken interlocution or through electronic multimedia.

The lecture speaking mode is neither a conversation nor necessarily a public speech—it is, however, a form of instruction. Heitzmann (2010, 50–54) suggests that there are ten factors that may both characterise and enhance the lecture format. These are:

- Start with an attention-making device
- Teach students skills in interpretation
- Be interactive with the audience
- Make frequent selective references to texts
- Represent the latest thinking and research
- Maintain good humour
- Respect the audience's intelligence
- Aim for interdisciplinarity—connections between ideas and concepts
- Be motivational, stimulate the audience
- Preview subsequent material (the *pre*-mortem)

Thus the lecture format is not simply like reading an essay with a beginning, middle and conclusion; rather, delivery style is also related to content. Larson and Lovelace (2013, 108) argue that the taxonomy of objectives for the lecturing format are instilling in students the skills of memory, understanding, application, analysis, evaluation and creativity. Thus the pedagogical format is laden with these educational affordances. However, lecturing has a practical focus: it aims to inspire, provide information, stimulate and present concepts to understand. Ardalan argues that the lecture mode of delivery is characterised by applying methods or questions to problems in order to find solutions. It instils in students (or

listeners) a top-down problem-solving, decision-making and choice-making schema which aims to both transfer information to the student and to engage the learner in analytical and creative thinking tasks (2013, 2). Hence lecturing is a bridge between spoken and written words; it is a form of "oral writing." Arguably, many forms of dramatical speech share many commonalities with lecturing.

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CHAPTER THREE

WRITING FOR THE WEB

The proliferation of Web pages (for example of html code) and increased use of the Internet have resulted in vast changes in the world of writing. One of the differences between code writing and Web writing is that the former has vastly restricted informational input compared to the latter—that is, coding is precise and denotative whereas Web writing itself is open-ended. Where once writing was confined to smaller groups and might or might not have been intended for publication, today anything posted on the *World Wide Web* may be read by an audience of thousands or even millions. The writing lens has become larger: mass media have afforded more and more reading possibilities, such that the range of choices of websites, and thus the range and amount of information that is available, has increased dramatically. Consequently it is increasingly important to make the information that is available on websites count; hence the need for writing skills that enhance the value of the information presented and make information readily and attractively available to readers.

However, form and function are not the only writing characteristics that deserve emphasis in writing for the World Wide Web. The possibilities for communication offered by blogging, chat rooms and email also increase the amount of conversational writing in the virtual medium and hence the amount of opinion, conjecture and argument that is available. Once such opinion probably wouldn't have been recorded in any form: today vast amounts of information are stored in the databases of millions of computers around the world. As a consequence, there is a great range of competencies and writing styles on the Internet, from texters and tweeters to professional public relations writers.

As Bivins suggests, Web writing requires involvement in four kinds of writing process: orientation, information, action, and navigation. An overriding maxim of Web writing is that it needs to be understandable at a glance: the most effective forms of writing involve presenting the least amounts of information to discourse on a particular subject. In this context, as Bivins suggests, excess of information is "a disservice." Good

Web writing is that which displays correctness, clarity, consideration, organisation, formats, names, addresses, spelling and grammar, appropriate language, tone, concision, coherence, and consideration of the impact on the reader (2008, 280). Thus a website should display what an audience needs to know in an attractive way—no more and no less. It need also give website readers clear entry, exiting and transition options, as well as options for service.

Micro-blogging and Twitter

Bivins writes: "Twitter is a Web 2.0 service that allows users to perform micro-blogging, communicating in messages of no more than 140 characters" (2008, 288). Thus, the purpose of tweet messaging is to keep it short, keep the topic to 140 characters, and make sense. Thus Twitter statements and notes need to be clear, precise and informative. Bivins' advice for Tweeters is:

- To categorise tweets for added visibility
- To share pictures
- To tweet from your phone
- To pick up a good desktop client
- To download a mobile client

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Web content

According to Lipson and Day (2005, 29), good Web content has five qualities. These are:

Dynamic content—the credibility of information is reinforced by its validity and freshness. Frequently Web content is subject to ongoing revision.

Customised content—it is important for audiences to know their content, and to configure information such that it is based on the specific needs and preferences of the environment.

Content relationships—the relationship between one piece of content and another is as valuable as the information itself.

Content granularity—quick, accessible information.

Content interactivity—content and tasks begin to merge at the level of the user interface, so it is important that there are appropriate information hierarchies using buttons and sliders and on-screen displays that provide the support a user is looking for. Differences between levels