

## **CHAPTER 4     A framework for the design of tertiary level academic writing courses**

### **4.1     Introduction**

This chapter proposes a framework that may be used in the design of academic writing courses for tertiary education. The framework is generative in the sense that it is an attempt at providing a directive that could be employed in identifying fundamental concerns in tertiary academic writing and to break these down into a focused enquiry of issues that are essential in the design of writing interventions. Two important conditions apply to the development of such a framework, namely that 1) the framework should be as comprehensive as possible with reference to a description of the context of tertiary education, and 2) the framework should be suitably flexible in order to provide for varying writing needs in tertiary education. Ideally, the framework should allow writing educators working in tertiary education in South Africa to select specific options within the framework and to combine such options in the design of writing courses that, given a number of potential constraints, provide the best possible support to specific groups of students/individuals in the development of their writing ability.

The theoretical rationale for the proposed framework has its origins in the thirteen design principles discussed in section 3.2 of the previous chapter. In a pertinent sense, the framework proposed in this chapter, therefore, is a further specification of the principles articulated in Chapter 3. The framework being proposed here is based on an approach that supports an informed eclecticism (see section 3.3) regarding the development of academic writing ability within the broader context of academic literacy. It is argued that such an approach enables one to treat past research more thoroughly and deliberately. Moreover, this facilitates the articulation of a holistic and integrative perspective towards the development of writing that also subscribes to the broad principles of academic literacy development. For reasons comprehensively discussed in Chapter 3, a framework that fuses relevant features of a product approach, a process approach, a social constructivist perspective on writing development, as well as a critical literacy perspective, will be part of the theoretical

underpinnings on which the framework is constructed. It is argued that there is an inherent danger in an absolute application of any one specific ideological approach, since this might exclude potentially relevant and productive options that could be particularly valuable for specific contexts.

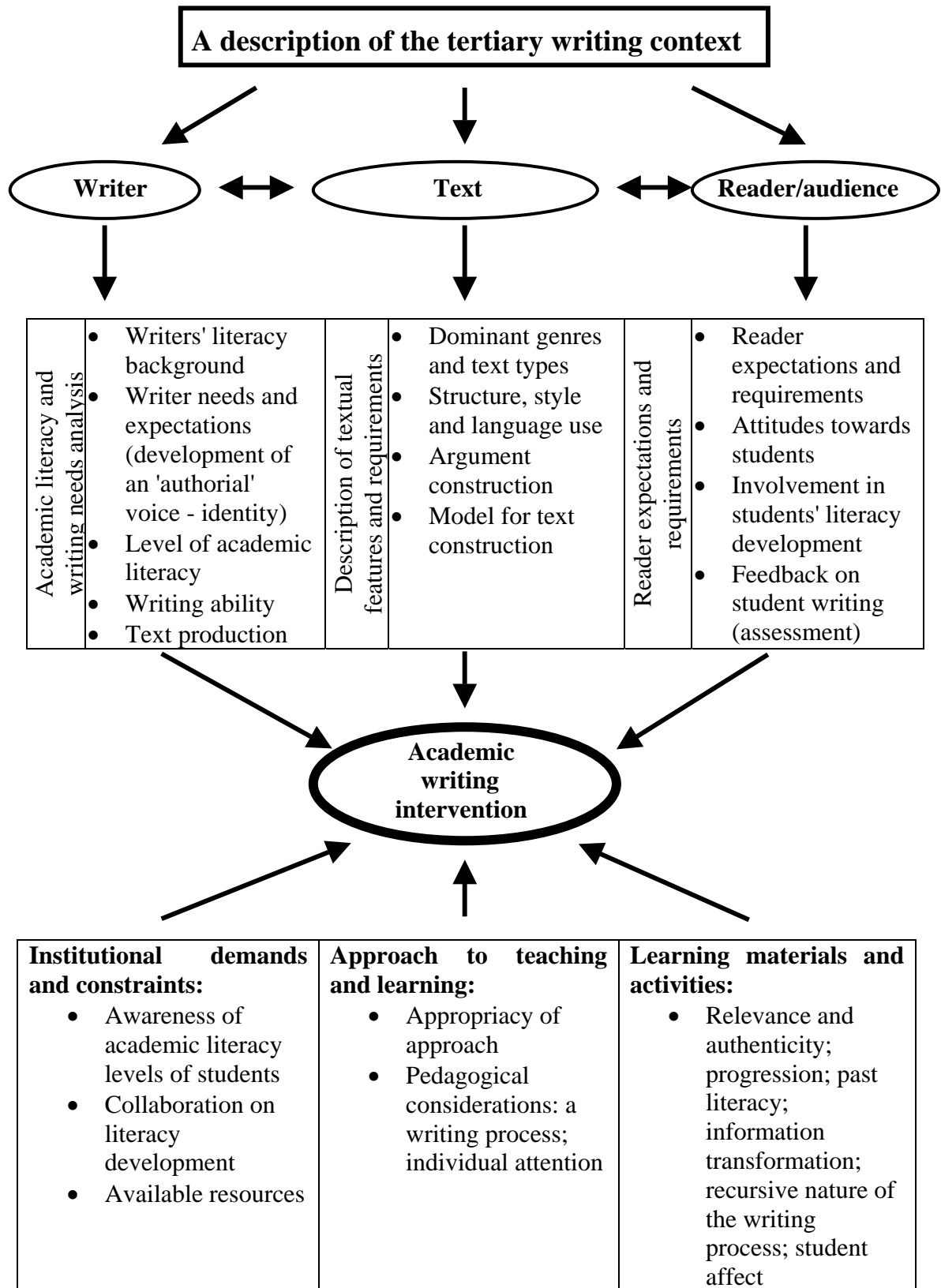
The framework further answers to the criterion that it is possible to isolate a core of important conventions/conditions in academic writing, based on certain generic features and principles of academic discourse, as well as a description of the specific academic context in which such discourse takes place, and that it should be possible to adjust the manner in which such issues/principles are applied to different disciplines to yield discipline-specific writing requirements. In her proposal for the key constituents of a tertiary writing course, Orr (1995:192) maintains that:

Prescriptive content [should be] avoided on the assumption that practical implementation of ... guidelines will need to vary from discipline to discipline across the curriculum depending on the demands of each subject course, according to the existing teaching style of each department, and in response to the particular student profiles in each case.

Following this line of argument, a very important component of such a framework should be access to and the productive use of relevant information-soliciting instruments in order to determine " ... the needs and expectations of both faculty and students within each discipline" (Orr, 1995:196). Thus, the availability of useful information soliciting, as well as assessment instruments in order to collect relevant information on a number of issues, is a central feature of the framework. This research proposes the use of at least four instruments, one that addresses student needs (and wants) regarding literacy and writing, another that determines levels of academic literacy (and specifically writing ability), and two (a questionnaire and interview) that focus on lecturer/supervisor perceptions and expectations (including textual requirements) of academic literacy and writing.

Ideally, a framework for the design of tertiary level academic writing courses would include the elements in Figure 4.1 that are comprehensively discussed in the following section.

**Figure 4.1 Key elements of a framework for academic writing course design in tertiary education**



## 4.2 Elements of a framework for academic writing course design

The different elements or focuses of the framework (and how they are further broken down into sub-components) discussed below comprise a reinterpretation and reformulation (re-synthesis) of relevant issues in the teaching and learning of academic writing within the wider context of academic literacy. Six primary focuses that need to be contextualised within the tertiary academic environment provide the major constituents of the framework (see Figure 4.1). These constituents focus on the **writer**, the **text** and the **reader** that stand in a relationship of dynamic interaction as part of and in response to the **contextual demands** of the tertiary academic discourse community (and the smaller sub-communities dispersed throughout this discourse community). Apart from the three aspects mentioned above, the design of academic writing courses further needs to respond to issues related to **institutional demands and constraints** and a **contextually relevant approach** towards the teaching and learning of academic writing. All the issues already mentioned will impact on or determine the nature of **materials and activities** to be used for writing development. Although the framework has a central analytical function regarding the identification of prominent issues for writing course design, it is important to note that the description and explanation of different elements in the framework might naturally lead one to consider them in isolation, whereas the ultimate purpose of the framework is to discover how such elements interact with each other in specific ways, depending on the specific context in which individual writers produce unique academic texts. The discussion of the framework in the following section will therefore also attempt to highlight the interconnectedness of the different elements. Following the description of each element, a short summary has been included of the most important issues that should be addressed in a specific element.

In the interpretation of this framework, it is further important to note that academic writing always functions within the wider context of academic literacy, and although not always explicitly stated, should be understood with this context in mind.

#### 4.2.1 The student as writer of academic texts

The first of the features in the framework above refers to the student as writer of academic texts.

A critical aspect of any planning towards writing courses for tertiary students is that the course designer has to know, within reasonable limits, what the student profile is. The challenges presented by the South African tertiary context with regard to student diversity are intense. Local students come from a variety of educational and literacy backgrounds, and to add to this complexity there is an increased enrolment of foreign students in South African universities. Although one is fully aware of the fact that students are individuals with unique characteristics in terms of their writing ability (and general academic literacy), it is a practical necessity, in dealing with large numbers of students as we generally do, to consider the possibility of grouping students together according to their writing needs. It is therefore necessary for the writing course designer to compile a profile of student writers with regard to a number of pertinent writing-related issues. These issues could then be used to inform different aspects of writing course design, and the profile further refined when developmental work is done with specific groups of students.

After the primary issues that should be addressed in a writing course have been identified from the perspective of student needs and abilities, the **suitability** and ultimate **relevance** of the course would clearly depend on the degree of **flexibility** as the need arises, of such a course in changing emphasis as well as in accommodating issues not originally addressed in it. Clearly, it is the writing educators who will have the crucial responsibility to be suitably accommodating in their approach and application in order to provide for individual student needs. What may be problematic, however, in this regard, is the increasing/increased differentiation between course designer/developer and language instructor in the sense that the person who designed the course may not always be the instructor. One would thus need to have strategies in place for ensuring that potential misunderstandings in how the instructor interprets the course may be adequately addressed. Issues that need to be considered in constructing an initial student profile are addressed below.

Two related aspects need to be considered in the compilation of a student profile towards the development of writing interventions. On the one hand one needs to collect **general background information** on students that includes information on current level of study, the specific course registered for (with the aim of determining sensible grouping possibilities of specific disciplines), literacy history, student perceptions of their own levels of academic literacy (including writing ability specifically), their expectations of academic writing, and typical writing behaviour. One therefore needs an information-gathering instrument that could be used to collect information on: 1) students' current engagement in academic studies; 2) their literacy background, and 3) what they perceive their writing needs to be. Obviously, one would like to be able to organise such data with specific categories in mind. The design of this instrument should therefore allow for a categorised analysis of information that would enable one to, for example, group students together with regard to issues such as language background, writing needs, the writing requirements of specific disciplines, etc. On the other hand, it is necessary to empirically determine students' current levels of academic literacy as well as writing ability specifically. This requires a reliable testing instrument that, apart from identifying a general level of academic literacy, can also be used diagnostically with regard to some areas of literacy that might be more problematic than others.

Although **student perceptions about their writing needs** will most probably translate to 'wants' (what they think they need) in many instances, there is important information to be gained with regard to determining student **attitudes and perceptions about academic writing**. In my opinion, many students' writing problems are to some extent related to misconceptions about the nature of writing in a tertiary academic environment, a point that I shall return to below. Data regarding student perceptions and attitudes towards writing are a vital source of information that would enable one to identify and address constructively possible myths and misunderstandings that may exist about academic writing. It will further show students' levels of awareness about fundamental issues in academic writing, an important consideration in the design of any writing course.

The **previous literacy experiences** of students who arrive at university differ considerably. Students who are, for instance, not familiar with the literacy practices valued in tertiary education, could easily be labelled 'academically illiterate'. Such students are often marginalized in the sense that they do not receive the kind of literacy support that will enable them to make significant progress with their studies (Johns, 2005). It is crucial to realise then that the manner in which students are initiated into the discourses of the university (Gee, 1998) will to some extent determine how successfully they will be able to use these discourses in order to succeed in this environment. For example, developmental initiatives that introduce 'new' literacy practices should incorporate sufficient scaffolding that would make such experiences meaningful in the context of students' past literacies. Johns (2005:12), for instance, indicates that:

... a course that focuses upon situated, communicative, meaningful language needs to begin with texts and experiences with which students are familiar, then move to the academic or professional genres and contexts with which they are less familiar.

If this connection is not established, students will probably grope aimlessly for something familiar in what they should experience as a frustrating and meaningless void. She suggests that one could make use of meaningful (genre-based) tasks in the classroom where students work on familiar genres first and then work towards the genres prominent in the university context.

Apart from what could be accomplished in the classroom in terms of learning about and incorporating students' past literacies into learning opportunities, it is often difficult to trace students' previous literacy experiences and writing history (especially in the case of foreign postgraduate students who, for example, have primarily practised academic literacy in a language other than the languages of learning and instruction at the UP). It is therefore suggested that a sophisticated assessment instrument be used for an **accurate determination of academic literacy levels** and writing ability specifically in the language of learning. This is a crucial step in the design of writing courses, since it will affect the level at which writing interventions are offered to students, as well as the types of learning opportunities to which they are exposed.

The integrated nature of academic writing with more general academic literacy has already been discussed at length in Chapter 3. Writing and reading ability, for example, are integrated in the tertiary environment in the sense that students are regularly required to make use of a variety of sources of information (that they mostly need to read) for writing tasks. An important function of academic reading is that readers in this context are usually expected to read purposefully to find new information/insights/different angles on or interpretations of information. Furthermore, because readers often approach a reading text with limited knowledge frameworks by means of which they may interpret the text, many of the ideas in the text might not be completely understood, which necessitates guided follow-up reading. A functional command of such reading strategies is fundamental towards students' critical engagement with texts in a tertiary environment. However, as Johns (2005:1) mentions, "... reading needs are often submerged ..., whereas elements of good and bad writing are there on paper for all to see." Although reading difficulties and needs might thus not be as overtly observable as writing needs, there is clear evidence that if students' reading ability is weak, it will affect the quality of what they write. Belcher (1990:220) offers further support for this notion by stating that "... it has been known for some time now that there is a positive correlation between amount of reading done and writing proficiency, i.e., the more reading, the better the writer" (also see Ferris & Hedgcock, 1998 for their perspective on the relationship between reading and writing ability).

In the tertiary environment, especially at postgraduate level, the information-gathering stage (and how this information is processed and utilised when writing) is critical for students to identify the most prominent points of view and information on specific issues they wish/need to investigate.

The framework being proposed here therefore supports the use of an integrative literacy assessment tool that emphasises an interplay between specific literacy abilities that contribute to appropriate and effective academic writing. This will obviously also influence one's thinking about the focus, content and structure of writing courses. Apart from the fact that the act (and therefore process) of academic writing will be the focus of a writing course, such a course needs to provide for



meaningful opportunities that effectively integrate activities of reading, listening, speaking and reasoning as they impact on and interact with the process of writing. Put differently, a writing course that is so designed as to focus exclusively on writing will be deficient in a number of respects. The information gained by using an integrated academic literacy assessment instrument could articulate with a set of core academic discourse principles that can be adjusted and used in different combinations and with different emphases in order to accommodate the average level of literacy of specific groups of students. It is therefore essential to determine students' levels of **functional academic literacy**, meaning that one needs to ascertain what students are functionally capable of doing with academic texts (in both receptive and productive modes).

Designing the type of literacy assessment instrument referred to above is a complex matter. Such an instrument should ideally also provide information on students' use of the more extended processes that characterise most academic writing in a tertiary setting. However, practical considerations such as time constraints with regard to taking down the test as well as marking it might well lead one to opt for the most practical format within such constraints. Strategies such as productive planning, purposeful gathering of information as well as redrafting of written texts may be difficult to assess under these conditions. It is therefore suggested that if a determination of the academic writing ability that enables students to produce coherent longer written texts can, for practical reasons, not be included in a literacy assessment, **such results be specifically augmented by a determination of writing ability**. Regarding such a determination, it is obviously not adequate to say that students can or cannot write. One should be able to determine what their more specific writing problems are, as well as the possible origins of these problems, in order to make informed decisions about writing support for such students. An expert analysis of written student texts is one way of identifying students' writing problems at a textual level. An interpretation of such problem areas should, however, not be limited to an analysis of students' written texts only, but should again be related to issues within the broader context of academic literacy in a tertiary academic environment.

In addition to determining general academic literacy levels, the framework needs to provide for a strategy that will distinguish between **students with real language problems** (i.e. not being sufficiently proficient) in the language of learning and **those who are simply unfamiliar with the conventions of academic discourse** in a tertiary academic environment. This will obviously compel the course designer to engage with issues such as the specific type and level of course presented to specific groups of students in the sense that the course will have to account for the fact that some students might be low language proficiency students. It will further have an impact on determining the most productive way in which to constitute groups of students for a writing intervention. In this way students could be grouped according to what specific focus needs to be applied to a specific developmental level, provided that resources at the institution allow for the teaching of such specific groups of students.

In a connected issue, the framework also distinguishes between **primary language and additional language users of the language of learning**. There is adequate evidence (see Grabe & Kaplan, 1996) of specific differences between these two groups of learners regarding the language learning and writing strategies they use, to warrant a careful consideration of the possible impact of such differences on the teaching and learning environment. Although the historical development of writing instruction for primary and additional language users appears to coincide on a number of issues, Ferris and Hedgcock (1998) highlight the fact there may be differences between the schemata of these groups of learners. The different prior experiences of learners are displayed in knowledge about content as well as knowledge about texts. Additional language users often experience difficulties with the rhetorical organisation of texts, resulting from the fact that texts are embedded in specific contexts with which additional language users might be relatively unfamiliar. Though these distinctions have been criticised, it is this embeddedness that led to Cummins' (1984) distinction between 'basic interpersonal communicative skills' (BICS) and 'cognitive academic language proficiency' (CALP). Such differences affect students' abilities in comprehending and analysing texts, as well as in their production of texts that meet the requirements of specific contexts (Ferris & Hedgcock, 1998:13).

A further issue emerging in the context of distinguishing between primary and additional language users focuses on the **division of such students into groups that are considered to be most suitable for their writing needs**. One needs to reflect on, for example, whether it would be wise to group primary and additional language users together for the development of their writing ability. Although it is often naturally accepted that one would separate these groups of learners, there are potential benefits such as employing primary language users as a resource for enhanced peer-learning (if facilitated judiciously) that might not be as successful in a context where students are placed in homogenous (regarding language preference and use) writing groups (see Grabe & Kaplan [1996:23-30] for a discussion on differences between L1 and L2 learners). In SA, where such division may result in a racial split of students, it may be worthwhile to explore further the advantages of mixed ability classes.

Another fundamental question that needs to be addressed in the context of students' literacy background and writing ability focuses on **how student writers construct written texts**. One therefore needs to ascertain the behaviour of student writers when they engage in more extensive writing tasks in a tertiary context. How do students approach a written assignment from the initial planning stage (do they, for example, engage in constructive planning at all?) that includes an analysis of a topic (self-generated or provided by a lecturer) through to the submission of a final product? What reasoning and general academic literacy strategies do students primarily use when they write? What linguistic (including grammatical, stylistic and structural) choices do students prefer to convey a written message? How do strategies used by mainly inexperienced student writers compare to those used by experienced academic writers? How do writing strategies interact towards producing a well-argued, cohesive and coherent, appropriately structured, stylistically appropriate and grammatically correct final written product? The interrelated nature of the elements in the framework discussed here should be evident at this point. Although the discussion below may be situated within the next focus on the textual features of academic writing (4.2.2 below), it was decided to discuss these issues of text in relation also to what kind of knowledge writers need in their construction of such texts.

The descriptive text construction model discussed by Grabe and Kaplan (1996) provides some insight into written text construction with a focus on the text as product. Generally, these authors propose seven interacting components that should form part of such a model. These include:

- syntactic structures;
  - semantic senses and mappings;
  - lexical forms and relations;
  - cohesion signalling;
  - genre and organisational structuring to support coherence interpretations;
  - functional-use dimensions (stylistic and register dimensions); and
  - non-linguistic knowledge bases, including 'world knowledge'.
- (Grabe & Kaplan, 1996:62)

According to these authors, the fundamental building blocks from which all texts are constructed could be represented in the form of a simple matrix (Figure 4.2): the components function on two levels, the sentential and textual levels. Along another dimension, these components can also be divided into a surface and deep structure. The function of the lexicon is dispersed throughout this matrix.

**Figure 4.2 Elements of text structure**

	Surface	Deep
Sentential	Syntax	Semantics
Textual	Cohesion	Coherence

LEXICON

(Grabe & Kaplan, 1996:63)

At the **sentential level**, knowledge of surface structure syntax and underlying semantics of word meanings and possibilities for combination generate written

language. The **textual level** involves knowledge of language structures as well as overall text structure and notions on relevance writers use in order to convey a sense of text coherence. Grabe and Kaplan (1996) mention that although research suggests that part of text coherence is constructed by the reader's interpretive systems, " ... it is reasonable to assume that the text itself has a considerable role to play in the construction of textual coherence" (Grabe & Kaplan, 1996:69). Cohesion in texts has to do with surface signalling by means of linguistic markers of cohesion that writers use to guide readers towards a coherent interpretation of texts. Coherence, however, while drawing on such signalling devices, involves more than this overt signalling. It also has to do with how the underlying relations between ideas contribute to an overall discourse theme, as well as with logical patterns of text organisation and decisions about emphasis of thematic information and how old and new information are highlighted (cf. Weideman, 1987:43-54).

The functional-use (or interpersonal) element in text construction highlights the relationship between writer and reader that is observable in stylistic choices made by the writer. How do writers, for example, align themselves through the texts they construct with issues such as the personal/impersonal dimension, distance and solidarity, superiority and equality and formality/informality? Non-linguistic knowledge also plays an important role in text construction. Amongst others, issues such as world knowledge, memory, emotion and intention all interact and contribute to how texts are ultimately constructed. This complexity of written text construction calls for a keen sense of observation and application on the part of the writing course designer/teacher in order to align classroom and individual learning opportunities in a way that supports students in their construction of meaningful and coherent texts. This issue will again be addressed in the section on the textual features of academic texts.

Another concern central to text construction is **how features of text as process and text as product interact in the creation of meaningful and acceptable academic texts**. One way in which the issues discussed in 3.3.4 with regard to how the process and product of writing are connected functionally find application in the production of quality academic texts appears to be the principle of re-drafting. I yet need to locate

an academic writer (especially an inexperienced writer) who can eliminate reworking a text any number of times towards increasing meaningfulness and correctness.

Being producers and consumers of academic texts, students are expected to be critics of such texts. They should, therefore, have the ability to be critical readers, not only in the reading of others' texts, but extending such strategies to a critique of their own texts. The ability to revise productively and edit written texts is therefore a key competency that should enable student writers to improve others' as well as their own written texts. The role of reviser and editor of texts is a little different from more general academic reading, in the sense that one does not read only for the purpose of understanding the text, but also with the intention of trying to improve the text with regard to both language fluency and accuracy. One will have to consider carefully how this competency should be introduced and developed in students. A major problem here is the often contrived nature of the classroom. Usually, the need for peer revision of one's writing is determined by real-life, contextualised goals. For example, if the context is one where it is evident that language errors and incoherent argumentation will not be tolerated (e.g. submitting a master's or Ph.D. thesis for final examination), there appears to be a strong motivation to make use of other resources to ensure writing quality. Furthermore, it is uncontroversial that one would choose a resource that one trusts to add value to one's text (for example, a person knowledgeable about the discipline or language, or if you are fortunate, both). In real, purposeful contexts, one does not revise (or ask for it) for the sake of just going through the motions of revision. In the classroom, however, this purposeful motivation for peer revision becomes somewhat artificial in the sense that, apart from not always knowing their fellow students that well, there is a tendency not to trust other students with regard to their judgement. It is therefore not surprising that revision done by peers in the classroom is often perceived as a case of the 'blind leading the blind'. This makes the facilitation of productive revision in a classroom rather problematic. One possible suggestion as to how this problem could be overcome is the use of a peer feedback system where more experienced (senior) students in the same field are used (possibly on a consultative basis) as a soundboard for revision. Such an option has the potential to counter perceptions of students new to university education that other students cannot help them with revising written

texts. What is important though, is that beginning students must be introduced to **productive revision strategies themselves** (and not only rely on requesting revision from others) in terms of revising and editing written texts. This will most probably be a somewhat different issue with postgraduate students, since they are usually aware that other master's and Ph.D. students are supposed to be on the same level with some experience in the discourse (and therefore, writing) of their disciplines. Table 4.1 below includes, in a summarised format, the most important issues that should be considered about students as writers in a tertiary academic context.

**Table 4.1 Important considerations regarding student writers**

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Literacy background               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Previous literacy experiences of new and more advanced students</li> </ul> </li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Writing needs and expectations               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ How do students see their own academic identities in the tertiary environment?</li> <li>➤ What are students' perceptions of their own levels of academic literacy?</li> <li>➤ What do new and more advanced students expect with regard to writing specifically in the tertiary academic environment?</li> </ul> </li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Level of academic literacy and writing ability               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Instrument for determining functional academic literacy levels</li> <li>➤ Strategy for determining academic writing ability specifically</li> <li>➤ Determining language proficiency in the language of learning</li> <li>➤ Distinguishing between primary and additional language users of the language(s) of learning at the institution</li> </ul> </li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Student production of written texts               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Strategy for determining what process students use to produce written texts</li> <li>➤ A model for text production</li> </ul> </li> </ul>

#### 4.2.2 Textual features of academic writing

The second element of the framework above (Figure 4.1) deals with the textual features of and requirements for academic texts.

The **surface (grammatical, stylistic and structural) features** of academic texts have in the past been the focus of numerous writing courses aimed at the development of writing ability. Although it should be clear from the discussion in Chapter 3 that a focus only on such surface characteristics would amount to an impoverished description of what academic discourse actually entails, it remains an important aspect of such a description. The text production model by Grabe and Kaplan (1996) discussed in the previous section highlights the irresponsibility of downplaying the importance of the linguistic knowledge that is necessary in the production of written academic texts. Perhaps the question of **whether** this type of knowledge is necessary is not so much of an issue as is figuring out a productive way for learners to acquire this knowledge. The functional contextualisation of linguistic knowledge, driven by the kinds of meaning that specific language structures create to make appropriate discourse possible in the tertiary context, can provide one possible solution to this problem. Still, one will have to decide whether there is room for the inclusion of any form of explicit grammar teaching in such a framework. If teaching the grammatical aspects of language is desirable, one should decide what form such teaching should take for maximum uptake by students. Should it only be included, for example, in the form of a reference grammar that is provided to students, or should there be active teaching of specific structures used regularly in academic writing? Should one perhaps consider gradually building up such grammatical knowledge by exposure to tasks that are designed to develop such knowledge? Clearly, there are pedagogical issues here that cannot be answered only from a linguistic (including textual) angle.

In addition to an understanding of the types of linguistic knowledge required of writers to construct coherent academic texts, the application of such knowledge should be related to the contextual discourses of different disciplines in a tertiary environment. It is therefore important that a surface feature textual description aimed at the design of writing courses includes a description of the **specific target genres**



(e.g. essays, reports, journal articles, theses) that students are required to produce in a specific discipline. One therefore needs to ascertain what dominant written genres, as well as internal variations on these genres, are expected of students in specific fields. Furthermore, students will be required to produce written texts of a variety of types (e.g. informative, factual, descriptive and argumentative texts) within these genres. For the sake of providing tailor-made courses to specific groups of students, if this is required, one should collect information on these issues in such a way that it could be organised into specific requirements for different fields and disciplines, departments or specific degrees. One therefore needs an information-gathering instrument that would elicit this type of information from those responsible in specific disciplines for conceptualising and assigning writing tasks to students.

Another important aspect of the textual description of academic texts relates to issues of **style, register and general language usage**. Students should be aware what concepts such as style and register refer to, situate them in the tertiary academic context, and be able to identify them in others' as well as their own academic writing. They should further have the ability to contextualise and operationalise their own use of style, register and general academic language not only within the constraints of the general tertiary academic environment, but also within the unique parameters of their own academic disciplines. Because this touches on an issue that has a tendency to differ across disciplines (and sometimes within disciplines with regard to different academic subjects, for example), it will be of central importance to create an **awareness of the flexibility of these issues**, and that students should have a repertoire of available strategies and language knowledge at their disposal in order to adapt or adjust to the requirements of such specific contexts. In order to accomplish this, students should clearly develop an ability to assess correctly the requirements of specific contexts.

A textual description will further have to take into account the **structural features of textual organisation** (macro organisation) and how this could become part of the language knowledge of student writers at university. Do students, for example, understand the general progression of academic texts from introduction to conclusion, and that specific genres might differ with regard to what types of issues are included

in them and how they are organised? Are they aware of how content and argument are expressed and developed within such structures? A number of functional descriptions regarding the development of ideas have been proposed in the form of broad distinctions between 'theme' and 'rheme', 'given' and 'new' information, etc. (see Martin & Rose, 2001 and Grabe & Kaplan, 1996 for an overview). These strategies towards the development of text coherence have already been applied with great success in a number of contexts in education. To this end, Grabe and Kaplan (1996) provide an extremely useful overview of research specifically aimed at tracing such development. Table 4.2 below includes salient issues that should be taken into account in a focus on the textual features of academic writing.

**Table 4.2 Textual features of academic writing**

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Different genres and text types               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ What are the dominant genres and text types used in different disciplines?</li> </ul> </li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Structural, stylistic and language use features of academic writing               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ What are the structural, stylistic and language use features of academic discourse – what are specific requirements in different disciplines?</li> </ul> </li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Argumentation               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ How are arguments structured and what counts as evidence in specific disciplines?</li> </ul> </li> </ul>

#### 4.2.3 The reader of student texts

The third element in the framework proposed in Figure 4.1 above concerns the audience for whom the academic writing is being done.

Apart from being readers of academic texts themselves, students' written texts are read by peers and most importantly, by their lecturers/supervisors. In the case of postgraduate students, they might also have the opportunity to write for a wider academic audience in the production of articles for academic journals. The one common denominator of this group of readers is, however, that they are all expected to be academically inclined and probably to share important ideas and conventions as to what an academic text should be. An element of the framework under discussion that needs clarification is the **mismatch that often exists between reader and writer expectations** of academic writing in this context. One possible way to accomplish this is by raising both writer and reader awareness about the other's expectations. Although it has been a tendency in the past to think that only student writers should live up to the expectations of their lecturers and supervisors, more recent work in critical approaches to writing suggests that it is just as important for lecturers and supervisors to be aware of student writers' expectations and needs with regard to writing in a context that is often alien and unsettling to them, especially with reference to the power relations that exist in this context. Although critical literacy focuses our attention on the potentially oppressive facets of writing in a tertiary context, it has generally not provided practical approaches that could be used in developing students' confidence, critical abilities and proficiency (Weideman, 2007; Lillis, 2003). Nevertheless, since these critical approaches make a valid point, it is crucial that an approach to literacy and writing development includes strategies that create a context that will allow for the positive construction of students' academic identities.

Another final issue for which the framework accounts is the **feedback** student writers receive from their lecturers/supervisors regarding the written texts they produce. Student writers in our current set of undergraduate (EOT 162) and postgraduate (EOT 300) academic writing courses at the UP often remark that they receive confusing messages from lecturers/supervisors. Too often, such messages are unhelpful to assist them in understanding what they are doing wrong. This sometimes has an unsettling effect that might hamper their further production of written texts. The type and quality of feedback provided by both subject lecturers as well as writing instructors can go a long way in supporting student writers to become more proficient academic writers in specific disciplines. Two connected issues are at stake in the provision of

feedback. Where **revision** tends to focus primarily on improving ideas, information flow and argumentation, **editing** is usually associated with error correction. In practice, however, it is difficult to separate these issues, since incorrect language use regularly leads to muddled ideas. Although research findings on the effectiveness of error correction appear to be largely inconclusive (Lee, 2003), there is some support for the positive effect of indirect feedback (e.g. only indicating the place of errors rather than directly correcting them), and dealing with error patterns regarding selective (as opposed to comprehensive) error feedback (Lee, 2003:3). My personal experience is that indirect error feedback that is accompanied by individual consultation has a positive effect on the production of specific error types as well as the error frequency of first year and postgraduate students. When lecturers/writing instructors provide feedback on students' written work, it is therefore essential to have strategies in place that will ensure that the educator knows whether the student found the feedback useful and can do something productive in the way of improving the text using the feedback. In order to create a context where students get consistent feedback, one could, for example, strongly consider making use of a standard set of revision and editing symbols and make details of these available to students. Furthermore, one could make use of general class discussions as well as interviews with individual students, for example, after a more substantial written assignment has been marked, focusing on what type of feedback they found most valuable. In addition, one would do well in noticing what type of feedback students respond to in a consistent manner when they redraft their written texts, after having received feedback from lecturers/supervisors. The main point, however, is not to have inflated expectations of long-term, sustained development of language ability as a result of error correction or feedback. While students may in the short term find it possible to eliminate errors and even types of errors on which they have received feedback, they may not always be able to sustain this. The reason for this kind of 'back-sliding' which is the bane of many a teacher's feedback, is of course that students may not be at the right developmental stage to learn the language component or structure at which the feedback is directed. Table 4.3 below summarises the above discussion in tabular form.

**Table 4.3 Readers of student writing**

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Expectations and requirements of readers           <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ What are reader expectations and requirements of undergraduate and postgraduate students with regard to the written texts they produce?</li> </ul> </li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Attitudes towards students in the academic environment           <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ How do lecturers support students to be initiated into the academic culture and in forming their academic identities?</li> </ul> </li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Feedback on student writing           <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ What type of feedback do lecturers provide on student writing?</li> <li>➤ Do educators have strategies in place to ensure the effectiveness of feedback?</li> </ul> </li> </ul>

#### 4.2.4 Institutional factors influencing the development of writing ability

The framework under discussion here also emphasises the importance of institutional factors and conditions that either promote or constrain the development of writing ability. It will, for example, probably be difficult to get support for initiatives that attempt to develop writing ability in a context where there is **little awareness of or understanding for the literacy problems of students**. A critical awareness about the literacy problems of students and prevailing thinking about the value of academic literacy and writing development will ultimately influence the amount of support and assistance for developmental initiatives. Thus, amongst others, an initial survey (such as the survey proposed in this study), that stimulates lecturing staff to consider literacy and writing matters carefully, can contribute much to raise awareness of academic literacy. Ideally, developmental literacy and writing initiatives should be embraced by the whole institution. One will therefore have to determine how much the institution is prepared to invest in such enterprises, as well as what existing (and potential) resources are available for such development. Is it, for example, an institution where both academic staff and students are aware of and act positively towards the negotiation and active promotion of the disciplinary academic literacies of

students? What is the nature of the institutional culture regarding academic literacy into which students are initiated?

It has already been highlighted that it would be unwise to attempt literacy development in isolation from the rest of an institution. The framework therefore further proposes that one makes provision for **specific strategies that emphasise a productive, continuous interaction between writing course developers/lecturers and faculty/departmental staff** on the most appropriate writing intervention for their students. A strategy of collaboration is vital in this context to the extent that it provides for building a positive working relationship with faculty staff, but even more important for keeping abreast of developments and changes with regard to the academic literacy and writing ability required of students. A joint effort in addressing literacy and writing problems in particular is potentially more valuable than the efforts of the writing/literacy expert alone. A study by Butler (1999) documents the willingness of a group of engineering lecturers to become involved in the language development of their students. In this survey, 87% of a group of engineering lecturers at a tertiary institution indicated that they were prepared to collaborate with English language specialists in addressing the language difficulties experienced by their students. Although the willingness of subject specialists to address their students' literacy problems will probably depend to a large extent on their awareness of such problems as well as their attitudes towards supporting their students in this regard, Butler's findings show that, contrary to general perception at the time, these specific subject specialists were acutely aware of their students' difficulties and prepared to address these in a collaborative manner.

A close collaboration between literacy (and writing) specialists and other subject specialists also has the potential to create a context where **subject specialists might be persuaded to assume some of the responsibility for the literacy and writing needs of their students**. Such a context approximates a situation that Zamel (1998) refers to as 'writing-across-the-curriculum' where "the entire academic community assumes the responsibility of teaching reading, writing and critical approaches" (Zamel, 1998:193).

If one subscribes to the notion that a wider, institutional approach to the development of academic literacy and writing would be most appropriate for a specific context, this has important implications for all educators at such an institution. Within this perspective, one will have to give consideration to a number of issues that have received prominence in the literature in recent years. Some of these issues have emerged as more intense interpretations of the interaction between students and lecturing staff. For example, a strong institutional awareness about academic literacy has the potential to lead to **educator introspection about their own literacy and writing practices and the quality of written texts they themselves produce**. Limerick (1998) argues, for example, that one cannot in all fairness expect of students to write clearly and concisely if their models, the lecturers, write confusingly. Along similar lines, Leibowitz (2000:15) mentions that:

Lecturers can benefit in terms of their own writing development by facilitating the writing of their students, and students will definitely benefit if their lecturers have interrogated their own writing practices, and are able to share these, where appropriate, with their students.

One of the aims of collaboration is to involve a wider spectrum of educators in the development of literacy and writing at tertiary institutions. It is, however, also an attempt to **simplify the task of literacy educators**. For example, if a sufficient level of awareness and collaboration is established at an institution, one could attempt to establish a database where all lecturers at the institution provide concise information on the literacy requirements of the specific courses they teach when decisions are made about the teaching of such courses for the new academic year. Such information could be invaluable for designing appropriate academic literacy and writing courses. At the University of Pretoria, such information could, for example, be linked to an already-existing information eliciting instrument such as the Higher Education Management Information Systems (HEMIS) documents that each lecturer at the University (and other universities nationally) must complete every year. These documents ordinarily focus on the specific courses presented by lecturers as well as the type of offering, credits awarded and so on. If the academic literacy information required of lecturers could focus on a limited number of prominent issues and, as a result, not place a heavy burden on them to provide such information, responses to

such an instrument could supply a continuous, up-to-date source of information that provides literacy specialists with the latest literacy requirements from different departments and faculties at an institution. The main issues of this section are put together in Table 4.4 below.

**Table 4.4 Institutional demands and constraints**

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What is the institutional <b>level of awareness</b> about the literacy and writing difficulties of students?</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How can productive <b>institutional collaboration</b> on literacy development be established and sustained?           <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Are other lecturers prepared to accept some <b>responsibility for the literacy development</b> of their students?</li> <li>➤ How aware are <b>lecturers about their own literacy practices</b> and how these impact on their students?</li> </ul> </li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How can institutional <b>structures be used to simplify and support</b> the role of literacy and writing course designers with regard to the collection of vital information?</li> </ul>

#### 4.2.5 Approach to teaching and learning writing

A fifth element of the framework proposed in Figure 4.1 above concerns the approach one should take to teaching and learning writing. A number of these approaches have been discussed in Chapter 3. Such approaches are often connected to specific time periods in which their history and connectivity are highlighted. So can one, for example, trace the history of writing development on a broad timeline that commences with the product approach which placed emphasis on the written text as product. As we have noted above, the process approach mainly originated as reaction to the inadequacies of the product approach, and in turn gave rise to the social constructivist approach in its criticism of the overemphasis in the process approach on the writing process and its neglect of the social context in which writing is done. Critical literacy, in turn, focuses mainly on the power relations that are sustained



through language use in the tertiary context. It is important to note, however, that there is an inherent danger in historical descriptions, because 'dated' is sometimes associated with 'no longer good' in the academic environment. Apart from the inclination to concentrate primarily on recent information on issues, one could also fall into the trap of assuming that everything connected to a specific approach is worthless because of strongly held ideological beliefs that are regularly shaped by extreme reactions to opposing points of view. The argument here is that one should not judge hastily when considering debates on past research and arguments about the teaching and learning of writing (or language/literacy, for that matter). Even past research that has been heavily criticised at the time might be useful in specific current contexts. A judicious stance would be to consider all approaches with regard to their potential contribution to the teaching and learning of writing in the possible contexts in which they might be employed. A good example is Krashen's (1982; 1985) Monitor Theory (MT) of the 1980s. Although some of his hypotheses have been criticised extensively, I believe that there is a case to be made for the function (and potential development) of an internal language monitor that enables language learners to notice their own language errors at specific stages of interlanguage development, and to correct such mistakes. Such a language-monitoring faculty is one of the literacy abilities that one would wish to develop in students towards becoming more proficient academic writers. Although there are other resources that could be exploited by students in ensuring the final correctness of their written texts, having the ability to correct others' as well as one's own texts empowers students in the sense that they do not always have to depend on the judgements of others who supposedly know better. Monitoring someone else's as well as one's own language use would, however, be very difficult without an adequate knowledge of the language in question. The implications for the teaching and learning of academic writing are obvious when one considers the central importance of strategies such as self-revision and editing in the process of writing.

At this point it is clear, though, that one cannot ignore that **experienced academic writers make use of some kind of process in their production of academic texts.** Any approach to the teaching and learning of writing will have to consider how a process of writing can best be facilitated in a writing course. It is important to note

that the description and practical implementation of a writing process in class should be flexibly designed so that it can make provision for learners with different needs, capabilities and writing styles. As Coffin, Curry, Goodman, Hewings, Lillis, and Swann (2003) note:

... not all stages [of a writing process] will be necessary for all students or in all contexts and some of the stages can occur simultaneously (Coffin *et al.*, 2003:42).

Apart from theoretical and practical considerations for the facilitation of a writing process, the selection of an approach (or a combination of approaches) for the development of writing will to some extent be guided by institutional practicalities and conditions. The one-on-one writing consultation that is currently so prevalent in the approach of many writing centres at tertiary institutions is an excellent example of how institutional constraints affect possible approaches to the development of writing. The resources (as well as specific beliefs about the development of academic literacy and more particularly, writing) of the institution will to a large extent determine whether this type of individualised writing intervention is feasible or not. Consequently, although theoretically the one-on-one writing consultation may potentially offer the most productive environment for writing development, the implementation of such an approach in its purest form may be nearly impossible in practical terms. Parkerson (2000:122) notes, however, that practical arrangements such as these do not have to be exclusionary, and suggests that although one-on-one writing consultation has developed within a specific context (mostly that of the writing centre), the same principles can also be used effectively in the tutoring or lecturing context.

A related factor that may play a role in the amount of individual attention that student writers can be afforded, is the **prevailing perception of the scale of writing problems at the institution**. The problems might be perceived to be so pervasive that the accompanying thinking never really allows for a situation of quality individualised attention to students. In other words, there may be so many students displaying an inadequate writing ability that attention to students' individual needs is considered to be totally unrealistic in the context. The question that remains in such a situation is: what type of course could add value in the development of the writing

ability of large groups of students? Although one could make use of peer revision of student writing in this context, it is clear that the successful implementation of a writing process might not be as easy or effective in a large group context. It is further apparent that this context requires an approach that would create opportunities for individualised communicative interaction (in this case mediated through the medium of written texts) that should be guided and monitored at a very intensive level.

Fortunately, institutional perspectives and conditions can be changed. So, for example, if a writing centre does not yet exist at a tertiary institution, the establishment thereof should be possible in principle. One has to decide, however, whether the potential gains are substantial enough to warrant such an effort, also taking into consideration that it might involve considerable financial implications.

The framework also stresses the **possible tutoring options relating to the practicalities of teaching writing for different levels of study**. One often finds that the resources required (with regard to the number of competent staff as well as available time) for intensive writing development exceed that of 'normal' lecturing in a tertiary context. A situation where there is little understanding of the nature of writing development can potentially have a negative impact on the usefulness of writing interventions, since quality writing intervention is usually a labour and time intensive endeavour. Although such a lack of understanding can be addressed over time, one still needs to find creative and practical ways of providing the best possible opportunity to students for developing their writing ability within such constraints.

Considering the wide spectrum of students that may possibly need writing support in tertiary education, it would be fair to say that the quality of writing expected from postgraduate students is non-negotiable, since academic texts as final product generally receive far greater attention in postgraduate studies as compared to undergraduate studies. It would also not be contentious to claim that in reality, where it seems easier for muddled writing to slip through at undergraduate level, the control measures (e.g. personal supervision, external examination) usually built into postgraduate studies are not supposed to allow weak academic writing to be accepted at this level. Regarding their level of writing ability, however, it is risky to assume

that postgraduate students will be more familiar than undergraduate students with the writing conventions of both their disciplines, and of writing in a tertiary academic environment, as a result of their more extensive exposure to this environment. A similar kind of assumption is that because one supposedly deals with more accomplished students at postgraduate level regarding their general academic ability, such competence necessarily extends to their ability to engage in quality writing in a tertiary academic environment. As has been previously mentioned, part of the initial impetus for commencing with this research was the concern of a number of postgraduate supervisors at the UP about the poor level of writing ability of their postgraduate students. With regard to the context described above, it appears as if the need for writing intervention at postgraduate level is immediate and intense. While the academic writing demands placed on students at undergraduate level are generally not that extreme, probably because they are perceived to be largely inexperienced writers in the tertiary context anyway and have time to develop this ability, the same lenience is not usually exercised at postgraduate level. These students are expected to be able to write meaningful and correct texts from the start. The conceptualisation of a writing course for postgraduate students will have to take into account the immediacy and urgency of their writing needs and, as a consequence, how writing support would be best facilitated in this context regarding possible tutoring options that will offer appropriate writing support.

**Table 4.5 An approach to writing development**

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What is the most <b>contextually appropriate approach</b> (or combination) to be used for writing development?</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What will be the most productive way of introducing a <b>writing process</b> to students?</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How can <b>individual attention be maximised</b> within current practical constraints?           <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ What are the <b>possible tutoring options</b> available for the development of writing – how do these suit the specific context?</li> <li>➤ How does the <b>study level of students</b> affect possible tutoring options?</li> </ul> </li> </ul>

#### **4.2.6 The development of writing course materials**

The final element of the framework proposed in Figure 4.1 concerns the development of writing course materials. Although the development of these materials can be seen as a culmination of the effects/influence of all the different elements of this framework, such development is also recursive in nature. In other words, materials should be regarded as the dynamic end product of an intensive process of investigation of matters related to the context and nature of academic writing, but should also be scrutinised constantly regarding what effect such materials have on the development of students' writing ability. In this regard, the question about what type(s) of materials would best facilitate the development of writing will depend to some extent both on the subjective awareness and observational capabilities of writing educators and course designers, and on the objective measurements of such development that can be made.

In short, the development of relevant materials will have to account for important considerations already comprehensively discussed in this chapter regarding the writer, the written text, the reader, institutional conditions and the theoretical and practical considerations of one's approach towards the development of writing ability. Whereas the first three aspects mainly involve a data gathering exercise, one's approach involves a dynamic interpretation of theoretical and practical considerations regarding the most productive way of facilitating writing development. Within the context of the approach proposed in this framework, one will have to consider, in the development of materials, aspects of text as product (with the accompanying principles of appropriateness and correctness), the writing process, the social context of academic writing, as well as an awareness of how power relations are articulated in, and affect the production of academic texts.

Although content-based and subject-specific models have been employed for many years in the teaching of language proficiency type courses, one should ask oneself whether this is a feasible option within the specific context of the development of writing ability. A university presents a context where a large number of different courses are presented to students. Academic staff working within support initiatives

have to make realistic decisions about whether it is practically possible to design literacy and writing courses that cater for the needs of specific disciplines. Are specialised courses sustainable, for example, when one considers the extensive revision that often accompanies such courses in their continuing relevance to changing needs? It is, however, well known that students are not usually motivated enough to engage in learning activities whose immediate relevance or importance they cannot see. It is therefore crucial that whatever materials are presented to students, such materials should be relevant to their studies, as well as engage their interest.

Another important principle that is closely allied to the degree of specificity of writing courses is how authentic these materials are with regard to what is expected in a university context. One could argue, for instance, that all students should be able to control a generic competency such as arguing in an academically accepted way. However, an issue such as argumentation may differ across disciplines with regard to, for example, what types of evidence are acceptable for specific fields. The question is, therefore, how close one prefers a writing course to be aligned with the actual content and way of reasoning in specific disciplines. Should materials be used that **only approximate the generic types** of academic writing tasks that students are expected to perform in general, or should the topics, texts and writing task types themselves also be taken from the very courses that are specific to the discipline? Obviously, in the context of a one-on-one writing consultation, the materials will to a large extent include the texts produced by student writers in specific subjects. In such a case, the actual consultation is best supported with input provided by specialist writing consultants on the principles of academic writing as well as discipline-specific writing conventions. In a context where this individualised model is not feasible and groups of students attend writing development sessions together, the issue of providing relevant materials is obviously more complex. Where writing tutors from specific disciplines are used in individualised consultation, one expects them to be well-versed in the writing conventions of those disciplines. This, however, is not necessarily the case with generalist writing lecturers/tutors who facilitate writing courses for large groups of students (these groups not necessarily being homogenous regarding specific disciplines or subject fields). In such a case the compromise could be to focus on generic principles of academic discourse, and, if students' writing

assignments from other subjects could be used, to provide feedback on such principles and not necessarily on the quality of the content. Depending on the context, it should therefore be possible to make use of more generic material (in the sense of a broader distinction between, for example, natural sciences type texts, social sciences and economic sciences texts that are not highly technical) in order to facilitate the acquisition of knowledge and abilities about the broad principles and characteristics of academic discourse.

Depending on students' familiarity with the context of tertiary academic literacy, materials should also be developed in such a way that progression in such materials **connects to students' past literacy contexts**. In the case of students new to the tertiary academic environment, for example, one could expect a relative unfamiliarity with conventions in the tertiary context, and one would do well in guiding students from the literacies that are familiar to them (that of the secondary school environment, for example) to what the tertiary academic context requires of them. The incorporation of the concept of **genre** into a writing course has the potential to create an environment where one can tangibly connect to students' past literacies in terms of establishing a connection between familiar genres and those of the tertiary environment. The argument is further that, by introducing students to the written genres of academic discourse through a set of writing tasks based on such genres, we create a familiarity with their conventions. The crucial issue is, therefore, the potential authenticity of genre-based tuition, and, hence, its relevance to students.

Writing materials and task types should enable students to **engage with information on a much deeper level than merely regurgitating memorised facts**. In this context, Grabe and Kaplan (1996) discuss two types of production strategies – information telling and information transforming – that are used by inexperienced and experienced writers respectively. It is typically the second type, information transforming, that is increasingly valued as students proceed through to the postgraduate level at university. Although information telling is also required at tertiary level, it is the latter of the two strategies that enables students to engage in real problem-solving behaviour in their construction of personal interpretations of information.

Another important feature of materials is that, based on a process of writing, they should show a progression that **foregrounds writing activities which emphasise the recursive nature of such a process**. This recursive principle is activated from the start in the initial prewriting and planning stages through to gathering and analysing information, the synthesis of information and how this interacts with the writer's own perceptions and opinions in constructing an argument, and the production of the first formal draft of an assignment with all its subsequent revisions. The ability to revise constructively as a way to revisit previous ideas and hypotheses is crucial in such a context. As has been stated before, it would be unwise to assume that students already control adequate revision strategies. A writing course should make provision for ample training and practice in, for example, doing peer reviewing, be it at undergraduate or postgraduate level.

Ultimately, materials for writing development will be activated in the context of the classroom, tutorial session or individual consultation. The **manner in which such contexts are managed by writing educators** will influence the potential for constructive writing development in these environments. Apart from issues such as interest and relevance of materials, it will depend on the writing instructor/consultant to create and sustain an affective environment in which students feel secure and are prepared to take risks without the possibility of being ridiculed. Parkerson (2000:122) advocates very strongly that affect is crucial in the language learning process, and that students should feel as comfortable as possible in the learning situation. One should therefore be aware that learning contexts that are intimidating (including materials that are too challenging) to students would probably not be very effective in getting them to produce language. Even more important, students might not be very willing to reflect on their own language use in contexts that appear risky and of possible detriment to their self-image. Hence, one should carefully consider the effects of error correction masquerading as 'feedback', and the possible negative effect of inhibiting students' language production. The risk for students is obviously that of losing face. The way that learners avoid such risk is by sharply curbing production, which is exactly the opposite of what a course in developing academic writing has as its main purpose: the production of more, not less, writing. Again, this points to the adoption of a selective approach as to which aspects should be addressed in the



provision of feedback. The following issues have been highlighted in the previous discussion:

**Table 4.6 Materials development**

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How do the <b>elements of the framework interact</b> in the production of appropriate materials?</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How <b>specific and authentic</b> should materials be?</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How can materials draw on students' <b>past literacy experiences</b>?</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How can writing materials support a <b>strategy of information transformation</b>?</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How should materials be structured to emphasise the <b>recursive nature of the writing process</b>?</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What is the role of <b>student affect</b> in the design of materials as well as in how learning activities are facilitated in developmental situations?</li> </ul>

### 4.3 Conclusion

This chapter has proposed an integrated framework, consisting of six focuses, that should enable writing course designers and teachers to create meaningful learning opportunities towards the development of student writing. However, the context in which we try to make a difference is so diverse in terms of students' needs and the contextual requirements for writing that I tend to agree with Johns (2005) that:

... we now know that language and textual demands can never be predictable. Every classroom can have different goals, different content, or require different genres. Therefore, our most significant contribution to our students' academic growth seems to be consciousness-raising, encouraging students to research rhetorical contexts so that they can be flexible, goal-directed writers (Johns, 2005:12).

It therefore appears as if the ultimate success of what we do as writing educators will depend on our ability to convince our students of the crucial importance of literacy and writing for academic success, and to foster analytical and critical minds that are

capable of assessing contextual requirements for the production of appropriate academic texts.

The following chapter (and the rest of this study) focuses on an application of the framework discussed here. Since there appears to be an urgent and immediate need for postgraduate writing support at the UP, I have decided to make this group of writers the focus for the implementation of the framework. Chapter 5 reports the results of a general survey that was conducted with postgraduate supervisors at the UP on the literacy and writing requirements of their students.