

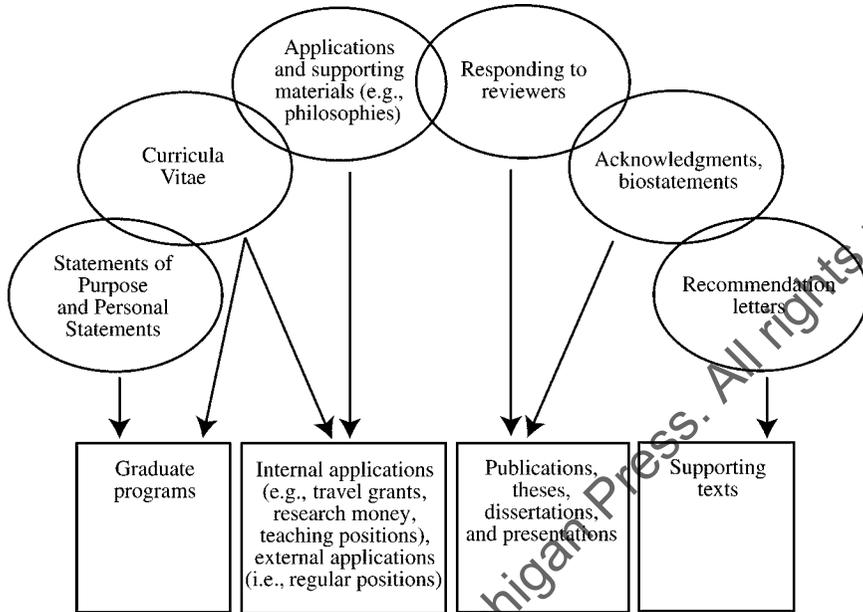
Introduction to the Supporting Genres Volume

This volume is somewhat different from others in the series. The main difference resides in the fact that this volume focuses on the *supporting genres* that facilitate the more public genres (research papers, dissertations, conference presentations) that form the building blocks of an academic and/or research career. Examples of these supporting genres—all of which are covered in this volume—are Statements of Purpose for graduate school applications, letters of recommendation, responses to journal reviewers, and various kinds of email. One feature that these genres have in common is that they are largely hidden from public view; it is difficult to find examples of them in university libraries. Although guidance about these genres can increasingly be found on the Internet, this guidance is often too general to be helpful in your own particular situation. This is unfortunate because these genres are crucially concerned with what famous sociologist Erving Goffman called “impression management,” in this case, managing the impression that you make on your reader. In almost all cases, you need to be seen as both a serious scholar, researcher, or instructor (whether beginning or getting established) and as a collegial but objective person. As a result, many of these academic communications need to be carefully considered, particularly with regard to the likely effect your communication will have on its intended recipients, who, more often than not, are established figures in your field (as with a job application letter). Because of the roles of these genres, this volume also differs somewhat from the others in that it is as much concerned with social academic practice as it is with more formal academic texts.

In our textbook writing over many years, we have occasionally given imagined or real expert reactions to student or junior scholar texts. The advantage of this is that it puts students in a new place by showing them how their texts may be perceived. Because of the nature of this volume, we have increased our use of this particular technique.

Although so far we have stressed what is distinctive about this volume, we also need to point out that our underlying pedagogical approach remains largely the same. For example, Figure 2 shows how these supporting genres are interconnected and form complex networks with the boxed “open”

Figure 2.



genres (such as publications and presentations) shown in the lower part of the figure.

Even so, the situated circumstances of each use of one of these supporting genres tends to be distinct, for instance, compare writing a letter of recommendation for an undergraduate research assistant in your research group to writing one for the group's director, who is being considered for promotion. For that reason, we have here focused on treating each genre in its own terms and with its own linguistic and rhetorical characteristics. In each case, we again have stressed the value of raising your consciousness about what is going on in this genre and why. For this, we have again opted for various kinds of text analysis as well as suggesting that there is much value in examining your own past practice and those of others that you can access. As usual, we have attempted to offer an interesting variety of tasks—whether working on your own or in a class setting—that further these objectives. In the end, we hope that users of this small volume will feel more “genre ready” as they contemplate sending a request email to a professor in some distant country, writing a tricky “teaching philosophy” statement as part of an aca-

demic job application, or writing a much simpler biostatement to accompany an article recently accepted for publication (congratulations!).

We have organized this book around the concept of a journey of entering graduate school, passing through it, and leaving it to take up an academic or research-oriented career. Obviously, any one individual at the time of opening the volume cannot be at all these stages at the same time. As a result, a PhD student might want to skip Section 1; on the other hand, a Master's student might focus on this section but leave some of the later material until another day. In a similar way, instructors adopting this volume will need to judge which sections and subsections will be most appropriate for their particular classes. For all users, *Navigating Academia* should be able to serve as a reference, not only for the present, but also for the future.

Navigating Academia is supported by an Online Commentary available at www.press.umich.edu/esl/compsite/ETRW/.