CHAPTER 10 A proposal for the development of academic writing course materials for the study group

10.1 Introduction

Important issues related to academic literacy and writing have been highlighted in Chapters 2 and 3 and these, in turn, informed the development of the framework in Chapter 4. Specific issues proposed by the framework necessitated empirical investigation, and the results of these investigations are reported in Chapters 5-8. Chapter 9 relates the most prominent and useful findings in these sections to how they impact on writing course design. This chapter then represents a culmination of the rest of the study in the sense that it takes into account the insights and information collected through the literature survey, as well as the empirical investigations, in order to make practical suggestions for writing course materials for the specific study group of postgraduate students.

With regard to the proposed framework specifically, there are a number of focuses (cf. Chapter 4) that should be considered in a **comprehensive approach to the design of writing course materials at university level.** An important principle in this approach is the interconnected nature of these focuses. Therefore, the writing materials that are eventually developed for a specific group of students will be strongly influenced by issues related to the identity of the writers, the types of texts they are required to produce, the primary readers (and assessors) of their writing, as well as the results of the contact with additional parties involved with/impacting on the students' writing. Additionally, issues relating to institutional constraints and opportunities, as well as one's approach to the development of writing, will shape the writing materials designed in this context. This chapter therefore attempts to account also for how the requirements and principles addressed in the application of the framework in Chapter 4 may be practically translated into suggestions for writing practice for the group of students from Agriculture.

It should be noted that although the **comprehensive approach** proposed by this study may be justifiable in theory, and while this study shows that it is practicable to

approach the development of writing course materials in this manner, one of the possible limitations of applying this approach is that, in practice, it may be time consuming. One would thus have to consider realistically how much of the approach proposed by this study could be accomplished at the beginning of the year for a number of possibly different groups of students. However, once a basic understanding of the literacy requirements of specific disciplines has been achieved, this foundation may be used in the development of writing courses for subsequent groups of writers in these disciplines, depending on continuous and productive contact with lecturers/supervisors in such disciplines. This study has, to a large extent, created such a platform for Agriculture. It has, in addition, provided a point of departure for a similar process to be pursued in the writing development of postgraduate students from diverse disciplines throughout the University by means of the general supervisor survey.

It is further apparent at this point that even in the case of aiming for the development of discipline specific writing materials, a degree of generalisation will be inevitable initially. One would, therefore, have to rely on general trends in the data on student needs as well as reader requirements. A basic discipline-specific writing intervention would thus be based on salient, generic difficulties and writing requirements for the group. In other words, one will have to utilise a basic generic core of issues to be addressed in the course. Depending on the size of student groups and, as a consequence, the time that may be spent on writing consultation with individual students, core issues may be adjusted and augmented (and other issues introduced) in order to address the needs of specific individuals in a group of students – an issue that can be addressed in a scenario where one deals with individual students in one-on-one writing consultation. The potential use of such a basic course for subsequent groups of writers in the same discipline will obviously be determined by collecting the same type of information as was done in this study, and deciding on this basis whether drastic changes are necessary to the materials that constitute the course. It will clearly also depend on the feedback one receives about the value of the course, once implemented, from both students and supervisors in conjunction with the writing lecturer's observations on student progress, and how, after having worked with the writing tasks in class, such tasks may be adjusted to have the optimum impact on student development.

In general, what one would wish to accomplish through adequate writing course materials is to **develop students' functional literacy abilities** while, at the same time, also **raise awareness about disciplinary conventions and features of academic discourse**. It is crucial in this context that a writing course for these students should have real potential in making a contribution in developing their writing ability, but also that one does not create inflated expectations of what may be accomplished in such a course. In other words, one's expectations should take into account the realities of the context in which students write, as well as the realities of language and writing development. For example, since it is generally accepted that this kind of development takes time, it would be wise not to create the impression that a writing course is the ultimate answer in solving the academic literacy woes of supervisors regarding their students. One should, therefore, be careful in not creating expectations that would be impossible to meet, but rather focus on what may be achieved realistically over a year. It would, for example, be inane to suggest to supervisors that a writing course would make students fully proficient users of English. Although one would hope that better basic English proficiency will be a result of the writing course, it is well known that any number of other variables may influence such a result. In any case, rather than attempting to 'remedy' students' basic language proficiency at this juncture, it might be more important to **create a heightened awareness of the central role of language and writing specifically in the tertiary context**, and to provide students with opportunities to develop strategies that would enable them to become **flexible, life long language learners that can adjust to the demands and requirements of different contexts**. To accomplish this, students will have to be aware that no one set of requirements exists for academic writing at the University, and that they should strive to discover as quickly as possible those requirements that hold for any specific context.

The approach followed from the outset in this study is that literacy/writing specialists cannot work in isolation in the design of writing interventions for students. This proposal for the design of writing course materials therefore forms part of a comprehensive strategy that proposes regular contact with supervisors discussing student needs, supervisor requirements (and possible writing needs), supervisor feedback on writing, as well as the possible implementation of a writing tutor system. If a departmental tutoring system cannot be implemented, one may consider the use of

the academic literacy tutors employed at the UAL, but this would basically amount to an editing service, albeit with explanation of language issues in students' texts. In this regard, a series of meetings/consultations could be arranged with departments in order to negotiate the issues referred to above.

This proposal is, therefore, discipline specific in as far as it considers the specific writing requirements and the needs of postgraduate students of Agriculture in the decisions about such materials. It further makes use of an integrated design regarding two crucial aspects: the integration of academic literacy abilities that finds expression in the employment of a process of writing in developing students' writing ability; and the integration of a number of prominent approaches to the teaching of writing, each emphasising a unique primary focus on a specific aspect of writing development. Of course, the specificity of the proposal in disciplinary terms applies more than anything else to the **content** of the instructional intervention. In terms of its **form**, the course proceeds from a generic, and therefore potentially generalisable starting point. In this way the materials of which examples are given and discussed below entail an accommodation of the indicated specificity (Chapter 9) and the inevitable general nature of any writing intervention.

So far, this study has thus been an attempt at engaging in a responsible and justified approach to the investigation of academic writing in a tertiary academic context. In order to present a more refined notion of this justification with regard to **student learning**, the overarching principle to which such a validation for course design should adhere for any language course, is that it "should make language learning possible in the classroom" (Weideman, 2003a:37). The development of writing course materials will thus have to adhere to principles of course design that are pedagogically responsible and justified so that optimum **learning** opportunities are created for students. Weideman (2003a:15) mentions a number of design criteria (cf. also Nunan, 1991) that should be considered in justifying the tasks one develops in language courses. Although he discusses these criteria in the specific context of communicative language teaching (CLT), one would agree that these criteria have been incorporated into language course design over a wide spectrum, and that they generally hold true for the design of language learning tasks today. The first criterion emphasises the importance of **making use of authentic texts (and tasks)** in the

design of language materials. "It means, therefore, that language teaching must be related as closely as possible to real language use, as well as to the present and prospective needs of the student (Weideman, 2003a:31)" The second criterion refers to the **equal importance of all the different skills** in the development of language, a criterion that is also echoed in a literacy approach that emphasises the integrated nature of different language abilities. This is also the principle Nunan (1991) applies in his acknowledgement of the **interactive nature of language** and that, as a result, language tasks should emphasise communication through interaction. Another important consideration for Nunan is the importance of a **focus on learner needs**. One therefore has to consider learners' needs in terms of their functional language needs, but also their emotional needs in terms of the learning atmosphere in class. Weideman (2003a) suggests a 'stress index' that may be used for determining the level of stressfulness of language learning tasks. Although his criteria in such an index focus on 'beginner' students, he mentions that the criteria could be adjusted easily to make provision for different levels of learners. Responding to these criteria that focus on student affect, language tasks should, as far as possible, make learning free of embarrassment, fear and anxiety. Connected to this issue is the notion that good language learners take risks, and that learners may engage increasingly in such behaviour in situations that are relatively stress free. Regarding the learning atmosphere created in the writing class, one will have to create a careful balance between what is required of students in terms of their writing ability at this level, and the stressfulness of actually producing such texts. Keeping in mind the academic literacy problems of the specific group of learners, it will thus be crucial that writing tasks are 'scaffolded' sufficiently so that students do not feel 'abandoned' in their production of such texts. The fourth criterion focuses on the **information gap activity** that stands central to the design of language tasks. Although this type of activity was developed specifically in the context of communicative language teaching, it is clear that it has enduring relevance in the sense that it enables authentic information transfer between participants in order for the negotiation of meaning to take place. In addition, Weideman mentions two further criteria suggested by Nunan (1991). These involve, firstly, that learning opportunities should enable learners to **focus on not only the language, but also on the language process itself**. The second of these criteria focuses on **what the learners' personal experiences may contribute to learning** in the classroom. It should be evident at this point that some of the criteria

discussed above have not only already been accounted for to varying degrees throughout the study, but in a very real sense bring together the various yardsticks for course design as these are reflected both in the framework discussed above, and in the findings of the empirical part of this study. They will further be employed as barometer for a justification of the materials proposed in the rest of this chapter.

The following section presents a list of the intended outcomes for the writing course, and then discusses each separately with regard to how such outcomes may be achieved through specific writing tasks and materials.

10.2 General aims, critical outcomes and learning outcomes for the course

In this section, the objectives of a comprehensive strategy for writing development are stated in the form of firstly, discussing general aims that do not necessarily form part of the specific writing materials for the course, but need to be addressed as a result of their possible influence on the design of the materials as well as on the implementation and functioning of a writing intervention. Thereafter, the objectives for the writing materials specifically are stated in the form of critical outcomes and learning outcomes, with the subsequent section discussing how such outcomes may be addressed through writing tasks and materials.

Apart form the fact that Outcomes Based Education (OBE) is the accepted educational model for all sectors of education in South Africa and has been so for some time in higher education, the development of objectives for the course in the form of learning outcomes requires one to deal with what students should be able to do practically and functionally with regard to their academic literacy abilities. It is therefore an educational approach that forces one to make justifiable decisions about the development of learner ability and to express elements of such ability in a way that should be measurable on a practical and functional level.

A writing intervention for the study group would thus include the general aims, critical outcomes and learning outcomes mentioned below.

10.2.1 General aims

A comprehensive approach to writing development for the study group aims to:

- Expand the current working relationship with supervisors from Agriculture;
- Create opportunities for supervisors to share their strategies on providing feedback on the writing of their students – initiate contact with supervisors on the development of a standardised feedback system for their students; and
- Support supervisors in the development of their own academic writing ability if requested.

Up to this point, the relationship with supervisors from Agriculture functioned on an *ad hoc* basis with regard to having contact in the beginning of the year when they usually request that their postgraduate students write the literacy test (TALL). After this initial contact, students with risk are directed to the EOT 300 writing course and contact effectively stops. This study would like to propose a more meaningful and productive relationship for future groups of students from this School where the formalised support in determining their students' academic literacy abilities, as well as student views and perceptions of academic literacy and writing, are augmented by work sessions with the supervisors where information is provided to supervisors/lecturers on their students' performance on the literacy test as well as the results of the student questionnaire. One could, therefore, help them to identify the specific academic literacy needs and requirements of students and, as a consequence, raise supervisor awareness about the specific difficulties their students experience with academic literacy.

One could further arrange opportunities where a negotiated system of feedback could be jointly developed for supervisors in the School. This could take the form of supervisors commenting on a specific student text from the discipline (preferably a weak text), which could then be discussed in a work session in order to determine differences in the way supervisors indicate the same issue, as well as differences of opinion about the importance of certain stylistic conventions used in the School. Such

work sessions could typically be promoted as part of staff development sessions, an obligation that all departments at the University are to fulfil.

The interview data suggests that there is an awareness among some supervisors that because they are not mother tongue users of English themselves, they may also benefit personally from contact with writing educators regarding their own writing ability. This contact will obviously influence the quality of support and feedback they could provide to their students. A closer working relationship with supervisors in the School that emphasises academic literacy issues as its main focus may, therefore, also make supervisors more aware of their own writing strategies and as a possible consequence, equip them to better facilitate a process of writing to their students.

10.2.2 Critical outcomes

The course will address the following critical outcomes:

- Identifying and solving problems in which responses indicate that responsible decisions using critical and creative thinking have been made;
- Working effectively with others as a member of a group;
- Communicating effectively in an academic environment using language skills; and
- Collecting, analysing, organising and critically evaluating information.

10.2.3 Learning outcomes

The learning outcomes for the course are the following:

At the end of the writing course, students should be able to:

- Employ their heightened awareness of their own academic literacy and writing abilities in order to seek out actively opportunities and resources for the development of such abilities;

- Apply adequately the knowledge and strategies with regard to the writing requirements of their specific disciplines in their own academic writing practice;
- Engage in writing activity as an integral part of academic literacy by making productive use of writing practised as a process; and
- Make productive (and continuous) use of opportunities for (or guidance as to what resources may be used in) the development of their basic proficiency in English.

10.3 Writing tasks and materials

The following section contains a description of writing materials that may be used towards achieving the learning outcomes for the course, and eventually, the critical outcomes as well. It is important to note that most of the students in the study group have already completed parts of the writing course being proposed. The writing materials suggested in the section that follows, however, serve as an example not only of how writing materials may be designed for subsequent groups of students in the same School and Faculty, but also for student groups from other faculties.

Because this research subscribes to a view of making use of authentic academic tasks (and texts) in the development of writing, it does not support a view of exposing students to isolated, out of context writing exercises that do not contribute as a functional part of an authentic, integrated writing task. Such a strategy would compromise the integrity of the approach proposed here in terms of the integrated and contextual nature of academic literacy ability. The following section will therefore discuss the learning outcomes mentioned above with regard to three integrated writing tasks that serve as examples as to how these outcomes may be addressed adequately.

10.3.1 Support students to become more aware of their personal needs with regard to academic literacy (and writing)

As an information gathering instrument that is to be used in the **placement of students**, an academic literacy test should be administered as early as possible in the

students' studies (preferably even before they have formally commenced with their studies). Once a selection has been made of students who will attend the writing course, sharing the results of the academic literacy test may be instrumental in making students more aware of their literacy needs. It is important then that the results of this instrument are available to students, not only in the form of reading a final score from a list, but also discussed in detail with each student on an individual basis, in order to strengthen the impression of students that their unique needs are important and to emphasise the fact that the specific difficulties that students experience can be addressed productively by a literacy intervention. The heightened awareness that may result from such discussion may also lead students to begin to seek out actively opportunities that are presented in other contexts than the writing class in order to develop the specific abilities identified by the test. In addition, all students should complete the student questionnaire on academic literacy and writing, and their expectations discussed with them individually. Such discussion will help the writing lecturer to focus on the unique background and expectations of individual students, but also has the potential to emphasise certain misgivings students have about literacy and writing in a postgraduate environment.

Connected to the issue mentioned above, it is further suggested that the writing lecturer responsible for this group of students keep a personalised record, a portfolio if you may, of individual students (that includes, for example, test scores, questionnaire results, copies of written texts, etc.) with the purpose of providing individualised attention in consultations. Such a system should enable the writing lecturer not only to determine at which level individual students are with regard to their academic literacy levels at the start of their studies, but also to monitor their progress as they develop their writing ability over time. It is important to realise that in our context, the writing lecturer who presents the course and the course designer may not always be the same person. It would, therefore, be essential for the writing lecturer to have access to all information that was collected about a specific group of students in a specific discipline, and thus to also be aware of the writing requirements of the specific discipline he/she is teaching. Although what has been discussed above does not constitute a writing task *per se*, it is considered an essential exchange between students and the writing lecturer towards raising student awareness about their academic literacy and writing needs.

Furthermore, consistent and appropriate feedback (supported by individual discussions with students about such feedback) on the writing that students produce for the writing course should also result in a stronger awareness of how students' writing needs relate to important writing conventions and conditions in the tertiary academic context.

10.3.2 Make use of writing tasks that would guide students to discover the writing requirements of the specific discipline

10.3.2.1 Investigate the specific writing requirements of the discipline

As was mentioned above, an important point of departure for the kind of writing intervention proposed here is to raise student awareness about their own literacy and writing needs in conjunction with the academic literacy and writing requirements of their disciplines. When translated into the design of a meaningful, integrated writing task, the results of the student questionnaire which contain students' expectations, the results of the supervisor questionnaire that include the requirements of supervisors, as well as the results of a survey task where students need to interview their supervisors about academic literacy and writing, could be shared and compared in class and subsequently be incorporated into a set of writing requirements for the discipline. Making use of this data, students could then be required to produce a short research report on the requirements for academic writing.

Regarding the student interviews with their supervisors (see Figure 10.1, Task 1 below), this specific section of the writing task requires students to initiate contact with their supervisors (or lecturers teaching on a tutored postgraduate course) on specific issues in academic literacy and writing. The social and contextual situatedness of academic writing is thus emphasised by the information seeking strategies (which essentially amounts to students negotiating writing requirements with supervisors) employed by this task. The task attempts to get students to determine what is required specifically of them in their disciplinary writing contexts and connecting such requirements to their own expectations. Practically, students could be given guidance on which issues to address in the interview (see Task 1.1 below). These may include, for example, specific stylistic matters such as the use of

personalised writing and which specific system of referencing they should use, and will essentially foreground assessment in terms of students finding out from supervisors what they value in academic writing (students will further be encouraged throughout the course to explore with supervisors/lecturers the exact requirements of specific writing assignments they need to complete for their studies). After having conducted the interviews, the group can negotiate during a class discussion what the most prominent writing conventions appear to be in respective disciplines within the School (see Task 1.2 below). Ideas could be refined with the assistance of the writing lecturer, be combined into a comprehensive set of requirements (Task 1.3) and students requested to write up the combined and integrated data in the form of a short research report (Task 1.5).

One would also, however, like to introduce students to a strategy of peer revision and editing as early as possible in the writing course. Keeping in mind that most of the students will probably be relatively inexperienced peer revisers and editors, it would be unwise to expect of them to engage in a peer-revision task without any guidance at this point. It is thus suggested that students are supported by means of a task (Task 1.4) that mediates between the information collected on writing requirements and students' production of the research report (where they will be required to revise and edit one another's reports). The proposed scaffolding task may take the form of providing students with a short, authentic written text (taken from the previous year's assignments) and requesting their critique of this text for the next class session. A specific requirement for this task would be that students need to apply selectively only one of the three focus areas (see Task 1.3) used as organising principle in the compilation of the integrated requirements that were negotiated during the class discussion. Students thus have to critique the text regarding its content (ideas) and structure. The main reason for this selective focus is that one cannot, in all fairness, expect of students to comment adequately on language correctness or, for that matter, correct academic style this early in the course. Their first introduction to revision and editing should, therefore, be restricted to commenting on the ideas (e.g. claims that are unsubstantiated) and structure of the text. In other words, the first peer revision task should attempt to focus on the quality and relevance of the ideas (meaning) first. A subsequent (surface editing) task may then emphasise surface issues regarding language and style (correctness).

This matter is, however, not as uncomplicated as the above contention may imply, since the meaning of ideas is sometimes obscured by incorrect language use (Parkerson, 2000). For example, the incorrect use of words and incorrect word order in writing have greater potential in obscuring meaning than for instance, errors in concord and article use. Inevitably, instances will thus arise in a discussion of the text where one will have to comment on grammatical problems in as far as they conceal the meaning of ideas. As stated before, other grammatical issues that do not have such a direct impact on meaning could form part of a later surface editing exercise. It is also important, however, that one does not confine students in this regard by taking away naturally occurring learning opportunities in class sessions. Therefore, if they do notice surface language errors, they may, of course, indicate them (and one may discuss them at this point). It is also important that the text one uses for this task have some rather obvious structural and argumentation problems (e.g. repetition of ideas; unsubstantiated claims; irrelevant ideas; etc.). Considering mistakes with language and style, one may opt for selecting a number of issues in the text that are prominent problems in the students' writing, and focus on these rather than discussing the mistakes in the text comprehensively. As noted previously in this study, although studies on error correction are largely inconclusive at this point, some do suggest that selective attention to specific aspects of language could have a positive effect on student uptake of grammatical and stylistic issues.

This writing task should also be a good opportunity to introduce students to a **system of revision and editing symbols** that they need to use in what they indicate about texts they will be required to assess. This set of correction symbols should be limited initially to include only aspects that focus on the issues concerning ideas mentioned above (Task 1.4 below). In the subsequent discussion about their revision of this text, one could physically go through the text with students (on transparency) and make use of the correction symbols (and indicate them as such in the text on the overhead for students to see), as students identify what they see as problematic in the text. Regarding problems concerning language and style, a useful strategy may be to focus on a limited number of prominent language problems identified by the text analysis, to explain these to students and to ask them to attempt to identify these errors in the text on the transparency (see Addendum E for an error correction scheme that may be used in this regard).

It should be noted that this task serves the function of **introducing** students to peer revision and editing in order to get them started. The ultimate aim of this strategy is that students may get so used to commenting on others' writing (and receiving comment), that they would of their own accord seek out opportunities for offering their own writing to somebody else to comment on. Whether students will engage in such strategies out of their own accord will depend to some extent on whether they find the feedback of their peers (and any other resources) valuable in improving their writing, which obviously implies the judicious selection of such resources. In essence, this study suggests that a system of revision and editing used by students for peer revision and editing, as well as the system of feedback that the writing lecturer, supervisors and possibly a writing tutor use, emphasises the construction of meaning first before focusing on surface language errors that do not impact as severely on meaning.

Students will further be given guidance as to the structure of the research report, and as a next step be required to physically write the research report (Task 1.5) and then to have it revised and edited by a writing partner from the group (they would already have had the introductory experience to revision and editing discussed above). After receiving back their texts from their writing partners, students will also have the opportunity to make the changes they wish to their texts (and also make use of outside resources such as the writing tutor) before the final submission of these.

This writing task already introduces students to one type of data – that collected through conducting interviews and administering questionnaires – considered important in the School, as well as their interpretation thereof (a discussion of the data will also focus on students' ability to judge the strength of this kind of evidence). The writing task discussed above thus has the potential to create a sense of immediate relevance regarding the materials dealt with in the course. In addition, part of the justification for the task is to be found in that it is a typical task in which students have to seek information, process such information and then produce information on the basis of what they have learnt.

Figure 10.1 Task 1 – Supervisor requirements of academic writing

Task 1 – Supervisor/lecturer expectations of student academic writing

1.1 Make an appointment with your supervisor (if you have been assigned one at this stage) or one of your lecturers (not a writing lecturer) during his/her consultation times. Interview this person with regard to what he/she believes are the features of a quality written academic text. Make use of the form provided below to guide you in which questions to ask your lecturer/supervisor.

Questionnaire - Supervisor/lecturer expectations of written academic texts

Name and surname of supervisor: _____
Subject: _____
Department: _____

Supervisor/lecturer expectations: student academic writing

1 What are, according to you (the supervisor/lecturer), the characteristics of a quality written academic text (also ask them to explain **why** these issues are important)? Are there specific guidelines in the form of a written document that you prescribe for writing? (If yes, try to get hold of a copy of this as well.)

_____
_____
_____
_____
_____
_____
_____
_____
_____
_____
_____
_____
_____

2 Are there any important **stylistic conventions** to which I should adhere in my writing?

_____

_____

_____

3 What do you expect from students with regard to the **language used** in a written text?

_____

_____

_____

4 Do you **award marks** for language and style in written texts? (If you do, what is penalised/rewarded when you mark for language and style?)

_____

_____

_____

5 What **referencing system** should I use for my own writing in the department?

_____

6 To what extent do you indicate or correct language/stylistic mistakes in written texts?

_____

1.2 Draw up a prioritised list of at least 3 supervisor requirements for quality student writing from your interview.

1_____

2_____

3_____

4_____

1.3 Aided by your EOT 300 lecturer, compile a comprehensive, prioritised list of supervisor requirements/expectations about student writing from a whole class discussion about the topic:

Lecturer expectations about student academic writing		
Content/argument	**Style and presentation**	**Language use**

1.4 Your lecturer will provide you with a text that contains a number of structural and thinking errors, as well as errors in grammar and style. For the next class session, you need to read through the text and try to identify as many errors as possible regarding those aspects contained in column 1 above (content/argument). Try not to focus too much on how the language was used, since this aspect will be considered jointly with your writing lecturer after a discussion of your findings on the value of the ideas in the text. Please make use (as far as possible) of the following symbols in indicating specific issues in the text itself:

Rep	Repetition of an idea
Evid	Unsubstantiated claim (no evidence provided)
Con	You are contradicting yourself
Log	No logical flow between ideas (ideas unrelated)
Pos	Idea does not belong here
Irr	Idea is irrelevant to the topic
?	I do not understand/it does not make sense
[NP	New paragraph

1.5 Write a short research report of between 1000 to 1500 words in which you give an account of lecturer expectations of student academic writing (it is important to realise that your report should also adhere to the specific requirements you are discussing in

the report). Make use of all information you have gained on the issue thus far. After you have finished writing the report, hand it to your writing partner so that he/she can check it for inconsistencies and errors in argument (ideas). Such errors should be indicated in pencil in the report itself. Make use of the same symbols we have used in Task 1.4 to indicate problems with the ideas in the text and also make use of the writing check (see Addendum D) as a guide to what specific issues to focus on in the text. After you have made the changes you want (in response to what your writing partner has indicated), write a second draft of your report and give this to your writing tutor for editing. Only after you have made the changes suggested by the writing tutor, you may submit your final draft to your writing lecturer.

10.3.2.2 Make use of generic written genres in the School

Writing materials should, as far as is practically possible, focus on strategies for discovering the characteristics of the written genres employed in the School, as well as require students to produce such genres that adhere to their supervisors'/lecturers' requirements. In the rest of this section, it should be apparent from the proposed writing tasks that the aim is to make the tasks as authentic as possible.

Students will thus be required to write a literature survey (see Task 2 below) on a specific topic selected in the course. A limited number of topics relevant to the discipline in general may be negotiated with students for the focus of the literature study. A topic such as 'desertification', for example, is generic for the discipline in the sense that students registered for different courses may approach this topic from their specific perspectives (e.g. a student from Animal and Wildlife Sciences may approach the topic in terms of the impact of this phenomenon on animal management, a student from Plant Production and Soil Sciences could approach desertification from the perspective of the impact on soil resources and a student registered for Agricultural Economics, Extension and Rural Development may approach the issue from the perspective of the economic [and social] impact of desertification). As discussed comprehensively in 10.3.4.1, students could be provided with a number of basic texts on the issue of desertification and be required to analyse such texts and extract

relevant information. This would address literacy abilities such as distinguishing relevance, classifying information, paraphrasing, etc.

Figure 10.2 Task 2 – A survey of the literature

Task 2 – The Literature survey
1 Copies of six different texts on 'Desertification' have been reserved for you in the main library on campus. As a first step, you need to decide which of these texts are relevant for the topic you need to investigate. You could, therefore, first skim read the texts in order to gain a general impression of what they are about. Make copies of the texts you select and read them comprehensively. Read specifically for information on the following important issues: • A definition of desertification • Major causes of desertification • Major consequences of desertification • Proposed solutions for how the effects of desertification could be minimised 2 While you read, keep these issues in mind and write short, summarising notes under each heading. Also write down important quotes (as well as their references) you feel may be useful in support of specific ideas/issues in your discussion of the topic. 3 Make use of your notes in order to construct a schematic diagram on the important information you have extracted from your selected texts. Copy this diagram on the transparency that your lecturer will provide (you may also make use of a Powerpoint presentation if you wish). Also make sure that you include the complete details of each of the texts you use according to the Harvard method of citation (as was discussed in class) on a separate transparency. During the following class session, each student will be required to present his/her diagram to the rest of the class. 4 Another important article on the topic has been reserved for you in the library. Make a copy of this article and read through it thoroughly. You will note that the perspective in this article contradicts that of the previous texts you read. Based on the evidence provided in this article, decide for yourself how you will include this new information into the diagram that you have already developed on the issue.

5	Now that you have established a basic understanding and framework on the issue of desertification, you have to address this problem in your specific field of study. For example, if you are registered for a degree in Animal and Wildlife Sciences, your angle on the topic would be how issues in this specific field are affected by desertification. At this point it will be necessary for you to consult more sources on research that was conducted specifically about the impact of desertification in your field. Make use of the basic diagram you have constructed and add any new, more specific information from your additional reading into the diagram in a logical manner.
6	Make use of your diagram as well as any additional notes and write a first draft of a survey of the literature on the impact of desertification in your field. Make sure that the structure of your text adheres to the general structure of introduction / body / conclusion. Follow the same procedure of revision and editing used in Task 1. You thus need to have your first draft edited by a writing partner from the group and the second draft by the writing tutor before submission of the final draft.

Since all students are required to produce a research proposal in the School, this is an important genre that will be exploited in the writing course. Every student will thus have to produce a research proposal during the year (see Task 3 below). This task will be explained comprehensively to students relatively early in the course and they will be encouraged to start working on it as soon as possible. It will also be made very clear that this is the same proposal that they have to produce for their research project in their field. Students may submit their proposals as a writing assignment for the course at any time they wish during the year, depending on the requirement that they have had at least three consultations on the proposal with their writing lecturer, and have presented it as a seminar to the rest of the group. An additional requirement will therefore be that students have to present their proposals in the form of a seminar (both written and orally) to the rest of the students in the group, for the purpose of receiving feedback from their peers, that may help them in improving the proposal. A writing task of this nature is surely the closest one could get in adhering to the criterion of making use of authentic academic tasks (and texts) for the development of writing in a writing course. The proposal is thus that the same research proposal they have to produce for the main research project of their studies is utilised as an authentic text for writing development.

Because proposal writing also tends to differ across disciplines and even within disciplines (there is, therefore, not one 'correct' or standard format for the writing of research proposals), it will be important for students to investigate this issue with regard to the specific reader/audience (their supervisors) who will require of them to produce this genre. In order to support students with this investigation, one could ask them to bring examples of research proposals they have collected from their supervisors to the writing class (obviously they need to ask for a proposal that has already been accepted), analyse such proposals in terms of content and structure, and then expect of each student to produce his/her own proposal during the year. As noted above, students may further be supported through a series of individual consultations with the writing lecturer about the proposal. One may, therefore, make productive use of the notion of text modelling in the sense that students may request examples of model texts (such as a research proposal) from their supervisors and that these then be analysed in order to discover what the appropriate structure and content would be for these genres in the School.

The research proposal is used here as a writing task that highlights the practical worth of employing a process of writing in terms of its emphasis on requesting feedback from various sources and making changes accordingly.

Figure 10.3 Task 3 – The research proposal

Task 3 – Writing a research proposal
1 This task requires of you to produce a research proposal for the main research project towards completing your degree. This is essentially the same research proposal you will have to produce for your supervisor before you can start with your research project.
2 For the next class session, please ask your supervisor for an example of a research proposal on which you may base yours (preferably, this should be a proposal that has already been accepted by a research committee). Read through this proposal thoroughly and try to take note of the type of information that is required for a research proposal as well as how it is structured with regard to such information. Each student's proposal will be discussed in class with regard to the two issues mentioned above in mind
3 Your task now is to write a research proposal for your main research project after having discussed at length a possible topic, as well as your supervisor's specific requirements for

proposal writing, with him/her. Obviously, the date of submission of this proposal (as a writing task for the writing course) will depend on your own time frame according to your study schedule. The requirement for the writing course is, however, that you should submit the proposal during this year. Obviously, you will have to take this task into account when you plan for your studies, since you are required to have three consultations with your writing lecturer on your progress with the writing of the proposal (you may also make any additional appointments with your lecturer if required).

4 If at any time you feel you want the rest of the writing group's input and feedback on your progress with your proposal, you should please inform your lecturer so that he/she could schedule a time in which you may present your proposal in the form of a seminar to the rest of the group (you should also hand a copy of your seminar to your lecturer so that it could be distributed in the group). Obviously, this should be done before you hand your final proposal to your supervisor or submit it as a writing task for the writing course. The presentation of this seminar is compulsory for the writing course.

10.3.2.3 Strengthen student awareness about different types of evidence that are acceptable in their disciplines

The writing tasks proposed here also aim (as far as possible) to integrate the different types of evidence that are acceptable in the School into the texts students are required to produce. Supervisors for the study group have indicated primarily that evidence from the literature and empirical evidence (gained through experiment as well as survey-type evidence) are acceptable types of evidence in the School. All three writing tasks discussed in this chapter are well suited to emphasise the judicious use of at least two of these evidence types in student writing. For example, Task 1 that requires students to conduct a survey and write a short research report is suitable in addressing the collection of data from interviews as well as questionnaires (and their interpretation) as a source of evidence. Apart from offering support to students in collecting information about disciplinary writing requirements, this task is also an attempt to guide students in making justifiable decisions about the strength of claims put forward and engaging in the responsible interpretation of data in their own writing.

Regarding evidence from the literature, Task 2 (Figure 10.2) focuses on the consultation of a number of different sources on a specific topic and emphasises the

extraction of salient information (and evidence) from the literature that would enable one to construct a sound argument based on evidence located in such literature. This task is discussed in more detail in 10.3.4. Task 3 (Figure 10.3), which involves the writing of a research proposal, also focuses on evidence from the literature in the sense that for this genre, one is usually expected to include a short survey of the literature in order to situate one's research problem in the context of one's discipline. This task is discussed comprehensively in 10.3.2.2.

Although experimental data have been identified by supervisors from Agriculture as one of the sources of evidence for the discipline, this type of evidence is at the heart of the discipline regarding insight into the content of the field. Apart from the difficulty of setting an authentic writing task that includes such experimental data, it may be wise for the course designer not to engage too closely with the intricacies of content in the discipline. Students may, however, be supported with the individual written texts they produce in the discipline regarding the way in which they have made use of language to construct their arguments based on experimental evidence.

10.3.2.4 Address prominent stylistic conventions of academic discourse for the School

Apart from what students may learn from their supervisors about writing requirements (and, more specifically, stylistic conventions) in the interviews (Task 1), the data from the interviews with supervisors from Agriculture indicate that stylistic issues they find problematic (or that they value) in this School are mainly restricted to the formality and impersonality of the language used in academic writing, as well as consistency in citation. Although stylistic matters would be addressed throughout the course (mainly in the feedback students receive on their written texts), this issue will be addressed comprehensively in the class discussion session about supervisor requirements in Task 1.3. The writing lecturer could further emphasise specifically those issues that are considered to be important in the discipline by indicating them on the transparency of the text that students had to critique with regard to argumentation and structure (Task 1.4).

One could, therefore, make use of instances of style emphasised by supervisors during students' interviews with them, and augment such instances by information gained from the supervisor questionnaire (Chapter 5) and interviews (Chapter 8).

10.3.3 Provide opportunities for (or guidance as to what resources may be used in) the development of basic proficiency in English

Both the results of TALL and the textual analysis indicate that students in the study group need support with the development of their basic English proficiency. It is therefore crucial that students with proficiency difficulties in English are supported to improve their proficiency. If not, many of these students will probably have extra difficulty in starting to write, and when they do, be tempted to plagiarise sources because they simply do not control English at a functional level that would enable them to deal in a productive manner with the reading and writing demands of studying in a postgraduate context.

Obviously, one would expect that a situation where students are partly immersed into the additional language through which they study should improve their basic English proficiency as they proceed with their studies. However, what complicates this situation is that students with an inadequate proficiency in basic English are already involved in postgraduate studies and will probably be hamstrung with regard to the progress of their studies in general. A writing course will have to take this into account with regard to the pace at which the course proceeds. Writing educators will have to be aware of such problems for specific students (something that could be determined by using a literacy test) and monitor the progress of individual students in terms of how they are coping with the demands of the writing course. Again, it is clear that for the type of writing intervention suggested by this research, the size of writing groups will have to be restricted to allow for the individual monitoring of students' progress suggested here. As has been mentioned previously, it would be unwise just to assume that students' basic English proficiency will improve to a level that makes productive study on postgraduate level possible by mere exposure to the language.

One would therefore have to consider alternative possibilities for the improvement of basic English proficiency, such as the (foreigner) English proficiency courses that are presented by a lecturer from the Department of English at the UP (under the auspices of CE at UP). This course is presented at different levels of proficiency, and may provide an opportunity for English additional language students to acquire a threshold level of basic English proficiency that would provide the necessary foundation for such students to engage productively with a writing course. This is, therefore, another reason for approaching writing development in a comprehensive manner by establishing a co-operative working relationship with that Department regarding what type of English proficiency courses are available to students.

The second possibility is that of the judicious integration of key grammatical issues into an academic writing course for such students. This way, one could incorporate priority language structures (as well as stylistic issues) that are prominent in academic discourse, but also those proficiency difficulties that are identified for a specific group of students through the assessment instruments one uses. It is, moreover, an opportunity to focus on the functional nature of such grammatical structures/issues and stylistic devices with regard to what they contribute towards producing texts that adhere to the specific conditions and conventions of academic discourse. For example, students may be made aware of the functionality of making use of correct passive constructions to conform to the condition of impersonality of academic discourse. Clearly, it would be important to guard against presenting language structures in isolation where it is difficult for students to realise the connection with the academic discourse used in the tertiary environment. A potentially productive way to address this issue practically would probably be to utilise those naturally occurring opportunities in a context where meaning is negotiated in class. Therefore, if one notices a consistent grammatical problem in a student's writing, one may address such a problem in individual writing consultation with specific students or, if required, through an extra group discussion about the specific problem (if other students display the same problem). Another suggestion is that one may adjust the error correction scheme that students will use for peer editing in the course to include the specific grammatical problems identified through the text analysis so that special emphasis may be placed on these. Obviously, these aspects will be addressed in the feedback the writing lecturer provides to students on their writing as they occur. It is,

however, crucial that practicable solutions are sought constantly for addressing language proficiency problems. As stated before, one cannot depend on students' immersion into an English environment to resolve the issue, since it is apparent in this study that in many instances it does not happen.

Although one may then be cautiously optimistic about the potential of a writing course to contribute to the development of basic English proficiency, it is clear that the main focus of a writing course cannot be the development of such proficiency and, therefore, students who display serious difficulty with English proficiency will be advised to register for the proficiency courses offered through CE at UP, either before they enrol for the writing course, or doing the two courses concurrently.

10.3.4 Introduce students to academic writing as an integral part of academic literacy ability

10.3.4.1 Introduce students to writing as a process

All three integrated writing tasks proposed in this chapter will require of students to make use of a multiple-draft (or a process) approach to writing. Students will, therefore, be introduced functionally to such an approach already in the very first writing task in the course. Apart from the fact that a process approach to the writing of academic texts involves the production of more than one version of a text towards increasing complexity and acceptability for this context, the stages of planning the text and collecting relevant information on the topic are crucial aspects of such a process. Through their active engagement with the tasks proposed here, students will be guided through the different steps of the writing process: from the initial planning stage to the writing of the final draft.

In order to adhere to the criterion of authenticity, the tasks further emphasise the integrated nature of academic literacy abilities, most notably that of academic reading and writing that, in tertiary education, are functionally bound together. Tasks in a writing course should therefore focus on the utilisation of specific academic reading strategies that are used deliberately in seeking and accessing (processing) information. Working on a set writing topic, one may, for example, provide students with a number

of reading texts on the topic (see Task 2). Whereas a number of these texts must be relevant to the topic to different degrees, at least one text should be unrelated, but not too obviously so (for example, that students could immediately see in the title that it is unrelated). In a writing session, one could therefore ask students to select the texts they want to use towards constructing a valid academic argument on the topic, and require of them to explain by means of concrete evidence taken from the texts why they have chosen certain texts and not others.

By restricting the time in which students have to select these texts, students will have to make use of a reading strategy such as skim-reading, a vital ability in the armour of any postgraduate student towards finding relevant information on specific topics. By discussing their selection at this point, one would be able to learn which strategies they have used in their decisions. Students could then be asked to search for specific phrases or quotes that offer evidence on specific aspects on the topic. Students would thus engage simultaneously with two other important reading strategies, that of scanning for information but also reading comprehensively in making sure that what they have chosen as evidence does actually provide substantial evidence for the issues at hand.

Students will probably also, at this stage, start to appreciate the interrelated nature of academic literacy and the central role of adequate reading in the construction of an academic argument.

Eventually, after having discussed students' selection of evidence from the literature with them, one could ask them to write a short review of the literature they have studied where they need to integrate (and provide a logical sequence for) the important issues they have extracted from the different sources. As the first literature study in which students engage, the task could be 'scaffolded' in the sense that one may provide guidance with regard to the specific issues to which students should pay attention in the writing of their texts. Students would thus not be expected to accept full responsibility for choosing the major issues in the construction of their arguments at this stage since, if one considers the data on students' interpretative abilities, this aspect might be beyond their current capabilities. By providing them with a framework, it should be easier for students to read for specific information relevant to

main issues identified beforehand for them. One would, however, expect from students to make the kind of judgment referred to above in subsequent writing tasks (such as Task 3), since the ability to find relevant information from sources (in effect then, judging its worth) is crucial towards the construction of valid arguments in the tertiary context. Later writing tasks would thus have to focus specifically on students' ability to be critical readers as a necessary precursor for presenting legitimate and authoritative written arguments.

Another important issue that was raised by supervisors is the adequacy of the background reading students do. Writing tasks should, therefore, encourage students to make use of academic reading strategies that also emphasise comprehensive and critical reading as necessary abilities in their construction of valid written arguments

The adequacy of the background reading that students do will to a large extent depend on students' information seeking ability, as well as the way in which they process sources of information on specific topics. An integrated writing task may emphasise this requirement by, for example, providing students with texts advancing one side of an argument initially (as in Task 2 explained above), having them make use of these texts to construct their own text on the topic by making use of information taken from these texts. Only after students have written their own texts, they could be presented with an additional text that contradicts the argument of the previous sources. Students would then need to adjust their own texts (and arguments) accordingly in acknowledging the existence of such counter arguments, deciding whether it is necessary to change their stance completely based on the strength of the counter argument, or perhaps deciding that the evidence presented in this argument is not compelling enough to change their angle on the topic. This may raise student awareness about the importance of doing adequate background reading for their research, in the sense that if one fails to consult important texts on a specific topic that present valid opposing arguments (that one does not acknowledge at least in one's own argument), one's research may be perceived as deficient/inadequate as regards its theoretical background.

This literature survey could then also be presented to other students in the group as well as the writing lecturer in the form of a seminar.

10.3.4.2 Use writing as a device to organise ideas

Writing down one's initial ideas in one's planning of a writing text as well as during a consultation of the literature on a specific topic, gives one the opportunity to create a conceptual framework on paper with regard to what one really wants to address about a specific topic. It may also serve as encouragement for those who have difficulty in starting to write, in the sense of knowing that they have already written something (albeit as notes or ideas organised into some logical scheme or framework) on the topic. Again, the writing process will be utilised in this regard by expecting students to use the texts provided in Task 2, for example, where they have to extract the most important issues and first write them down in the form of a diagram (they could also be encouraged to attempt to write down such ideas in their own words). Students could subsequently be required to present their diagrams (summaries) to the rest of the class where issues they raise may be further explored and discussed and as a consequence, planning documents refined before they start writing the first draft of the text.

10.3.4.3 Build students' confidence in their ability to write acceptable academic texts

Building students' confidence in their own writing ability is obviously an aspect that will be developed over time as students become increasingly more proficient academic writers in the tertiary academic context. What is crucial in this context is that students should be aware of their starting point as well as how they are progressing towards producing written texts that are acceptable in this context. This awareness will depend, to a large extent, on the nature of the feedback that is provided to students on their writing. It would therefore be important that students know that they are making progress with their writing ability. In essence, the feedback one provides should be balanced so that, apart from indicating unambiguously what students still need to learn and acquire about academic writing, they also have to know what they are doing correctly. Again, it would be ideal if this principle in the provision of feedback could be practised by all those involved in the writing of these students.

It is further important to take note that the issue regarding basic English proficiency raised in 10.3.3 will probably also have an effect on students' confidence in writing. It has been my experience in the past that students on the EOT 300 course with proficiency problems have difficulty in coping with the demands of the writing course: in essence, their proficiency is so low that it is difficult to have a simple conversation in English, let alone have them engage in productive academic writing in English. As has been suggested in 10.3.3, what would probably serve such students best is to attend a course in English proficiency first in order to really benefit from developmental opportunities offered in the writing course.

10.3.4.4 Assist students in their interpretation of feedback on their writing

At the very least, students should be exposed to consistent and appropriate feedback. However, apart from what may be accomplished in the writing course itself regarding the provision of appropriate feedback, the ideal scenario proposed in a comprehensive approach to feedback suggests that if possible, a similar system of feedback should be used by everyone involved in the writing of specific groups of postgraduate students. Whether this is a realistic aim in the context of the specific School used in the application of the framework is still to be ascertained. If such a feedback system could be negotiated with supervisors from this School, it would obviously be the feedback system that will be employed in the writing course as well. If not, one would attempt that the feedback system used in the writing course is unambiguous to the greatest possible extent, and that students would be encouraged to discuss feedback with the writing lecturer, supervisor and writing tutor whenever they do not understand what is indicated. With regard to writing course materials, students will be introduced to the system of feedback that would be used in the writing course (and possibly by supervisors and writing tutors) as part of their first writing task in the writing course. As was mentioned in 10.3.2.1, this may coincide with the task that focuses on their critique of an actual text that was produced in their field. One would hope that the more students make use of the feedback system, either in criticising others' texts or interpreting comments on their own texts where such a system was employed, the more they will become used to the system, and, as a consequence, minimise confusion with regard to how they understand feedback.

10.3.4.5 Introduce strategies that would minimise the language errors in student texts

As mentioned before, one of the more serious problems for supervisors seems to be that because of the number of language errors made by students, they find it difficult to assess the argumentation in such texts. It has further been discussed in 10.3.2.1 that different types of language and stylistic mistakes could contribute in differing degrees to obscuring meaning in a text. However, the overall impression from supervisors indicates that they do not necessarily differentiate between the different types of mistakes, but tend to group them together under 'language mistakes'. Thus, although one may downplay initially the importance of surface level language mistakes in favour of mistakes in argumentation when following a process of writing in the writing course, students need to be suitably aware of the impact of all such errors on the readability of their texts (for supervisors). To address this need, one of the aims of a writing course would thus be to encourage error free writing in students. There are various strategies through which one could address this issue, one of which is to develop students' own ability to productively revise and edit their own texts (which is pursued in all three tasks proposed here). However, as noted before, although it is the ideal that students should be able to edit their own texts for language correctness, this is also an ability that typically develops over time, and it would be unrealistic to think that students will be able to accomplish anything near what is required in this context when they start with their studies. One would thus have to explore additional avenues through which this issue could be addressed adequately.

As has been suggested earlier, one way of ensuring relatively error free student texts (after their utilisation of computer resources such as spell checkers), is by making use of a writing tutor system. Part of the discussion on a negotiated feedback system to be used for this group of students, is the notion of a writing tutor system where writing tutors (who should obviously be proficient writers in their disciplines) from the School are used to support other postgraduate students with their writing. This is, however, an ideal scenario (one has to keep in mind that such tutors will have to receive training in the provision of feedback). If the implementation of a departmental writing tutor system is not possible, one will have to consider making use of the literacy tutors at the UAL to fulfil this function. However, while the tutors

at the Unit may have a good working knowledge about issues in academic literacy (and writing), they will not necessarily know much about other disciplines, and could thus not be expected to offer much more than a 'glorified' editing service to such students (language issues could, however, be discussed with students on a consultative basis). Even in this instance, such a strategy could alleviate some of the language pressures that supervisors experience and may lead to a situation where more time could be devoted to student argumentation. Students would thus be required to consult the writing tutor assigned to their group for all the written texts they produce in the writing course before final submission of such texts (I usually require that students hand in all the different drafts of any assignment produced through a process of writing). Therefore, although the issues of revision and editing will be a constantly recurring theme in the writing course itself (regarding peer revision and editing tasks), this strategy should ideally be extended to include outside resources that are available to these students whenever they have the need for them: once students become more aware of the importance of how they use language in their writing, they may thus start to make use of a wider support system in terms of finding someone they may trust to help them with language correctness in their writing.

10.3.4.6 The construction of authoritative academic arguments

Both the literature and the empirical findings of this research indicate that argumentative writing is the primary text type used in tertiary education (especially at postgraduate level) for the advancement of one's ideas. Writing course materials and tasks therefore need to acknowledge this primacy in the construction of arguments, and create an awareness as to what makes it possible to argue convincingly and with the necessary authority (essentially, then, discover one's 'voice') in this context. In the first place, writing tasks should emphasise the importance of acknowledging authoritative literature in advancing the authority of one's own argument, and, in effect, promote the principle of making use of sound evidence in order to construct convincing arguments. Authoritative argumentation would therefore, in part, depend on students' functional literacy abilities discussed in Chapter 7 with regard to their ability to locate relevant information, to classify (categorise) and sort such information, to make valid inferences based on the information and to integrate the information (synthesise) coherently into their own writing. These issues have all been

addressed in the different writing tasks proposed in this chapter where students will be required to make use of these strategies in their analyses of reading material in order to complete specific writing tasks.

Furthermore, students should be aware that at postgraduate level (with specific reference to doctoral studies), making use only of the literature to construct an argument will not be adequate, and that an element of originality in their research is also important. This is probably what results in one being able to distinguish a student's 'voice' in their writing, that unique combination and interpretation of information that convinces the reader that they have something substantial to say about a topic.

As has been implied above, the notion of writing with authority is also closely connected to writing convincingly on a postgraduate level. Undoubtedly, apart from using unassailable evidence in argumentation, the way in which one makes use of language resources will influence the authoritativeness of one's writing, in the sense that incoherent argumentation with regard to how language is used may well lead to weak argumentation. The presence of language mistakes in a text presented for assessment will probably further add to an impression of weak and careless research. In effect then, it might be difficult to take students' ideas seriously that are presented by means of poor language. Students will, therefore, have to be aware that in order to be taken seriously in this context, they will have to ensure that apart from making use of compelling evidence in their arguments, such arguments should be expressed by means of a logical (and therefore coherent) structure created through the way language is used. Moreover, they need to ensure that the language they employ adheres to stylistic conventions as well as the principle of clarity, so that it is easy to follow and understand. Developing a 'voice' in this context thus refers to firstly, having something that you want to say and secondly, ensuring that one is heard when saying this.

To this end, it will further be important for students to develop an awareness about the finer nuances of how one makes use of language in one's specific writing style, in the sense that one could come over too strongly to the extent of sounding pompous and arrogant. One's choice of vocabulary (with regard to strategies of hedging also

identified in the interviews) is obviously important in this regard in relation to using appropriate utterances for the strength of claims made in one's writing. It should be noted, however, that the issue of hedging is a relatively advanced aspect of writing that develops as one receives increasingly more feedback on one's own writing, as well as being exposed progressively to reading more academic texts in a tertiary environment. It is something that will be addressed continuously in the feedback provided on students' writing.

10.3.4.7 Use the Harvard method as foundation for the principles of referencing

In all writing tasks that require the integration of sources, the approach to referencing will be based on the Harvard method. Students will, however, be made aware that referencing is pretty much regulated by the context for writing, and that they should be suitably aware of what system is required by different contexts. It is exactly for this reason that this issue is also to be addressed in the interviews students conduct with their supervisors in Task 1.1, which should provide one with valid information to highlight the flexibility of this issue in the writing course. Writing tasks should allow for a focus on citation within the text itself, as well as how to compile a list of references for a written assignment. Although one would expect students at postgraduate level to know how to cite sources correctly, previous experience with student writing in the EOT 300 course has shown that, probably because of the variability with which citation methods are applied, students are confused as to what is regarded as the 'correct' method. Most importantly, therefore, students should be made aware that there is not one 'correct' method, but only a contextually appropriate method where correct application of the method will depend largely on their inquisitiveness about the issue.

In both the literature survey (Task 2) and the research proposal (Task 3) students will be required to integrate additional sources into their own texts. Since students will be dealing with the same set of texts for Task 2, this is also where, when they make use of the sources they have consulted for this writing task, the specific intricacies of the citation of different types of sources will be introduced.

10.3.4.8 Address the nature of plagiarism

As mentioned before, students may well be aware of the consequences of plagiarism and may even be able to provide a rather refined definition of plagiarism. This does not ensure, however, that they do not revert to plagiarising texts in their writing. It is therefore necessary for students to discover the true boundaries of plagiarism in the sense of working with sources in such a manner that these boundaries are strictly defined for (and by) students. Writing Task 2 requires of students to paraphrase sources (in the short summarising notes they have to write) as well as make use of direct quotation. This task may be used productively towards creating such observable boundaries for students. The fact that all students (as well as the writing lecturer) will have a reading knowledge of the same texts will make it easier to address misconceptions and misunderstandings students may have in this regard. Obviously, students will be aware that it is impossible for their lecturers or supervisors to read all texts that are available on specific topics, and that it will depend on their academic integrity (and, therefore, how they see themselves regarding their academic identity) whether they would revert to plagiarising texts.

10.3.4.9 Make productive use of connecting devices

One of the most important aspects in writing cohesive and coherent academic texts is whether one makes productive use of connecting devices in order to signal relationships between ideas and different sections in one's text. Writing tasks will introduce the use of such devices in a functional manner in the writing course (cf. example included in Addendum F). Students will, therefore, be introduced to different types of connectors they may use in the functional relationships they create between their ideas, but also as a stylistic device that offers alternatives in how to create a specific type of relationship between ideas (e.g. regarding a relationship of cause and effect a number of different connectors such as: 'because'; 'as a result'; 'subsequently'; 'consequently'; etc. may be used). This may also help to emphasise the notion that all information is not equal, and that the use of connecting devices should clearly signal such relationships between ideas.

10.4 Conclusion

The suggestions for writing tasks and materials contained in this chapter emphasise the importance of the integrated nature of different literacy abilities that should be reflected in the tasks in which students engage in a writing intervention. More specifically, the three examples of writing tasks discussed here show how the learning outcomes for such an intervention could be addressed through the manner in which writing course materials are designed. The two primary issues, however, that these three tasks address in an integrated manner are 1) a consideration of the academic literacy and writing needs of the specific group of writers investigated in the study and 2) a focus on the disciplinary writing requirements of the context in which the students write. A set of further examples, not discussed here, is included as further illustrative material in Addendum F.

The last chapter contains a number of concluding thoughts as well as specific limitations encountered in the study. Recommendations for further research will also be made, based mainly on the limitations of the study.

Present texts that are visually appealing regarding layout;
Write in an appropriate academic style;

If we could return to what has been said in Chapter ??, students should be able to seek info, process info and produce (new) information in an authentic way.

In a subsequent section, it then comments on a potentially productive structure and sequence as to how the writing tasks could be integrated to form part of a holistic and comprehensive approach to the academic writing development of the study group.

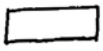
Probably, assessment criteria will have to be connected to those of supervisors for their writing tasks. This is also where student discussion with supervisors could be invaluable in determining exactly how and what they assess – to some extent this has been done generally in focusing on their requirements for writing.

Therefore, when conceptualising a writing course for postgraduate students, they should probably be tutored by more experienced writing lecturers/tutors in small (depending on the amount of individual attention required), homogenous (regarding the type of postgraduate qualification) writing groups, while undergraduate students could, for example, be tutored by trained writing tutors (possibly senior students) from their specific faculties. One option is that such a system could be coordinated to function as a decentralised writing centre, therefore, to function within specific faculties but being coordinated from a central point.

Writing teachers who teach writing within specific disciplines and who are not discipline specialists will have to rely on the students as informants and allow them to teach them about the content – this needs a special kind of teacher (Belcher, 1990:222).

- Employ their heightened awareness of their own needs with regard to academic literacy development in order to seek out opportunities and make use of specific strategies for the development of such abilities;
- Make use of writing tasks that would guide students to discover the writing requirements for their specific disciplines;
- Introduce students to academic writing as an integral part of academic literacy, therefore focusing on academic reading strategies (with a specific focus on critical reading) as a necessary precursor for constructing valid written arguments;
- Provide opportunities for (or guidance as to what resources may be used in) the development of basic proficiency in English (also recommend that students on a specific level do the foreigner English course at the Department of English)?
- Introduce writing tasks that would encourage students to make use of the different steps in a process of writing;
- Encourage students to organize their ideas through writing them down and, in the process, attempt to persuade them of the value in starting to write as soon as possible;
- Build students' levels of confidence in their ability to write coherent academic texts;
- Motivate students to do adequate background reading (from a variety of sources) for writing assignments;
- Attempt to minimize student confusion in interpreting supervisor feedback in the possible development of a standardized feedback system (in consultation with supervisors) and to obviously also make use of this system in the writing course – also how to provide feedback in terms of, for example, focusing on specific issues at specific time, or just make supervisors aware of the research on this?

- Develop and introduce strategies that may limit the number of language errors made in student texts so that supervisors have an opportunity to pay more attention to the value of ideas and argumentation (students' own abilities in revision and editing but also in making use of other resources [such as computer resources and people in the know] for this purpose);
- Focus on argumentative writing as the primary text type in postgraduate academic writing;
- Develop the concept of authority in student writing (their 'voice') in terms of what exactly makes one's writing 'authoritative';
- Strengthen students' awareness about the nature of different types of evidence as well as support them in judgments about the strength of claims put forward – support students with the interpretation of data (possibly in the survey done on supervisor requirements);
- Make use of the Harvard method of citation to highlight the principles of referencing but also raise student awareness about the flexibility of the issue;
- Address plagiarism on a practical level that would make students aware of exactly what constitutes an act of plagiarism in the tertiary context;
- Support students in the use of connecting devices towards the construction of cohesive and coherent academic arguments in their writing;
- Address academic writing conventions (style and register [formality; impersonality]; citation);
- Employ, as far as is practically possible, the written genres used regularly in the School for writing tasks in the writing course and attempt to use model texts from the discipline to teach about genre – also explore further the idea of students making use of academic texts in general on which to model their own written texts;

C	Capitalisation problem
	Incorrect word order (correct word but misplaced)
	Missing word or words
P	Punctuation problem
	Correct word family, but incorrect word form
sp	Spelling problem
art	Absence of or incorrect article usage (a/an/the)
WW	Wrong word
X	Unnecessary
	Combine
¶	Paragraphing problem
(?)	I did not understand (try again)
F	Fragment (incomplete sentence)
R	Run-on sentence (sentence is too long)
S/V	Agreement between subject and verb (concord)

CHAPTER 11 Conclusion and recommendations

11.1 Introduction

Perhaps the most significant finding of this study is that the comprehensive approach adopted here for the development of academic writing materials (in its application of the framework proposed in Chapter 4) is practically feasible. This is so despite the fact that one of its potential limitations may be the availability of time for conducting such investigations. Such an approach enables one to justify academic writing course design from a variety of pertinent angles and perspectives. As mentioned in Chapter 1, it was necessary in this study to utilise a range of research methods, which has enabled the researcher to exploit the congruencies in such methods, identified in the findings through the employment of a variety of approaches. All of these approaches, together with the multiple sources of data that were utilised, have contributed towards the comprehensive approach to writing course design that was adopted here.

In essence, therefore, the character of this study is partly qualitative (ethnographic) in the sense that it employed multiple strategies for data collection (e.g. the questionnaires and interviews) in order to gather the necessary information that was required by the different focuses in the framework. A number of information soliciting instruments have thus been developed and administered in order to gain a better understanding of the contextual requirements for postgraduate writing, as well as the perceptions and attitudes of students engaging in such writing at the University. The study is, however, also quantitative in its reporting of the statistical results obtained for the questionnaires as well as the literacy test. In order to obtain reliable data on the academic literacy levels and writing ability of students in the study group, different assessment instruments have been utilised in this study. These instruments had the additional function of identifying specific literacy problems students experienced. The ultimate purpose of all the different methods of data collection used in this study was to inform the design of writing interventions in a responsible and theoretically justifiable manner. In an echo of the approach adopted in the rest of this study, it is evident, too, that no one research method on its own will provide one with

an approach that is dynamic enough to account for all the different focuses that have been complementarily employed in this study.

What is further evident is that, because one may wish to make use of a similar approach for other departments at the UP, it will be necessary for the research instruments utilised here to be constantly adjusted and refined in order to offer the most useful and relevant information for writing course design. The comprehensive approach adopted here should therefore be seen as a dynamic approach that seeks to achieve the constant refinement of instructional materials, and relevance towards the writing needs of students as well as the requirements of lecturers in the tertiary context.

The one finding that is of specific interest in its general applicability for the University, is that the results of the supervisor questionnaire used in this study indicate that their perceptions about the literacy levels of their postgraduate students are generally not very positive. In particular, they perceive their additional language students to be weak academic writers. Although this study focused on a formal determination of such ability for students in the study group only, the perceptual data suggest that this may be a more general problem, and that perhaps all supervisors should be encouraged to make use of the formal postgraduate academic literacy test that should be available to them in the near future. This will enable them to assess their students' academic literacy abilities reliably in order to address possible student difficulties timeously. The potential benefits in doing so have been discussed extensively in this study.

11.2 Limitations and recommendations for further research

One of the most obvious limitations of this study is that, while it does refer to the author's experience in working with similar kinds of materials, it does not report on the actual implementation of the writing materials proposed here. It will, therefore, subsequently be necessary to gauge the effectiveness of these materials in addressing adequately the specific development of writing that they were purposefully designed to emphasise. The effectiveness of the materials suggested in Chapter 10 will now

have to be assessed through their implementation over a period of time in the writing class (by means of action research; cf. Van der Wal, 2004 and Habte, 2001) and the materials refined accordingly for new groups of students from this School. The same comprehensive strategy proposed here for writing course design will, therefore, also be utilised in the design of writing courses for subsequent intakes of postgraduate students from the same School, and the materials for the course adjusted according to the results of such work. This ongoing research will also be reported on in scholarly publications in order to get the input of a wider audience of academic scholars on these materials.

The intensive working relationship proposed here between the UAL and Agriculture will be further pursued with regard to constantly emphasising pertinent issues in the development of their students' academic literacy abilities, but also more specifically to negotiate a combined feedback system for their students, as well as to discuss the possibility of implementing a departmental writing tutor system.

A similar strategy to the one proposed in this study for writing development will be suggested to a number of other departments at the UP that have expressed the need for writing support for their postgraduate students. The results of the initial supervisor survey are flexible to the extent that an abstraction may be made of the results for any department at the university (depending obviously on whether supervisors in such departments have completed the questionnaire) in order to provide a foundation on which future discussions may be based.

The academic literacy test for postgraduate students specifically referred to in the study is in the process of being developed, and a final version of the test should probably be available to supervisors at the University from the beginning of 2008.

A second limitation is that the study did not investigate institutional perceptions about the feasibility of the establishment of a (postgraduate) writing centre for the future. One would, however, not just want to follow current thinking on the issue because it is fashionable to do so. It has been remarked in this study that although a writing centre offers the possibility of quality individualised writing consultation, one will

have to determine whether the potential benefits for students are worth the considerable financial implications of establishing and running such a centre.

Another issue that requires further investigation is the possibility of establishing an institutional editing service for postgraduate students. Although we offer a professional editing and translation service (through Creative Language Services) as part of the UAL, this service is maintained as a business unit that caters mainly for the editing and translation of documents from people outside the University. Although I do regularly refer postgraduate students on the EOT 300 course to make use of this service, this is not its primary focus and it is not marketed as such. One may, therefore, consider to start advertising Creative Language Services as a service that is available specifically for the editing of postgraduate writing (if resources permit), and perhaps attempt to get the service subsidised by the University so that such students know that they have access to an affordable final resource in terms of the language correctness of their texts. A related issue is whether an institutional policy about the editing of Ph.D. and master's theses is desirable at the university. This matter is complicated by the fact if such a policy requires in its extreme that **all** postgraduate students should have their research edited by a professional language editor before final submission, one may disadvantage those students who are competent writers. This issue will thus have to be addressed with the necessary sensitivity about the flexibility of such a policy.

The study also suggests that the establishment of a database for academic literacy requirements may be a valuable resource for focusing literacy course design in terms of changing needs and requirements at the University. Further research could thus explore the possibility of creating such a database, where one would make use of either an already instituted information-gathering instrument such as the HEMIS information system, or if this is not possible, considering adapting the questionnaire utilised in this study for such purposes. The main purpose of such a database would be, however, to have a continuous flow of information on specific literacy issues from all academic departments at the University, and should therefore preferably not be a once off occurrence.

Another important finding of the study emphasises the predicament of part-time postgraduate students who are not on campus regularly and who can, for this reason, not utilise fully opportunities to discuss in person supervisors' feedback on their writing, as well as the difficulty of such students with literacy problems to attend a writing course on a regular basis. It would, therefore be important to investigate the possibility of designing web-based writing courses for such students, which would in turn depend on the interactive nature of a computer platform such as Web-CT currently used at the UP.

11.3 Conclusion

It is hoped that the proposals made in this study for a comprehensive approach to writing course design for tertiary students will benefit other professionals working in the field of tertiary academic writing not only in the identification of important issues that should be considered in conceptualising possible writing support for students, but also in presenting a workable and justifiable strategy for the practical investigation of such matters. Course design initiatives such as the ones that have formed the background of this study, inevitably, it seems, have to meet the requirements both of feasibility and, in the current post-modern context of academic work, defensibility.