

Online Commentary for *Navigating Academia: Writing Supporting Genres*

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Before we get to the actual commentaries on the tasks, a few preliminary remarks would seem to be in order.

General Comments and Teaching Suggestions

1. Regular users of the textbook (whether teachers, tutors, or independent scholars) may find it more convenient to print out this Commentary.
2. As in our previous volumes in the EAPP series, we are cautious about offering advice to our EAP colleagues, especially as they inevitably have a better understanding of their own teaching contexts than we do.
3. There is probably more material here than can be worked through in the available time, so be selective in terms of what you focus on. And if you are teaching a group of people who all come from one field, such as medicine or psychology, then you will naturally want to bring in supplementary materials that more closely reflect your participants' interests.
4. It is our experience that most of the tasks are better undertaken by pairs or trios of participants. Discussion will be more lively; participants will feel that they have more to contribute; and additional pieces of information or points of view will probably emerge.
5. Remember the aim throughout is to raise participants' perceptions and sensitivities to the language and structure of texts and to raise their awareness of likely audience reactions to those texts. Try, therefore, to head off arguments and discussions that relate purely to the content of those texts.

6. If you are discussing participants' work in a class or workshop setting, bias for success; that is, focus on achievements rather than failures.
7. For quite a number of the commentaries, we offer the perspective of our research assistant, Vera Irwin, who has completed her PhD in Sociolinguistics and Germanic Languages and Literatures and now teaches German and Russian at the University of Michigan. We have adopted this policy in order to better establish a *dialogue* between the tasks and the users of the book. And here it is important to remember that Vera's perspective is that of somebody on the border between the Social Sciences and the Humanities. If your research is situated elsewhere, such as on the border between Medicine and Engineering, your own perspective will often be different. Hence, we hope an enlightening conversation between the two perspectives will emerge.
8. A fair amount of this small volume is devoted to emails of various kinds. It might be helpful for participants to make, for reference purposes, a small "anthology" of their own more significant emails. This will allow them easily and quickly to compare their writing practices with those illustrated in this book.
9. An Online Commentary on the University of Michigan Press website is obviously a more flexible document than a printed volume. We welcome your comments and suggestions, which we may be able to incorporate in occasional updates. We can be most easily reached at jmswales@umich.edu and cfeak@umich.edu.

An Opening Orientation

The broad overview in Task One is quite useful in helping students and others, such as workshop participants, to see the main focus of this volume. Although academic writing is often seen as including only the public genres such as research articles or dissertations, we think it is important to consider hidden or occluded genres in the design of courses or workshops. Despite their widespread use, both fully and partly occluded genres can be difficult to access and thus may prove to be as challenging to write as the open genres presented in Figure 1 of the main volume.

Task One

This task seems rather straightforward, but does generate some disagreement and lively discussion in our classes and workshops. One thread that ties together points 1, 2, 5, 6, and 7 is that of impression management and how a writing persona may be revealed through these different types of academic text. Points 3 and 10 raise the issue of getting some assistance, while the others deal with some perspectives on a particular academic text.

Chris often adds a few points to the 10 statements given in the task.

11. When reviewing a manuscript, I should be extremely thorough and tell the authors all of the problems that have to be changed in the manuscript.
12. When responding to reviewers' and editors' evaluation of my manuscript, I should be humble and accept all recommended changes to make sure my paper is published.

There really are no right or wrong answers here and whether one strongly agrees (disagrees) or simply agrees (disagrees) does not matter much.

How do you respond to these statements? Circle the numbers of your responses (1 = strongly disagree; 5 = strongly agree). If you have a partner, discuss your responses as you proceed.

1. Effective academic correspondence is as important as effective scholarly or research writing.

We would agree with this, although research writing receives far more attention from advisors as well as scholars whose research focuses on academic writing. No matter the type of communication, it is important to establish and maintain a professional image as a researcher, teacher, and colleague, and to position oneself as a member of one's chosen field.

2. Creating and responding to emails well is useful, but not as important as making a good impression in face-to-face meetings.

We do not agree since readers do form an impression of the person writing an email message. A very large portion (if not the majority) of the day-to-day communication in the academic world happens via email rather than in face-to-face settings. In some cases, we may never meet the people with whom we correspond, such as those on a listserv focusing on a particular topic or other online community.

3. I would always ask one of my professors for advice before submitting an important application (e.g., for a full-time job).

We very strongly agree with this since senior members of an academic community can usually give advice that is not available elsewhere. Senior members have connections to others in the field, likely have some inside information, and generally have a good sense of how to shape an application or other text.

4. Letters of recommendation are easy to write because they are about other people.

We would disagree since another person's future can very well be influenced by what is written. Given the potential impact, writing a letter of recommendation is a big responsibility that requires a number of difficult decisions. Some of these hard decisions center on whether to say anything negative (in the United States typically we do not); how

enthusiastic the letter should be in terms of characterizing the candidate's achievements; the type of adjectives to use; and how to make sure that the letter is credible. More on this can be found in pages 51–56 of the main volume.

5. The more senior the person, the more carelessly written his or her emails tend to be.

This is an interesting point that tends to generate disagreement in our classes. John is a senior member in the field of Applied Linguistics and will confess that his email messages are not always carefully written. He does not, however, expect junior colleagues to follow his (bad) example! Chris, on the other hand, worries a lot about impression management and her level of concern very much depends on how well she knows the email recipient. Based on their experiences with their advisors, many of our students agree with point 5, but they add that sometimes their advisors seem to take a lot of time, if a message is really important.

6. In application letters, the focus should be on what you can do for the organization you are applying to, not on what you have done in the past (for another institution).

This strategy may be a bit risky, so we would disagree, if this is a central part of the letter. Of course, an organization wants to know how an applicant may contribute, but if the applicant emphasizes this too much, he or she may sound presumptuous. After all, how can someone who is not part of an organization know what work needs to be done and how to best do it? At the same time, however, some self-promotion is necessary so that the applicant's skills and experience will be appreciated and seen as a good fit with the organization. To find the right balance, we think writers should seek the advice of a more senior person, as suggested in point 3.

7. Open (To Whom It May Concern) letters of recommendation have very little value.

When possible it is always best to customize all letters, especially letters of recommendation and cover letters, to the specifics of each program and institution. When students and others ask us for letters of

recommendation, we ask for the name of the person to whom the letter should be addressed. These days the Internet can often provide the names and other potentially useful information. If this information does not seem to be available, we ask whether there is a committee name that might be used. In addition, we ask for information about the program, company, or institution as well as the specific qualifications expected of a successful applicant. Often students will give us the job description, which makes the letter writing task a bit easier.

8. Spontaneous emails (those written using an email program) are typically fresher but less audience-sensitive than those composed using a word processing program and then copied and pasted into the message.

Some of our students would agree that spontaneous emails are less audience-sensitive (i.e., the message may not be so carefully tailored to the recipient), but John and Chris are not so sure about this. We think that this depends on who the audience is. The important consideration here is that while spontaneous emails appear to be “fresher,” it is always good to take some time to reflect before sending an important email message. Time for reflection may even be more important than the means of producing a message. Many of our students report that they compose important messages using a word processor so that they can take full advantage of the features of these programs, such as the thesaurus.

9. Subject lines in emails are more important than generally thought.

We definitely agree. Subject lines may be a key factor in whether a message is read or not. Not only do we know this intuitively, but research in fields such as marketing has also demonstrated that subject lines influence the likelihood that a message will be viewed or be marked as spam. Another important consideration is that most email programs have an option that allows message sorting and searching, which can be facilitated by a clear subject line.

When discussing this topic in class we also emphasize that the subject line of a reply message may need to be changed if there is a topic shift. Although this seems obvious, unfortunately, when retrieving an email address many writers merely look for the last email correspondence

with a person and then reply without changing the subject line. In one message to John and Chris, for instance, the subject line was *Housing*, but the message contained a draft of some teaching materials we were supposed to review. We almost deleted the message because we thought the housing issue of the sender had been addressed.

10. Colleagues are a better source of assistance with academic correspondence than the Internet.

We would agree since there is no guarantee that information found on a website will be accurate or relevant. As mentioned earlier, immediate reactions and input from colleagues, particularly more senior colleagues, are generally more helpful. Another consideration here is that others may also be looking at Internet resources and so writers may miss an opportunity to distinguish themselves if they use the same resources as everyone else.

Task Two

Here are two versions of an email request; they differ principally in their structure. Which do you prefer, and why?

In our view, the first version might be more appropriate, given the nature of the request. The email sender has never met John before and so beginning with a compliment before asking for a favor is a nice, polite strategy. Our students agree and add that this strategy may be more likely to result in a favorable reply because the background information also reveals that the sender has made an attempt to find the volume she needs. The second message has the same content, but requires a bit more work to understand why the request is reasonable.

Some of our students have asked us whether it is okay to write to scholars and researchers to ask for copies of materials or request other forms of assistance. We think that if a student has made a reasonable attempt to solve his or her difficulty, it is definitely worth contacting other researchers. Most established members of the field try to be of assistance, as long as the request is not too large (e.g., a request for copies of expensive books or a dissertation topic).

Task Three

Which of these concluding statements would you choose for an application cover letter?

- a. Thanks for reading my application & looking forward to hearing back soon.
- b. In closing, this applicant iterates his deep interest in the position and expresses his profound appreciation of your careful review of his case.
- c. Thank you for your consideration and looking forward to hearing from you.

And the closing salutation? We have listed these in order from most formal to most informal. Where in the list would you place Kind regards, Yours truly, and Cheers?

- d. Yours faithfully
- e. Sincerely
- f. Warm regards
- g. Regards
- h. Best wishes
- i. Best

Our assistant, Vera, chose *a* as her concluding statement. She thinks it is concise and polite, but at the same time indicates that the author would like to hear back from the search committee sooner rather than later (at the same time without being pushy). She thinks that *c* gives the impression that the author is not too eager to hear back from the search committee. She finds *b* too formal and too humble for her liking. John and Chris, however, prefer *c* because it seems more balanced and less pushy. They agree with Vera about *b*. As for the closing salutations, we all think *e* sounds the most appropriate; *d* seems too formal, while the rest are perhaps too informal for a letter accompanying an academic job application. Chris would put *kind regards* between *d* and *e*; John would put it between *e* and *f*, would put *yours truly* between *e* and *f*; and would put *cheers* after *i*.

On a Lighter Note

We include the parody to inject a bit of humor into the volume. Some of our students immediately get the joke here; others do not. Some instructors like working with parodies; others do not. If the text will be used in a class or workshop, it is important to assess whether the text will work. If there is a chance that the parody would have to be explained, it may be best to avoid using it.

Getting into Graduate School

The introductory orientation section laid some groundwork for academic correspondence; in this section we now look more narrowly at some correspondence contexts, the first being that for entering a graduate program. Although students in our writing classes are already enrolled in a graduate degree program, some of them plan to obtain a master's degree at our university and then a PhD or other degree at another school. Therefore, we sometimes cover this section in a writing class when we have enough students who are planning to write new Statements of Purpose (SOP). If students are not writing SOPs, however, this section may also be used to introduce the notion of writing moves. This works well since all of our students have written at least one SOP and are familiar with this text type.

Task Four

This task offers a sample SOP from a master's student (here called Gene) applying for a PhD program in Chemical Engineering. Since it is fairly long, we have added short numbered paragraph headings to help you read through it. Now read the SOP and the discussion between the author and his writing tutor that follow. Then respond to the questions that have been inserted within the discussion.

1. Do you think Gene is exaggerating? Does it look like a fourth draft to you?

We know that Gene was struggling with his SOP and this is indeed his fourth draft, the first three offering very little detail and lacking focus. In this version, it is finally becoming clear why he wants to move from

Mechanical Engineering to Chemical Engineering. The draft, however, still needs some work since it could discuss more deeply what he wants to achieve; Gene could do something to make the draft memorable. If a reader were asked to recall anything about this version of the SOP a few days after reading it, it would likely be difficult.

2. Do you agree with Kay that these are the strengths of this SOP? Or is she just being nice?

In Vera's opinion, Kay is either very polite, or is not very insightful when complimenting Gene on his draft. John and Chris think a bit differently here. When Kay says, "it seems very very business-like," this seems like a criticism, but perhaps one that Gene would not pick up on. *Business-like* here suggests that the SOP is lacking something personal that might resonate with the readers. In other words, it gets the job done, but it could be better.

Kay stresses that the strengths of the SOP are

- mentioning the names of the professors in the program Gene is applying to,
- suggesting what Gene could bring to the program, and
- staying under the 600-word limit.

Let us look at each of these comments.

While Gene mentions the names of specific professors, he does not go beyond stating that these professors have demonstrated interest in the area he would like to pursue in his dissertation research. In our opinion, this does not help him make a strong case for why they would want to work with him. He might want to be more specific about how his own interests relate to the research interests of the faculty members, and how together they all may potentially benefit from his participation in their research.

Much of the SOP focuses on what Gene has learned and what he wants to learn. In this sense, it is good that he is trying to convey what he can bring to the program, but he could be a bit more forward looking. He could try to be more convincing that he has something to offer beyond a desire for knowledge by describing some potential areas of research on fuel cell performance or including some more specific

research that he would like to undertake.

It seems to us that Kay's point about staying within the word limit is not much of a compliment. It is the sort of thing one might say if there is not much else to highlight.

3. Gene makes two main points. Should he include a story? And should he add the part about pollution?

As Gene points out himself, so far he has focused on his previous academic and research activities and his desire for more knowledge. This may not be enough for him to distinguish himself from other equally qualified program applicants. Our students think that a story might help to personalize the statement, so that it does stand out among other statements read by the committee members. At the same time, our students worry that including something personal might actually make a negative impression. To avoid being too personal, they have suggested that pollution could be the basis for a story. For instance, Gene could talk about restrictions placed on urban driving that result from high levels of pollution. Whatever he adds, it should be something that is not widely known so that it might be remembered. A well-chosen story could also demonstrate Gene's motivation to solve a very real problem in addition to his desire for deeper knowledge.

4. Simplify Paragraph 3? Leave out the professors in Paragraph 5? Revise Paragraph 1? Your thoughts?

There are, of course, several ways for Gene to revise his SOP. Here are some suggestions that might help him.

- Paragraph 1 could start with a context more closely related to Gene's personal experience rather than the very broad comment on contemporary engineering. This change could result in a more memorable SOP that stands out among other SOPs (see the answer to Question 3).
- Paragraph 3 seems to spend too much space on the lack of practical training in Gene's previous academic program. This information could be given more quickly, freeing up space for a discussion of what he wants to accomplish in the PhD program in this particular department. Here, Gene might want to be more specific about

how he could fill any possible gaps in his education.

- Mentioning faculty names seems fine in that it reveals that Gene at least took time to identify a program and mentors that would help him reach his goals. Gene, of course, needs to be sure that his area of interest matches the interests of these faculty members. Otherwise he might be limiting his chances of getting into the program. For this reason, he should show his statement to a faculty member in his field. Chances are, the faculty member would be familiar with the work of the other faculty members and be able to offer Gene some valuable insight.
- Instead of the generic closing in which Gene states that the PhD program would prepare him for his future career, he could take his SOP back to the more personal and unique opening paragraph. It would be worthwhile to link the end to his personal interest in pursuing a PhD and to the urgency of this research (as seen from the perspective of his unique background).
- It might also be worth looking at some of the vocabulary Gene chose to strengthen his SOP. Chris, for instance, reacts negatively to expressions that seem overused such as *I believe it is crucial to*; *I am fascinated with*; *I strongly believe*; *this knowledge is indispensable for*; and *your program is the ideal place for me to*. . . .

5. Is looking at the new textbook by Swales and Feak a good idea?

Well, of course, we would say yes.

Task Five

Either rewrite Gene's opening paragraph to make it more memorable or draft an SOP of your own, whichever is more appropriate for your current circumstances.

Here is one possible revision of Gene's opening statement.

As a country with one of the world's highest levels of CO₂ emissions, China has recently announced that it is committed to reducing the greenhouse intensity of its economy by 40 to 45 percent in the next decade (*Wall Street Journal* 9/2/10). Having spent most of my life in China, I have a good first-hand understanding of the urgency to lower CO₂ emissions. In addition to the public health issues related to pollution such as increases in rates of asthma and lung cancer, this problem has other direct effects on daily life. For instance, Chinese drivers must deal with the governmental ban on cars in urban areas in which vehicles with a certain license plate number must sit idle one day a week. The dilemma here is how the government can continue to grow the economy, reduce CO₂ emissions, improve public health, and not limit driving. As a Mechanical Engineer with a deep interest in environmentally friendly automotive energy systems, I realize that the strong commitment to reducing emissions is fully dependent on quickly finding innovative solutions and developing new technologies that go beyond the limits of one specific discipline. With the help of your program, I intend to combine my strong background in Mechanical Engineering with opportunities offered by the department of Chemical Engineering to pursue my long-term interests in research on fuel-cell systems. In this way, I hope to become a part of the solution to the environmental crisis faced by China and the rest of the world today.

We think that this opening has the potential to be memorable. Although the serious issue is that of public health, this is rather common knowledge and would not do much to distinguish this SOP. The point about banning vehicles, however, has the potential to be memorable. After all, in how many countries are drivers banned from using their vehicles one day a week?

Task Six

Read the Personal Statement, and answer the questions that follow. We have underlined some less common words and phrases, which we discuss in Question 1.

1. We have underlined five words or phrases that may present difficulty. Which of the following offers the correct explanation of their meaning?
 - a. they have been endowed with: they have inherited
 - b. animated: remain enthusiastic about
 - c. methods of coercion: methods of strong control
 - d. alleviating: reducing
 - e. interstices: places where they meet and connect

2. Would you characterize this text as:
 - a. a philosophy of life
 - b. a plan for the future
 - c. a personal journey

We think the text is a bit of all three. It can be read as a personal journey that reveals the influences the author believes to be significant in shaping his life and that emphasizes the changes that occurred as a result of his international experience. At the same time the statement indicates what Carl would like to do within the field of education and points to a specific area where he would like to contribute. He clearly indicates his personal and professional goal of merging theory and practice to alleviate problems in education.

3. In his statement, Carl stresses his social responsibility, primarily by:
 - a. stressing his life of privilege
 - b. focusing on his international experience
 - c. arguing that with privilege comes responsibility

Carl actually incorporates all of these points, thus painting a complex and multifaceted picture of his own journey. In doing so, his story is not only personal and credible, but also links his own personal experiences with larger social issues, such as his understanding that together with a privileged status there should be a sense of social responsibility. The main message for us is that with privilege comes responsibility.

4. Carl supports his educational commitment, primarily by:
 - a. attacking the educational establishment
 - b. showing how theoretical work needs to be made relevant to teaching practice
 - c. arguing how underprepared today's undergraduates are for the real world

We cannot choose one main strategy. We think that to make his case Carl has actually done all of these to a somewhat similar degree.

5. In your view, as an applicant Carl comes across as:
 - a. a serious academic
 - b. a person who just wants to settle back in the U.S.
 - c. a socially committed educationalist

We think that here Carl seems more like a socially committed educationalist. We would also hope that he is a serious academic, but since this text is a Personal Statement the focus should be on the personal story behind his reasons for pursuing a PhD rather than on his academic plans. The latter would have been described in a separate SOP.

Finding Your Voice in the Academic Community

Although many of our students and workshop participants tell us that they prefer communicating via email rather than face-to-face, this does not mean that they are completely confident in their ability to write effective messages. Problems arise because it is not clear whether they should follow the conventions of spoken language or those of the more rule-governed written language. Another factor is that they are aware that email can be misread or misinterpreted due to factors beyond their control, such as the recipient's mood or careless reading.

Task Seven

With this in mind, here is a draft email message that a graduate student, Akiko, plans to send to her advisor, Caroline Kelly. The email relates to the first version of the second chapter of her dissertation. The student shows the draft of this email message to the three other members of her study group for comments because she is worried that she may not be making a good impression. Their comments follow. Whom do you agree with and why?

Dear Professor Kelly,

I have finally gotten around to writing something. I will put a hard copy in your mailbox sometime next week. Please pick it up and let me know what you think. I hope you like it 😊.

Akiko

We mainly agree with Simon's comments. First, Simon urges Akiko to be more specific about what exactly she is submitting to her advisor. Although the subject line may indicate that she is submitting a draft of her second chapter, it is still a good idea to state this in the body of the message. Second, Simon urges Akiko to be clear about when she will give the chapter to her advisor. If this information is given, the advisor can plan to get the draft and then perhaps schedule time to read it. We agree with Simon that it is best to avoid emoticons in her email since these are more appropriately used in nonwork-related communications. Finally, as to whether Akiko should address the professor by her first name, this depends on their relationship. If she usually calls her professor by her first name, then it seems odd to not do the same in email. If, however, Akiko does not use her advisor's first name when talking to her, then what she wrote is fine. Consistency in the use of names in both face-to-face and email communications makes good sense. Although Akiko used an appropriate greeting, we would like to add here that even after several years in a graduate program many of our students formulate greetings by using the recipient's last name only, as in *Dear Feak*. It surprises us that these students have not been told by anyone that this is not an appropriate form of address in the United States and many other countries.

We would advise Akiko to explain where in the chapter she is having difficulty and what she would most like feedback on. This would help her

reveal some awareness of possible weaknesses in the text and provide a basis for useful written feedback from the advisor as well as discussion points for a later meeting.

Finally, we want to add that the imperative, *please pick it up and let me know what you think*, may be perceived as a bit impolite. The mere addition of *please* here does not lessen the force of the imperative. Akiko might make a better impression if she wrote, “I will leave it in your box for you to pick up. Looking forward to getting your feedback.”

Here is another attempt at the same email. We have assumed that it is okay for Akiko to address her advisor by first name only.

Dear Caroline,

I have finished the first draft of Chapter 2 and I will put it into your mailbox next Monday (October 12th). This is a rather rough draft and, as you will see, I am still trying to find a way to organize all the ideas I have into one cohesive story. I would very much appreciate your feedback on this piece. Particularly, I am interested in getting your opinion with regard to the following questions:

- Basically, I am trying to say that. . . . Do you think that this message is clear considering the current chapter organization?
- Do you think that I should switch subsections 2b and 2c in order to . . . ?
- As I was writing the chapter, I felt like I had too much background and not enough analysis of the actual data. What is your feeling after reading the draft?

I am very much looking forward to hearing your comments. I would be glad to stop by to talk about the draft and the next steps I should take; just let me know what day and time would be the most convenient for you.

Akiko

Task Eight

Now suppose you are Vera, who has worked with John and Chris on a part-time basis for more than a year and who now has her PhD and who also works as a lecturer in Russian and German. Write her email on the same topic to John Swales. It should, of course, be somewhere between the other two in terms of style and politeness.

Hi John,

I was going to start working on the commentary for the Methods volume, but I am afraid that the version you attached to your last email was not the most recent one. Could you check this so that I don't write the commentary based on an older draft? I am attaching the document you sent us for your reference.

Thanks!

Vera

Vera's message has positioned herself between Chris's strong criticism and Emma's hesitant query by clearly, but politely, stating the problem (*I'm afraid that . . .*), and nicely asking John to check his attachments before sending them (*Could you . . . ?*). Some of our students question the wisdom of attaching the wrong draft. They think that this might be considered rude since the message has already indicated the problem and there is no need to make John feel worse about the error. We understand this perspective, but given the relationship between John and Vera, we think it is fine. In fact, seeing the wrong draft might help him figure out which draft should have been sent. However, when in doubt about whether something might be rude, we recommend erring on the side of caution and being as polite as possible.

Task Nine

Here are a number of suggestions of various kinds for managing group writing tasks. Evaluate them in terms of their importance, and then undertake the writing task. (Not all of them will necessarily be “very important.”)

V = very important

S = somewhat important

N = not really important

Here are our responses to the task. We give our agreed upon evaluations, followed by our reasons. Of course, other interpretations are possible.

- S 1. During the work on the project, establish who will be busiest with other commitments and who will be least busy.

This might be not so relevant for a writing project in which every group member is expected to participate equally. However, in any case, it would be important to know about commitments group members might have when scheduling group meetings and planning deadlines.

- Y 2. Everybody should agree to date all the drafts at the top, so that members don't respond to out-of-date texts.

This or any other system of tracking manuscript dates is important, as we saw in the previous task where John's habit of not dating the drafts led to confusion and, in one case, wasted work by his co-author. Word processing programs can be set to automatically update dates.

- Y 3. The order of authors on the final manuscript should be decided at the beginning.

This should be discussed early in the writing process, taking into account various factors, such as the amount of research and writing done by each of the group members. Author order can be a very sensitive issue and one that our students tend to avoid raising with their advisors and others who are co-authors on papers. The lack of discussion of author order has on numerous occasions resulted in disappointment and even anger. We have noticed that the longer students wait to discuss author order, the harder it is to bring it up with their co-authors.

- Y 4. Agree early on formatting issues, such as choice of font and font size.

While having all members adhere to the same formatting throughout the writing process (e.g., by using a template) may not initially seem important, the value of doing this becomes very clear as deadlines approach. Some final formatting adjustments can be made toward the final stages of the project, but time is better spent working on content rather than major formatting tasks.

- Y 5. Work out a clear and realistic timetable for completing the project on time.

In our experience it is very important to make sure everybody in the group has a clear vision of what has to be completed when and in what order to make sure deadlines are met. Working backward from the due date can allow project members to set reasonable deadlines. However, even if deadlines are set, research shows that most people are very bad at judging the amount of time needed to complete a task.

- S 6. Make contingency plans in case something goes wrong (e.g., illness in a group member's immediate family).

It is useful to think about both Plan A, in which everything goes as planned, and Plan B, which is needed when unexpected problems arise. In reality, formulating a Plan B is hard to do since it is generally impossible to predict what might happen.

- Y 7. Try to decide who might be best at what (e.g., literature review, data collection, statistics, stylistic elegance, etc.).

We believe this is important to maximize the effectiveness of a group; however, just because someone may have more experience doing some part of a project, it does not mean that this person must take on that part. Projects should provide an opportunity for trying new things and developing new skills.

- Y 8. Do not penalize non-native speakers by restricting them to tasks that do not require writing or participation in an oral presentation (e.g., doing the statistical analysis, making tables and charts).

This is definitely important since each group member deserves a chance to participate in the project to an equal degree. Excluding non-native speakers from the written or oral tasks limits their opportunities to practice academic communication skills. Our non-native speakers tell us that they are often saddled with number crunching and often the creation of graphs and other visuals. This latter task often needs to be done near the end of the project and perhaps the end of the semester when they have many other tasks to take care of. Often, the data gets to them late and there is a tremendous amount of pressure to get the visuals done on time.

For 9 and 10, write two recommendations of your own, and evaluate them.

Here are some sample recommendations:

- Y 9. Appoint someone to keep track of what has been done and what still needs to be done.

It is incredibly helpful to have one person who gently manages the group, while also contributing to the project tasks. This can ensure that everything gets done.

- Y 10. Set up regular meetings to check progress.

Thanks to technology, regular meetings can be set up so easily these days. Programs such as Skype allow everyone to meet without all of the hassles of scheduling and attending face-to-face meetings. Even if there is little to report, having everyone check in from time to time allows everyone to see how the project is progressing (or not).

Now take one of the suggestions you ranked as very important, and write a suitable message to your (imaginary) co-authors, indicating how the suggestion could best be implemented.

Here is a sample email message that one group member might send to his or her group with regard to Number 5.

Hi Peter and Jessica,

I've been thinking about the project timeline that we discussed at the meeting yesterday. I wasn't sure about you, but my feeling was that we were still not on the same page with regard to when each of the parts needed to be completed and when and how we would pull all the pieces together. So, I've tried to put all of the important steps we talked about into a calendar. Do you mind looking it over and letting me know whether this schedule is what you have also envisioned? As you will see, I tried to leave us a little bit more wiggle room toward the end of the semester just in case we are running behind. Of course, we can shift things back and forth so that they fit everybody's schedule. My main goal here is to create a realistic schedule that would allow each of us to plan ahead and complete each step on time.

Let me know what you think.

Vera

Task Ten

Which of these next steps do you prefer—and why?

1. *Resend the original message again.*
2. *Send this message as a test.*

Dr. Rogers, did you get my email of June 12 regarding a request for one of your papers? I am beginning to wonder whether it got trapped in your spam box, or perhaps you have been out of email contact?

3. *Explain to Professor Lee that you have had no reply, and suggest that it might work better if he sent a message personally.*
4. *Resend the message, adding the following:*

In the meantime, I am attaching a working paper on a similar topic that might be of interest to you.

Our students find it difficult to decide which of the four options is best. On the one hand, simply resending the original message (Option 1 or Option 4) might again result in the message being overlooked by the recipient. On the other hand, Option 2 might appear too “pushy.” Perhaps a combination of the two options would be appropriate. A polite inquiry about the recipient’s receipt of the original message could be composed and the original message copied and pasted into the end for reference. Here is one such possible reminder message.

Dear Dr. Rogers,

I was wondering whether you received my email of June 12 regarding a request for one of your papers and just wanted to make sure it did not get trapped in your spam box. I am pasting the text of my original message below. We would greatly appreciate it if you could assist us in locating the article I mentioned.

Sincerely,

Emily Chang

Task Eleven

You (and your partner) are assistants to Professor Gardener. He forwards you the five email request messages on pages 30–33, accompanied by this one from him.

Guys, these requests just in. They never seem to stop. What should be our priorities here? Could you sort them out in rank order, with either the most urgent, or those easiest to comply with, at the top (i.e., 1)? Then at the weekly lab meeting we can decide what to do—or not to do! Thanks for doing this for me.

Read the messages, and complete the chart on page 33 in the main volume. Then sort the requests as per Professor Gardener’s instructions. What are your reasons for your choices? What do you think the decisions will be at next week’s lab meeting?

Here are Vera and John's responses to this task.

	Message 1	Message 2	Message 3	Message 4	Message 5
Academic status of requester	Researcher at a smaller institution	Master's student	Leader of a research group, recent PhD	Head of the Department of Materials Science, Shatin University	Research assistant, part-time PhD student
Type of help requested	Would like to visit as an observer researcher for three months	Referral for papers related to her research	Request for Professor Gardener to serve as an informal and unofficial advisor for a research group	Inquiry about Professor Gardener's availability to act as an external examiner	Hard to say. On the one hand, she is interested in getting information about Professor Gardener's research; on the other, she is asking about further suggestions for her dissertation topic. Furthermore, she is requesting information about further bibliographical references she might use.
Place in text where main request occurs (beginning, middle, or end?)	Toward the front: <i>I would like to visit your department as an observer researcher for a short time (about three months) to get ideas to inform my thesis.</i>	In the middle: <i>I was wondering if there are similar papers on this topic that you could refer me to or let me have copies of?</i>	In the middle: <i>I am asking whether you might be willing to act as an informal and unofficial advisor to my group.</i>	At the beginning: <i>This is a preliminary inquiry as to whether you might be in principle willing to act as an external examiner.</i>	In the middle (however, it is not clear what in particular the author is requesting): <i>I am especially interested in your publications . . . I also would be grateful if you have any suggestions . . .</i>
Phrases you like	<i>I am carrying out research in your area of materials science. I could collaborate in any other way that you might suggest.</i>	<i>I am currently working on a master's thesis on the . . . (This email beginning ensures a quick and informative self-introduction for the reader.)</i>	<i>On Dr. Jones's suggestion . . . (This gives authority and reason to his request, also the request is expressed very tentatively.)</i>	<i>This is a preliminary inquiry as to . . . (The goal of the message is clarified right at the beginning.)</i>	<i>I am writing you on the recommendation of Professor Grossman . . . (This gives authority and reason to his request.)</i>

<p>Phrases you dislike</p>	<p><i>... in order to get ideas about my thesis</i> (This is too vague.)</p>	<p><i>I recently read a recent ... paper</i> (This is too repetitive.) <i>The library here isn't very good.</i> (This seems too critical; she could have put it differently.)</p>	<p><i>I know you are a very busy and important man.</i> (This a very obvious attempt at flattery and could backfire.)</p>	<p>(We don't think there are any bad expressions or sentences here.)</p>	<p><i>I really need your help!</i> (The writer sounds too desperate.) <i>I am ... working part-time on my dissertation.</i> (This might indicate a lack of strong commitment to the research.) <i>I understand from professor ... in this area ...</i> (This suggests that she is not really familiar with the work of Professor Gardener and is making a blind request.)</p>
<p>Rank order</p>	<p>3. This is also a request that seems to need timely attention because in the case of a positive answer the requester would need to apply for travel grants. That said, John finds the request rather vague; in addition, he doubts that Professor Gardener would know anything about the modern languages department.</p>	<p>2. This request sounds reasonable and easy enough to satisfy. It is clear what the requester is asking for and why she is contacting Professor Gardener.</p>	<p>4. This request might need a deeper look. Before declining or accepting the role of an unofficial advisor, Professor Gardener might want to know more about the responsibilities of this role and the expectations that would be placed on an advisor of a research group.</p>	<p>1. This request appears to need the most urgent attention since the completion of a degree depends on the availability of the external examiner.</p>	<p>5. This is the request that we would designate as having the lowest priority. The author does not leave an impression that her request is well thought through and reasonable. In fact, she even appears not to know exactly what she is asking for, mentioning too many things at once. She might need to rephrase it to be more specific.</p>

In our view, it is likely that during the next group meeting, the professor would decide to respond (positively or negatively) to the request to serve as an examiner of the PhD thesis (Message 4). He might also decide whether to invite a visiting observer researcher (Message 1). The task of helping out with additional references might be assigned to one of the research assistants familiar with the literature and the topic (Message 2). For Message 3, the professor might decide to either decline or request more information on the responsibilities that would come with this role. In this case, he would contact the sender asking for additional details. Message 5 is likely to be the lowest on the priority list and Annika might be emailed to ask if she could be more specific.

Task Twelve

Offer Annika Graf a revised version of her request message.

Here is Vera's revision of Annika's email to Professor Gardener. We are assuming that Annika has now taken some time to familiarize herself with Professor Gardener's work and publications in order for her request to be more reasonable and more specific. We believe that now the request may receive a positive response.

Dear Professor Gardener,

I am a research assistant of Professor Grossman from the Vienna Institute of Technology, whom you know from your sabbatical there. I am writing to you on his recommendation. I am currently working on my dissertation under the running title "Ceramic-Metallic Fusion Properties at Extremely High Temperatures." I am familiar with your published work on this topic, which has been very helpful in propelling my own research forward. In the bibliography of your last article in *Solid State Phenomena*, you mention research on cermet catalysts that will appear in two soon-to-be-published articles. I was wondering whether it would be possible for me to get a copy of these before they are published.

I was also wondering whether it could be possible for me to share with you some of the work I have done so far. Feedback and input from you—a well-known expert in this particular field—would very much help me

refine the focus of my dissertation. Please let me know if you would be interested in looking at some of my latest work. I would be glad to send you a copy of my most recent dissertation chapter. However, I would completely understand if this would not be possible for you due to the other commitments.

I very much look forward to hearing from you,
Sincerely,
Annika Graf

Task Thirteen

I. Complete the sentences with an appropriate VERB+ing.

1. I am looking forward to *attending* your presentation at next month's conference.
2. The director is not accustomed to *having* his decisions questioned.
3. The student admitted to *plagiarizing/copying/downloading* the paper from the Internet.
4. The tax reform is being introduced with a view toward *providing/increasing* benefits for the poor.
5. There can be drawbacks to *relying* on probabilistic measures.
6. She is averse to *rewriting/redrafting* her dissertation abstract for a sixth time.

II. Look through some of your emails and other texts to check on your use of this hard-to-learn syntactic pattern. For example, check on your use of alternative to see whether you write:

One alternative to repeat the study is

Or the correct:

One alternative to repeating the study is

Task Fourteen

Here are six email messages to John. Mark them as FF (very formal), F (formal), I (informal), or II (very informal). Also, can you guess the relationship of the sender to the receiver (in this case, John)? Work in pairs if possible.

- II 1. Hi John. Excuse the long silence. Been so busy running around that I'm hardly ever in my office. Anyway, I'm attaching what I think you want. Lemme know if it isn't okay. Best.

This is from a colleague that John probably knows well. We can conclude that the apology is quite informal because the sender uses a very informal greeting, leaves out the subjects of sentences (commonly referred to as ellipsis), uses conversational forms in writing (lemme = let me), and an informal closing—*Best*.

- FF 2. I apologize for being slow to respond to your request for information. This was reviewed by the board at its last meeting. However, the discussion was highly complex and it was, after the meeting, difficult to discern the actual instructions for how to respond to you. Further conversations with the chair now allow me to say

This message was sent by someone acting as an official representative of an institutional unit. This is a lengthy apology in which the author provides a detailed explanation for being late with his other response.

- I 3. Dear John. Forgive the delay, caused in the first instance by a faulty fax machine, from which it was difficult to extract your message. Then, we had trouble getting the machine to work properly. However, the delay does not signify a lack of interest in your suggestion. Warm regards.

This is likely from a colleague who is not close and probably at another institution. Although the apology is quite informal, it shows a higher level of formality than the first one.

- I 4. John, I am sorry to have taken so long to get back to you on this. With my new job I've been literally run off my feet. Might I suggest we get together for lunch one day? Perhaps if you could suggest

two or three days that work for you before the end of the month, then Keith and I can select one and firm up arrangements.

A colleague or a co-author sent this message. The style of the email also suggests that the relationship is not so formal, but it is not as informal as the first email.

- F 5. Professor Swales, we apologize for being slow to getting you payment for your recent work for us as an external examiner. This was caused by an oversight in the accounting office, which has now been rectified. Sincerely,

This looks like a response to a complaint from John about a delayed paycheck.

- ll 6. Groveling apologies for being so slow. Recently, I have been running into a whole heap of technical problems, including a dreadful computer crash. Anyway, finally here is what you wanted.

This message was sent by a colleague. Similar to the first apology, this looks very informal.

Establishing Yourself in Graduate School

Task Fifteen

At some point you may want or need to apply for a small grant—perhaps to make a research trip of some kind, or for some equipment, or to attend a conference. Often these grants are competitive, and so you need to make the best case you can for getting the money.

You (and your partner, if you have one) are members of the selection committee for a university-wide competition for summer research grants, with a maximum level of support of \$2,000. The extracts from two applications from very different fields follow. Both fall within the budget limit. Read the applications, and decide which of the arguments from your fellow committee members you agree with.

Arguments in committee

Mark the points with which you agree with an A (agree) and those with which you disagree with a D (disagree).

Here are our reactions to the comments from the committee.

Ana's Application

D 1. Ana doesn't show any effort to obtain alternative funds.

Funding applicants do not necessarily need to reveal whether they have sought other sources of funding, so we would not reject the application based on this alone. True, it might strengthen her application if she did indicate that she is seeking other money and that the funds requested would cover a specific need not covered by the other funding source, but given her field, Ana may have no other funding sources.

A *Also, what does focuses in part mean? I don't know, as a result, whether this trip to Spain is crucial for her dissertation or not. I'm inclined to turn this one down.*

The expression *focuses in part* is vague, so we really do not have a strong sense of how the encyclopedia fits in Ana's dissertation work. We really would like to see some detail regarding the encyclopedia. Vagueness will often result in rejection.

Many of our students question whether Ana needs to see the encyclopedia. They think it is highly likely that a digital version is available and that should be sufficient for her needs. This makes sense to us, so Ana should have explained her need to see a real copy.

A 2. We all know that the Modern Languages Department never has any real discretionary money, and Ana's project is so specialized that it is unlikely that anybody else in the U would fund it. I also read the *focuses in part* phrase differently; to me it suggests that she will be offering the field more than a narrow archive-based textual study. I vote to give her the money.

It is true that it can be more difficult to obtain research funding in the Humanities. It is refreshing that some committee members are aware of this and would fund her proposal, despite the weaknesses.

D 3. Look guys, I may be an engineer and all that, but I don't see much value in this kind of historical scholarship. Surely, we should be supporting projects that are more relevant to life in our century, not the thirteenth. For me, it's "no."

As a sociolinguist, our assistant, Vera, strongly disagrees with this perspective, and luckily, the comment of the next committee member provides a nice counterargument to the engineer's position. John and Chris agree with Vera on this.

- A 4. We are a major research university with a serious commitment to scholarship in many forms. Ana's project looks outward to Spain at a very interesting time in its history, because it is through Islamic Spain that Aristotle was rediscovered in Europe. Unlike my engineering colleague, I think it is well worth considering.

We think that this is a very valid argument. However, it is unfortunate that a committee member, not Ana, makes such a good case for funding the project. We would like to have seen this in Ana's own text.

Esmail's Application

- A 1. It looks as though these guys in Architecture messed up their funding support, and are asking us to get them out of a hole. Since *sustainability* is such a buzzword these days, they should have been able to do better. I don't think we should be providing such bridge funds when we have so many other strong applications to consider.

This committee member makes some very good points. Sustainability does stand out in this application, which seems to be an attempt to make the project at least appear important, timely, and cutting-edge; however, nothing more is given to suggest that this research is essential. It may very well be that if the applicant did not receive funding for the summer, the only problem would be a delay in getting the work done. This is quite different from the proposed work in Ana's application, which might never get done without funding.

- A 2. It seems to me, on the contrary, that one of the prime purposes of the summer research grants system is precisely to provide the kind of funds that Esmail is requesting.

Yes, it seems like the fund is designed to carry students through a short period of time when there is no other funding.

D Our sums are small and in this case, they will go far. I recommend that we approve this funding.

On this point, we disagree since it is not clear why the funding would *go far* in Esmail's project. Esmail may have other funding sources that Ana does not have. So, perhaps the funding would go far for her research, as well. We do not see much value in this line of thinking, but do agree that as summer projects the money may go far for both.

A 3. The project description is a little vague, but if you look at the detailed budget, it becomes much clearer what kinds of material are needed and in what quantities. Some of these are really experimental and cannot be easily fabricated on-site. Given this, and the potential industrial applications of this research, I vote "yes."

It is hard for us to judge this comment because we do not have the actual budgets that came with Ana's and Esmail's respective applications. If Esmail's budget really makes a good case that he will use the money wisely, then this is a valid observation and would be a reason to lean toward funding his research. However, if Ana's budget clearly details how the funds will be used to achieve certain goals, then we would be inclined to fund her project, as well.

We agree that Esmail's research might have industrial applications, but we think it would be unfair to eliminate Ana's application simply because her research (obviously) does not.

A 4. As an engineer, I am concerned that the first priority should be that the testing equipment works. There is no point in purchasing relatively expensive materials until we are assured that the testing and simulation programs are running smoothly. Although I was initially impressed with this project, now I have concerns about its viability. So, reluctantly, it's a "no" from me.

This sounds like a solid argument from a person who may be well qualified to make it. The committee member seems to know something about necessary research steps that Esmail has perhaps overlooked. If the background work has not been done, then the proposed work cannot be accomplished during the summer. As

non-experts, we are inclined to defer to this committee member and assume the points are valid.

In the end we think that despite some weaknesses in the proposals, the projects are worthwhile and the committee would do well to fund them. Although Ana might gain access to a digital copy of the encyclopedia, seeing and/or working with an original copy may offer her some important research insights. Without funding Esmail probably would do his research eventually, but getting some important work done in the summer might allow him to get something published sooner.

Task Sixteen

Rank these four email responses, with 1 being the best. First, read the discussion points on page 45 in the main volume. Which two applicants would you interview and why?

Here are our rankings.

1. A
2. D
3. C
4. B

Discussion points

1. Do you have any concerns about any of the applicants' written English?
None of the responses reveals any serious writing problems. Applicants A and D mention that they are international students (suggesting that they may also be non-native speakers of English) and they describe struggling with writing, which may actually be beneficial for the project. Native speaker status should not matter for the project as long as the person has a good command of English and is familiar with the conventions of academic writing.
2. How important do you think statistical skills will be?
We do not know exactly from the job description that knowledge of statistical software and an ability to perform statistical analysis are necessary parts of the job; however, it is possible that these skills would be a plus.

3. Should you be looking for signs of cross-cultural sensitivity?

Yes, this would likely be relevant because the project deals with the writing done by international students.

4. Should you pay any attention to apparent student need, or focus only on who would be best for the ELI?

It is best to find the most qualified candidate for the job to make sure that the project is completed efficiently and competently. Unfortunately, budgets and strict timelines these days usually do not allow student need to be taken into consideration, although sometimes there is pressure from advisors to take care of students.

5. If Applicant B asks you for suggestions about how to improve the posted message, what advice would you give?

a. The beginning of this message sounds more like a job description than a job application. The author could consider starting by stating the purpose of the email as Applicant A did. Overall, the message appears a little rushed.

b. We do not think it is necessary to provide a general statement on the particular qualities needed to perform the job. Instead, the author could focus on the skills he or she has together with the previous relevant work or research experiences.

c. Given the nature of the project, the candidate could also discuss his or her experience with academic writing at the dissertation level. Based on what was written, this project might be his or her first serious opportunity to write.

It was decided to interview the top two candidates, A and D.

Task Seventeen

Your acquaintance from Korea, Ji-Young Kim, is looking for financial support to conduct her field research back home. She has written three versions of her statement of purpose for the Miller Fellowship so far, and each time she has received feedback via email from her advisor. She is now a bit confused and needs your advice as to which one to submit and then whether the best of the set needs further work. Read through her drafts (and commentaries) and then decide which

would likely be the most successful. What are the strong and weak points of each? Then send an email to Ji-Young giving your considered opinion. In this case, we have added sentence numbers because we have included some Language Notes at the end of the three versions.

Version A

Strengths

Ji-Young manages to clearly demonstrate her connection to Korea and her personal motivation for conducting research there.

Weaknesses

- The point about her grades being “encouraging” does not do much to instill confidence in Ji-Young as a strong student and scholar.
- There seems to be too great an emphasis on Ji-Young’s personal story. She would be better off highlighting the urgency of the proposed research for Korean society at large, and not discussing her work so much in direct relation to her own family experiences.
- This draft does not provide sufficient detail on what exactly Ji-Young would be doing in Korea; thus, a reader could very easily conclude that she does not have a clear research plan. Stating that she could do research in the United States seems to very much work against her since it suggests that there is no compelling reason to fund research in or on Korea.
- Some language choices could be improved. For instance, the phrase *really need* sounds too much like pleading and not suitable for an application of this sort.

Version B

Strengths

- From the very beginning, this version manages to highlight the need to perform research in Korea as part of a well-planned academic path for the applicant and as something that she has a solid and long-standing interest in.

- The draft gives a more global perspective on the problem by relating it to recent statistical data.
- It also gives the selection committee a sense what exactly Ji-Young will do for the fellowship.

Weaknesses

- It might help Ji-Young to explain in more detail the need to undertake the research in Korea. Stating that her advisor was the one to suggest doing so does not reflect positively on her as a scholar.

Version C

Strengths

- This version highlights the need to do the research in Korea.
- It also provides a good vision of the research that Ji-Young will do and her intent to share her work by publishing.

Weaknesses

- This version in many respects looks like a research article introduction (showcasing the urgency of the proposed research) rather than like a fellowship application.
- What is lost in this version is the personality of the researcher and the “personal story” behind Ji-Young’s interest in this problem.
- Also, stating that the proposed research is merely an “appropriate topic” for her dissertation comes across as rather weak.

Overall, version B looks the most promising. The commentary accompanying the next task provides an email message to Ji-Young suggesting how to strengthen the second draft.

Task Eighteen

Now it's your turn. Write an email message to Ji-Young, explaining your choice of your preferred version.

Here is a message composed by our assistant, Vera. We think she has some very good advice to offer.

Dear Ji-Young,

I now think the second version is the basis for a successful application, but there is still some work to be done. Here are some ideas for how to strengthen the text. The beginning seems fine, as it shows how this fellowship will enable you to stay on your academic career path and pursue your interests. Moving on, however, you could shorten sentence 3 a little to save space for other things (e.g., “widows living alone” instead of “women whose husbands have died and who are not cared for by their family members”). In sentence 4, I would mention the statistical results for Korea that you included in Version C. This would help demonstrate the urgency of doing the research specifically in Korea. In sentence 5, instead of stating that it was your advisor who suggested the topic for you, you might want to position yourself as the perfect candidate to do the research given your cultural and linguistic background. I would cut *unfortunately* in sentence 6, and instead rephrase this sentence to highlight that there is a gap in the research that your work will fill. You could omit *If I am successful* in sentence 7 to save space. In sentence 8, I would add the three perspectives you are trying to investigate (medical, emotional, and financial from Version C). This would help you demonstrate the focus of your data collection. I would be glad to look over the new draft. Let me know if you have any questions.

Best,

Vera

Task Nineteen

Read this letter of recommendation for an undergraduate student applying to a master's program in Public Policy, and then respond to the eight reaction statements.

1. This is a nice letter about a nice person by a nice person, but it may not help her too much.

The letter writer clearly knows something about the student, but we wonder how well she really knows the student. The vague adjectives used to describe Ms. Matthews could apply to many other students and probably will be ineffective in convincing the readers that she would be a good addition to the graduate program in Public Policy. The next paragraph is a bit better, but the weak opening may negatively influence the reading of the remainder of the letter.

2. This is a very nice letter that should work very well.

We do not think that it will work very well. At the same time, it will not do any harm either. If the program she has applied to wants applicants who have actively participated in political activities and campaigns, the second paragraph may be very helpful.

3. There is no need to write *To Whom It May Concern*. It doesn't do any good, and may do harm.

We agree. As mentioned in commentary to Task One (Question 7), care should be taken to find the name(s) of the addressee(s).

4. Why does the writer consistently refer to the applicant as *Ms. Matthews* in the second half of the letter? I would have used her first name.

In the United States, we often will start with the full name and then switch to the first name to demonstrate that we know the person fairly well. The consistent use of *Ms. Matthews* in the second paragraph suggests an unfortunate distance between the letter writer and the student. In other academic cultures, however, the use of Title and Family name may be perfectly fine.

5. The writer doesn't say what course she was teaching. Why not? I am guessing it had nothing to do with politics.

We think one could easily conclude that it was not a political science or other related course. Certainly, if the letter were written by someone in Public Policy or Political Science, the letter would have mentioned the course.

6. The formal use of *Ms. Matthews* in the second half of the letter suggests that the applicant is a serious, mature individual.

While the use of this form of address might signal a lack of familiarity between the recommender and the applicant, we acknowledge that for some readers the form of address here may reflect the fact that Ms. Matthews is a serious and mature student.

7. *While assisting Ms. Matthews with her papers* gives an impression that the student has a serious writing problem. This needs rephrasing.

It is hard to say that a negative impression will result since it is common for undergraduate students to seek assistance from their instructors. The writer could, however, give the frequent meetings a more positive spin. For instance, she could write something along the lines of "As a very engaged student, Ms. Matthews took additional opportunities to engage herself with the course material, for example, by exploring and testing ideas for course-related writing during my office hours. It is through these meetings that I had ample opportunities to get to know Ms. Matthews and appreciate her deep interest in and commitment to public policy. . . ."

8. The first paragraph has useful detail; the second does not.

We would disagree for the reasons discussed earlier.

Language Focus: Positive and Less Positive Language in Recommendations

Look at this list of adjectives and adverbs. Could any of them perhaps carry negative connotations without the addition of supporting evidence? Place a check mark (✓) next to the adjectives you think an applicant for an academic position (such as yourself) might like to see in a letter of recommendation.

There are no absolute right or wrong answers here, but after much discussion our students typically check these adjectives. While there is no doubt that most of us would like others to think we are *pleasant* as well as some of the other adjectives, we would hope that in a letter of recommendation, our letter writer would have something more substantive to say. Care should also be taken when choosing descriptors. Although being assertive is not necessarily a bad quality, in a letter of recommendation it could be misread to suggest that someone disagrees a lot or is perhaps unwilling to compromise.

- | | | |
|--|---|---|
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> articulate | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> creative | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> observant |
| <input type="checkbox"/> nice | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> imaginative | <input type="checkbox"/> self-confident |
| <input type="checkbox"/> dependable | <input type="checkbox"/> satisfactory | <input type="checkbox"/> eager |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> effective | <input type="checkbox"/> assertive | <input type="checkbox"/> adequate |
| <input type="checkbox"/> pleasant | <input type="checkbox"/> efficient | <input type="checkbox"/> cheerful |
| <input type="checkbox"/> good | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> innovative | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> cooperative |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> mature | <input type="checkbox"/> steady | <input type="checkbox"/> critical |

Task Twenty

What type of support could be offered to justify the following unsupported statements made in various recommendations. Don't just say, Give examples. Be creative, and make up examples for at least two of them.

Here are some possible expansions of the original points.

1. Desiree has obtained one of the best grade point averages in our program and she has done magnificent work in the materials laboratory.

Desiree has obtained one of the best grade point averages in our program (3.9) and she has done magnificent work in the materials laboratory, especially while working on ceramics with Professor Smuda. Her recent work in his lab focused on developing an approach to removing the mold material without distorting or fracturing the unsintered ceramic. Despite numerous challenges, she achieved high yield strength (up to 472 kPa) and Young's modulus (up to 110 MPa) that facilitated easy and successful removal of the wet-coagulated bodies even from intricate shape molds.

2. Throughout her time as an undergraduate, Maria has been active in extracurricular activities.

Throughout her time as an undergraduate, Maria has been active in extracurricular activities. She has enthusiastically performed the duties of the president of our undergraduate Science Club for two years and in 2009 and 2010 spearheaded the planning of Science Days—a university-sponsored event that annually attracts more than 800 local high school students interested in the natural sciences.

3. Sergei is a very responsible person.

Having supervised Sergei's work on three projects, I can say that in addition to his other good qualities, he is a very responsible person. In these projects Sergei was recognized by his teammates as the informal group leader and spokesperson due to his ability to consider all aspects of a project and to have a clear understanding of the steps needed to successfully complete the work on time. He has also always shown himself to be very careful in following all the safety precautions. In a word, he can be trusted.

4. Mitsuyo is an excellent communicator.

Mitsuyo is an excellent communicator. Since her second year in the PhD program, she has been repeatedly elected by her fellow graduate students as a student-faculty liaison and has greatly contributed to establishing effective communications between the faculty and the students in the Department of Linguistics.

5. Over the years it has become clear that Antonia is a very motivated student who sets high goals for herself.

Over the years it has become clear that Antonia is a very motivated student who sets high goals for herself. In 2008, she successfully applied for and received a highly competitive fellowship for undertaking summer research in Spain. This allowed her to gather unique data on how European environmental norms were perceived and adopted in Spain. Antonia used this research experience to compose an outstanding senior Honor theses entitled “The Environmental Legacy of the Franco Dictatorship: Implications for the Integration of European Environmental Norms in Spain,” which won the departmental award for best thesis written by an undergraduate student in 2010.

Over the years this next task has consistently generated lively discussion on the potential impact of including what appear to be negative comments in letters of recommendation. Student reactions to the text in the main volume range from being shocked to admiration of the skill with which the concern was raised.

Task Twenty-One

Read this short section from the final paragraph of a letter of recommendation written for a graduate student applying for a junior faculty position. Consider the questions that follow.

1. The writer is obviously concerned about the impression the candidate might make and wants to reassure the reader that the candidate is really a good catch. Do you think the writer dealt with concerns fairly? Do you think the writer has helped the candidate?

John and Chris do not agree on this. Chris thinks that the writer failed to consider that Melissa might rise to the occasion and handle the

interview process well. Melissa would know what is at stake during the interview and would likely make every effort to present herself as a capable academic who would be a good addition to the department. Thus, Chris thinks that the writer has done Melissa a disservice. John, on the other hand, thinks the comments help Melissa because the interviewers would know in advance that Melissa might falter at some point and would overlook any small misstep. John and Chris's disagreement here likely reflects differences between a British and a U.S. perspective on letters of recommendation. John always says that the British are well known for writing letters that are less enthusiastic than those of their U.S. counterparts.

2. Do you think the end of the letter was the best place to discuss the writer's concerns?

John and Chris disagree on this point as well. John thinks that it is best to address such concerns toward the end of the letter, focusing the earlier parts on praise. However, Chris thinks that it is not a good idea to end the letter on a negative note. As stated earlier, her preference is to say nothing about possible underperformance, but if the writer feels compelled to say something, a sentence or two could be added to reassure the readers that the concern is really minor and that Melissa would be an excellent addition to the department.

Task Twenty-Two

What do you think of these forms of reassurance to a reader that the candidate is truly outstanding? Which might you accept, and which not?

1. I know this letter describes a person who seems too good to be true, but I can assure you that Shaw is very, very exceptional.

The statement that the candidate is *very, very, very exceptional* does not really say a lot, and would need to be supported with a lot of detail for us to be convinced that the candidate is so amazing. The repetition of *very* three times strikes us as a bit odd.

2. I realize that this letter is extremely positive and enthusiastic, but in my many years of teaching, I have seen only one other student as outstanding as Anand.

The author here is aware that he or she may seem overly positive, addresses this, and then provides a suitable context for the enthusiasm. This statement makes us a bit curious about the candidate since it seems to come from someone who has considerable teaching experience and has had only one other student comparable to Anand. We would perhaps be even more convinced of Anand's exceptional qualities if we knew how many years of teaching experience the author has. For instance, writing something like, "In my 25 years of teaching, I have seen" We would also hope to see some examples to support the writer's point of view.

3. I have seen Vadim evolve over the years into a creative, self-motivated researcher who has taken on a leadership role in our research group. I can easily foresee how this young scholar will someday make a major contribution to his chosen area of study.

We like this commentary on Vadim since it indicates that the writer's observations of Vadim's growth as a researcher has developed over time, rather than during a short-term interaction. We like the concrete examples (e.g., that he has taken a leadership role in a specific research group) as well as the glimpse into the future, in which the writer suggests that Vadim will be an asset. We would assume that such a prediction would not be given lightly.

4. There have been rather few students for whom I could write such a positive letter of recommendation. I am pleased to be able to support Marie in her pursuit of a graduate career.

This excerpt indicates that the author is stingy with praise for the typical student, but Marie is no ordinary individual. We would like to know more and would be inclined to trust the recommendation that follows.

Language Focus: Double Meanings in Recommendations

As with parody texts, this language focus may work well with some students and not so well with others who may need an explanation to get the humor.

As a lighthearted exercise, study these ambiguous recommendation statements that, from time to time, have been circulated on the Internet and in other places. Can you figure out the two meanings, one positive and one negative, that can be attached to each of these?

1. You will be lucky if you can get this person to work for you.
Positive: If you hire this person you are fortunate because he or she is a good catch.
Negative: If this person works for you, getting him or her to do any work would be a major accomplishment.
2. I am pleased to say this candidate is a former colleague of mine.
Positive: I am happy to have had the opportunity to work with this candidate.
Negative: I am happy that this candidate is no longer my colleague.
3. I would urge you to waste no time in making this candidate an offer.
Positive: This candidate is a good catch; act quickly.
Negative: It is a waste of time to make this candidate an offer.
4. This candidate is an unbelievable worker.
Positive: This candidate's work is amazingly good.
Negative: This candidate cannot be trusted.
5. I most enthusiastically recommend this candidate with no qualifications whatsoever.
Positive: I wholeheartedly recommend this candidate; I have no reservations whatsoever.
Negative: This candidate has no qualifications.

6. I can assure you that no person would be better for the job.

Positive: This is the best person for the job.

Negative: You would be better off hiring nobody than hiring this person.

Joking aside, a letter of recommendation can be viewed as a legal document that reflects on both you and the applicant. Thus, care needs to be taken when writing these texts. Particularly, if a writer does feel a need to say something negative about the person being written about, it should be backed up with support.

We also discuss with our students whether we should write letters for individuals about whom we have serious concerns. We cannot say what is really best for everyone here, but all of us need to decide what our obligation might be in such circumstances. Many people would politely decline to write the letter, possibly making an excuse about being too busy. Others might agree to write a letter, but ignore or minimize the issues. Still others, might warn the letter seeker that their letter would include some negative, leaving it up to the person to decide whether he or she still wants the letter. As mentioned earlier, John feels comfortable writing something negative; Chris, on the other hand, is a little less comfortable and would prefer a candid phone conversation.

Task Twenty-Three

By now we think you are in a strong position to write a useful recommendation letter. One option is to draft your letter for one of the individuals whose CV you can find in the final section; another option is to write a letter for a fellow student or colleague.

Below is a possible recommendation letter for Robin S. Lee, whose CV is given in Task Thirty-Six of the main volume. The letter was written from the perspective of Professor Guzman, who knows Robin's work well and is pleased to be writing the letter in support of her grant application.

November 15, 2010

Dear Dr. Otto and members of the Selection Committee:

I am happy to take this opportunity to recommend Ms. Robin S. Lee for the Dissertation Research Fellowship. Not only do I see this fellowship to be extremely valuable given the current stage of her research, but I also believe that Ms. Lee is an ideal candidate for the fellowship for a number of reasons.

Over the years, Robin has demonstrated a deep and long-standing interest in protein folding in alcohol hydrogenase and an extreme skill in band-selective optimized flip-angle short transient (SOFAST) real-time 2D NMR spectroscopy, a method that allows simultaneous observation of reaction kinetics for a large number of nuclear sites along the polypeptide chain of a protein. Although she has been a PhD student in the Department of Molecular Biology at the Center State University only since 2009, I had a great chance to get to know her even earlier when she was a Master's student and junior researcher in a collaborative project with Southeastern State University and Dr. R.S. Wang. Robin provided exceptional support in gathering and analyzing data for the project on the ultrastructure of *Morchella asci*, later co-presenting the results of the study during a poster presentation at AIBS in Baltimore. As a result of her contributions to the project, Robin was awarded the Southeastern State University Research Foundation Fellowship.

As a doctoral student in our program, Robin has demonstrated that she is an extremely skillful and motivated researcher. She participates to

the full extent in the life and work at our departmental laboratories, where she first worked as an active collaborator in my own research on electron microscopy of dried mycological specimens, becoming a co-author of our forthcoming publication on this topic. Since 2010, Robin has provided invaluable research support to my colleague, Dr. R. Anderson, who is investigating real-time kinetic processes in proteins.

Robin's engagement with her research on protein folding has allowed her to reach candidacy within two short years of beginning her PhD program; she is now ready to focus on her dissertation research, which will examine the mechanisms of the folding of α -lactalbumin. This is a highly innovative and promising project that is based on Ms. Lee's previous research experience described earlier, and has a strong potential to deepen our understanding of protein folding, which could eventually lead to better treatments for neurodegenerative diseases.

My colleagues and I are looking forward to working with Ms. Lee on her planned research. However, as a highly complex and innovative project, this work will require Ms. Lee's full attention, making it impossible for her to depend on other potential funding resources, such as teaching, that require a large time commitment. Moreover, her current funding cannot be used to support this new work. Thus, the Dissertation Fellowship would play an important role in supporting this important research.

Once again, I strongly recommend Robin's application for the fellowship and would be more than happy answer any additional questions you might have.

Dr. F. Guzman
Professor, Department of Molecular Biology
Central State University

Thinking Outside the Box

Task Twenty-Four

Two versions of a simple submission letter follow. Compare them, discuss them with a partner (if possible), and then try to anticipate the editor's reactions.

Here are John's reactions as the former editor of a journal in the ISI—Institute for Scientific Information—database.

1. Letter A engages in a considerable amount of *credentialism* (e.g., "leading institution in my country"; "written several articles").

John would agree that all of the personal information is irrelevant. The status of the submitter would not sway him to accept the article.

2. Letter A does not give the actual title of the paper, while Letter B does.

John thinks that the title should be included.

3. The author of A suggests that the editor make any necessary corrections.

Such comments are generally ignored since the author(s) should take ownership of the changes and not defer completely to the editor.

4. Letter B's closing phrase is *in due course*, while Letter A's is *as soon as possible*.

John prefers *in due course* and does not appreciate the pressure tactics from A.

5. Letter A does not clearly state that it has not been submitted elsewhere, but Letter B does.

Letter A should have indicated that the work has not been submitted to another journal.

6. Letter B mentions it is partly based on PhD research.

In John's view (and like that of other editors) it does not matter whether the work was done for a dissertation or not, but this does suggest it is based on serious research.

Task Twenty-Five

Draft an appropriate submission letter to accompany one of your manuscripts.

Dear Dr. Johnston:

We are submitting our paper entitled “Developing Academic Correspondence Skills: A Genre-Based Approach” for publication in *Genre in Academia*. We confirm that this paper has not been submitted elsewhere for publication. Dr. Irwin is the corresponding author. We are looking forward to hearing from you at your convenience.

Sincerely,

Vera Irwin, Christine Feak, and John Swales

Task Twenty-Six

Which of these options do you think are appropriate for a letter written to accompany a reviewed and revised manuscript? Discuss with a partner if possible.

1. I have revised the manuscript according to the reviewers' comments. Thanks for your attention.

If this is all there is and there is no indication of what specifically has been changed, then this is not helpful for either the editor or the reviewers. One good point here is that it clearly states that the revisions took into account the reviewers' comments.

2. I have revised the manuscript, and below please find a summary of the main changes made.

This is better than the first one in that there is mention of a summary of the revisions. However, it would be good to also indicate that the reviewers' comments were taken into account.

3. Please find below a detailed list of the changes to the manuscript that have been made. I hope the revision meets with your approval.

This is nearly identical to the previous statement. It mentions a summary, but fails to indicate that the reviewers' comments were taken into account. We do like the optimism here when the author indicates his or her hope that the paper is fine.

4. I would like to thank the reviewers for their helpful comments. In the commentary that follows, I have addressed each of the suggested changes and indicated how I have done this.

This one looks really good to us. The author has clearly stated that there is an accounting of what was done. Moreover, there is an expression of gratitude for the efforts of the reviewers—something that many reviewers would appreciate since they are not paid for reviewing a journal manuscript. Reviewers see their work as service to the profession.

5. I am really grateful to your excellent reviewers for their insightful comments on my humble manuscript. I have worked extremely hard over the last two weeks in order to incorporate their wonderful suggestions. As you can see from the remainder of this response and from a re-reading of my heavily revised manuscript, I have done my very best to follow almost all of them. Thank you once again for giving me the opportunity to improve my submission to your famous journal.

This is not a very good response. The expression of gratitude here is nice, but there is far too much flattery. In fact all of the compliments (e.g., *wonderful suggestions* and *famous journal*) do not make a very good impression on us; nor does the modesty (e.g., *humble manuscript*). We also would like to know what changes were made since not all of the recommendations were followed. Finally, there is no need to mention how hard one has worked. The amount of effort will not be taken into consideration when the work is reviewed again. What will matter is whether the manuscript is of sufficient quality to justify publication.

Task Twenty-Seven

Which of the proposed responses by the authors do you prefer, and why?

A. p. 11. We have rewritten as follows: "Since it is neither practical nor economical to recommend mediastinoscopy for all candidates for surgery, we developed indication criteria for cervical mediastinoscopy."

This response does not seem to address the reviewer's challenge—that contrary to what the authors say, the procedure is practical and justifiable. Unfortunately, the authors seem to merely restate the position in the original paper (that the procedure is too expensive and impractical); they then state that criteria were developed for the procedure. This is a bit hard to follow. If we think about this response, it should become clear that the authors are saying that they developed criteria for when the procedure should be done; they are not saying that the procedure should never be done. What the authors should have added is that in their healthcare context the procedure cannot be done routinely, which is why they developed a way to determine who should undergo the procedure.

B. p. 11. Reviewer 2 objected to our statement about the justifiability of routine mediastinoscopy.

Response: This procedure remains a point of controversy within thoracic surgery. On p. 11 we have qualified our stance by saying: "It is neither practical nor economical *in Japan* to recommend mediastinoscopy for all candidates for surgery." Regardless of opinions on this issue, we believe everyone would agree that it is better to avoid this procedure if the same information can be obtained non-invasively at much lower cost.

We think this is a really nice response. The author paraphrases the reviewer's concern, thus revealing that the criticism has been understood. The author then explains how the original manuscript was revised and then appeals to reason, stating that, of course, we all would want to avoid an invasive procedure, if a reasonable alternative is available.

C. p. 11. An all-too-typical response from the American surgical establishment focused, as it is, both on maximizing profits and reducing the chances of expensive malpractice lawsuits. *In international terms*, we stick to our original position.

This last response is rather confrontational and seems inappropriate to us. An attack on the reviewer is never good form, especially when we consider that the editor knows who you are—even if the reviewers do not. When authors respond to reviewer comments, no matter how upset or hurt they might be, they need to realize that their professional persona is on the line. As authors, it is good to think about how we want others to perceive us. Would we prefer professional and pleasant or antagonistic and unpleasant? The response here would perhaps suggest that the author falls into the latter category.

Task Twenty-Eight

A discussion between the two corpus linguist authors led them to consider these possible responses to the criticism from R2. Which do you prefer? And what do you think actually happened?

Option A

We will withdraw the paper and resubmit it to a journal more open to corpus linguistic research.

Option A seems a bit extreme since only one reviewer has raised this problem. When deciding what to change, authors need to consider the reasonableness of the comments and revise those aspects that will in fact improve the paper and ignore those that do not or will change the paper in an undesirable way.

Option B

We will agree and, for the first time in our lives, study the writing research literature in order to try to answer the criticisms.

This will probably not work all that well. For one this would be very time consuming. For another, it may be completely unnecessary since there is not general agreement among the reviewers and editors that this additional information is needed.

Option C

We will accept all of R1's suggestions, as well as some of R2's points. But on the major one quoted above, we will argue back and say to the editor:

We think R2 is essentially missing the point. Our main aim was not to make any contribution to writing research theory, but to offer an introduction to useful methodological tools that may be new to many members of the writing research community and to present a case study showing how the tools and techniques can be implemented. We believe that the decision is yours.

This one makes the most sense to us. Authors need to be willing to make a good case for preserving the integrity of their work and not change aspects of the work that they think will harm their work. A well-reasoned, respectful argument to not make a change will likely be accepted.

Option D

We will recruit a third author who is a writing research expert.

Adding another this late in the process is not necessarily a good solution. This could cause a major delay in resubmitting the paper and may not completely solve the problem.

The authors did indeed choose Option C and their revised version was accepted for publication.

Task Twenty-Nine

Here is a response letter. In your view, how well does it follow the guidelines given?

Overall, this looks like a well-written letter. The only changes we might suggest have to do with the discussion of the title. The authors indicate that the title has been shortened, but do not reveal how. They could have provided both the old and the new title for the editor to compare, since he or she might not remember the title of the originally submitted manuscript. We know a change was requested and rejected because of *unfortunately* in the second point. We assume the deleted parts restate a reviewer's concern along with an explanation as to why no change was made. If an explanation was not given, however, it should have been. We

really like how the issue of the figures was handled. We think the expression of gratitude for the reviewer commentary is appropriate—even if in reality the authors were not particularly pleased about having to make changes. We also like that the authors indicate that they are willing to address a need for further changes in a timely manner, but still reveal their optimism that the paper is now in good shape.

Task Thirty

Either construct a biostatement for yourself, or edit this entry and reduce it from its current 85 words to a 60-word maximum.

*John M. Swales was the director of the English Language Institute from 1985 to 2001. Previously, he worked at universities in England and Africa. He officially retired as a professor of Linguistics in 2006. His most recent publications are *Telling a Research Story: Writing a Literature Review* (with C. Feak) and *Incidents in an Educational Life: A Memoir* (of Sorts), both published by Michigan Press in 2009. He remains a faculty advisor to the MICASE project. In 2004, he received an honors PhD from Uppsala.*

Here is John's shorter version.

*John M. Swales is a Professor Emeritus of Linguistics and the former Director of the English Language Institute at the University of Michigan. He has published extensively on academic discourse, most recently, *Telling a Research Story: Writing a Literature Review* (with C. Feak). Although retired, John remains professionally active. In 2004, he received an honorary PhD from Uppsala University. (59 words)*

Note how the very short biostatement is very focused on recent information, with the exception of the honorary PhD from Uppsala University. Including this older information suggests that John is quite honored to have received the honor.

Task Thirty-One

Read this acknowledgments text, and answer the questions.

① The authors wish to thank Tom H.____, Carole W.____, and Elizabeth Z.____ for their helpful comments at various stages of this project. ② We thank Raymond D.____, The Center for Public Opinion at _____, and the Election Study Center at _____ for use of their survey data. ③ However, they bear no responsibility for our interpretation of the data. ④ We are also indebted to the University of _____ and the John T.____ Center for _____ for financial assistance with this project.

1. What field do you think this text is taken from?

This is, in fact, taken from an article in political science, as revealed by the use of data collected by the Election Study Center and The Center for Public Opinion.

2. The people mentioned here are expressed differently than the people who are cited in the body of a research article (RA). What is the difference—and why?

When we refer to people in the main body of a research paper, we are constrained by the citation rules that limit our choice to family name in the vast majority of the cases. In the acknowledgments, however, we can freely use first names. The use of first names also suggests that the authors know the people they have thanked and not just their work.

3. How have the authors ordered their acknowledgments?

This support described in the acknowledgments text is organized in the following way.

1. intellectual support
2. data support plus a disclaimer, and
3. financial support

4. How is the *disclaimer* expressed?

The disclaimer follows the acknowledgment of the two centers that provided data for research (*However, they bear no responsibility for our interpretation of the data*). The authors could also have said, “However,

any remaining errors are our own.” We have even seen, “The usual disclaimers apply.”

5. Suppose the authors also wanted to acknowledge the reviewers. How might they express this statement, and where might they put it?

According to our survey of acknowledgments across disciplines, this type of information is presented at the very end and might be expressed, for example, in the following ways.

We also benefitted significantly from the comments of the two anonymous reviewers and the chief editor.

The authors would also like to thank the anonymous reviewers for their thoughtful and thorough comments, which have considerably improved this paper.

6. Suppose you want to add that an earlier version of this project was presented at a conference. What you would write, and where would you place it?

This information would not necessarily be part of the acknowledgments and might be presented as a footnote early in the paper. If the authors decide to put it into the acknowledgments, it might appear at the beginning, after which there may be a listing of the key people who helped the conference presentation become a journal article.

Task Thirty-Two

Here is a draft of the acknowledgments in a master's thesis. Some words have been left out; which of the choices given after the text would you recommend?

We believe the following are the best choices to complete the sentences.

1. express
2. pursue
3. be exposed
4. acknowledge
5. owe
6. has contributed
7. would like
8. completion/carrying through

Task Thirty-Three

We think that the three extracts from these acknowledgments are each, in different ways, not quite right. Can you identify the weaknesses in each?

Excerpt A

The author is rather formal. Most writers would use *I*. The phrase *oral support* is rather unconventional. A better option would have been something like *insightful conversations, which helped me throughout my academic journey*. Or did the author mean *moral support*? *Frustrating period* sounds quite negative. We would suggest avoiding being overly negative.

Excerpt B

This excerpt seems to mix various types of acknowledgments, first talking about a gratitude to people, then switching to financial support from a fellowship, and then going back to talking about people again. Stating that the financial support was more significant than the support of the institute and the director seems to almost undo the *thank you*. The writer should not express enormous gratitude to everyone, but needs to be more selective.

Excerpt C

The author's statement about having an opportunity to get to know American people and culture during the dissertation process might imply that this person was more interested in personal gain rather than the intellectual achievement. This seems a bit out of balance to us.

Task Thirty-Four

If relevant, write a draft of your acknowledgments for your thesis, dissertation, or research paper.

Here are the acknowledgments from Vera's dissertation.

I owe many thanks to people who made this dissertation possible. I would like to express special gratitude to Robin Queen for her enthusiasm about this project, for challenging me, for providing expertise, guidance, and support, and for believing that this dissertation will one day become a reality. I am also very thankful to the members of my dissertation committee, Deborah Keller-Cohen, Robert L. Kyes, and Sarah G. Thomason for their insightful comments, feedback, and suggestions that made this dissertation possible. I would also like to mention the faculty and students of the Department of Linguistics who have contributed so much to my intellectual development throughout my years at the University of Michigan.

I would like to thank Christine B. Feak and John M. Swales of the University of Michigan English Language Institute. Working with them has taught me a lot about writing, drafting, and revising, and about the ins and outs of turning an idea into a piece of finished work.

This dissertation would not have been possible without the generous support from the Department of Germanic Languages and Literatures, Department of Linguistics, Rackham School of Graduate Studies, Center for the Education of Women, and Sweetland Writing Center at the University of Michigan. The fieldwork was made possible by the German Academic Exchange Service (DAAD). I also thank the Otto Benecke Foundation for their assistance and support.

I owe my greatest thanks to the participants of this research who made this dissertation possible by so willingly sharing their amazing stories. I would like to express my special gratitude to those who became friends and provided me with a home away from home during my fieldwork.

My time at the University of Michigan would not have been the same without the invaluable friendship and support of the most amazing group of graduate students—the Department of Linguistics' incoming cohort of the year 2000: Nancy Perez, Jennifer Nguyen, Nick Pharris,

Carson Maynard, and Katherine Chen. It is hard to express what it meant to have you all as a part of my life and what a difference it made to be able to share the ups and downs of graduate school with such wonderful friends. If one would attempt to write down all the memories we made together over these years, it would be another dissertation.

I am also thankful to Marga Schuhwerk-Hampel for her friendship and help with navigating the maze of graduate school. To Sun-Young Kim, for her support, encouragement, and companionship during the final months of the writing process. I am thankful to all friends and family for their willingness to donate their time and effort to read and comment on my writing, especially to Lisa Del Torto for her insightful feedback and all the help.

Last, but not least, this dissertation could not have been finished without the continuous support of my family. My deepest gratitude goes to Christopher, who has been there for me all along, and to Andrei, who reminds me every day about the most important things in life.

Vera seems to have thanked just about everyone who supported her along the way, so hopefully nobody will be disappointed. We think Vera's thoroughness is a strong quality as is her focus on finding a variety of ways to say thank you. She gives some detail, but not too much. Many of those thanked know what they did to help Vera and the rest of us do not really need to know.

It might be interesting for students to look at the acknowledgments in the main volume to see how John's and Chris's acknowledgments are similar and/or different from Vera's.

CVs

Our focus here is mainly on the content of CVs rather than other matters such as formatting, the latter of which is best left to others more knowledgeable in this area. Assistance with CV preparation is available at most U.S. universities in the form of career centers, but, surprisingly, many of our students are unaware that these services exist. One word of caution on the use of career centers is in order here. Some of these centers may have more experience with resumes for undergraduate students who are looking for a job and may have less experience with CVs. While career centers may be useful, in the end, the best advice is likely to come from advisors and other trusted colleagues.

Our students enjoy testing their CV knowledge in Task Thirty-Five. While going through the task, they become aware of cultural differences, some misconceptions they may harbor, as well as some points of strategy.

Task Thirty-Five

Consider these talking points about CVs; in so doing, assume a U.S. destination for your CV. Work through the points with a partner if possible. Indicate whether you agree (A), disagree (D), or are unsure—or you and your partner disagree (?).

1. A resume and a CV are the same genre.

No. Although the terms are often used interchangeably, they are different. A resume is usually a much shorter document (often 1 or 2 pages) that highlights a candidate's educational and professional experience and is used primarily in non-academic jobs. For example, a resume would not provide any details on a job candidate's research interests and publications or his or her service on academic committees and such. It would rather focus on very specific skills directly relevant for an advertised non-academic position.

2. You should include your date of birth, sex, and nationality.

No, for candidates seeking jobs at institutions based in the United States. This information is not included in order to prevent discrimination on the basis of any of these facts. In some other countries, however, this information may be standard.

3. Your CV should include both your home and departmental address.

No, there is no need to have both. Many of our students say that they include only a home address since they do not want any mail sent to their departments; mail sent to the department could reveal information that they do not want others to know. We recommend including one address to which mail can comfortably be sent.

4. It is best to use reverse chronological order throughout (i.e., put the most recent things first).

Yes. Recent educational and professional experiences are likely to matter more to a potential employer than what was done several years ago. Also, assuming that the CV writer has maintained a good academic trajectory, the more recent achievements are likely to be more impressive than accomplishments as an undergraduate, and it is good to showcase the best things first. Some of our students have questioned the wisdom of reverse chronology for a rather short CV. We respond by pointing out that a CV will grow with each academic accomplishment and that at some point there may be so many entries that if items are listed chronologically (the most recent item last) the best things may be buried and difficult to find. Chris knows from her own experience that reversing the order of a chronological CV is very time consuming and frustrating; it is much easier to simply settle on reverse chronology from the start.

5. The longer your CV, the better.

No. Although a very short CV might raise some questions, it does not have to be overloaded with every single detail of one's academic and professional development (e.g., topics of the course papers you wrote). In the case of a very long CV, it is easy for the employer to lose track of the most important things, so it is advisable to find a good balance between providing a detailed account of one's career and keeping this information well structured and visually comprehensible. If any category becomes too long (e.g., numerous semesters of teaching), this information can be grouped into smaller summaries.

6. Provide some information about your high school.

Generally, no. In the U.S. context, a CV would start with your first college degree. If, however, the high school is exceptional in some way, such as a high school for the performing arts or a highly prestigious prep school, then it may make sense to include this information.

7. List only advanced or special courses you have taken.

Yes. If you are planning on listing any courses at all. More often, however, the information on graduate school courses is not given in a CV since this information is available in a transcript. A question that may come up in relation to this point is whether to include grade point averages or grades anywhere on the CV. We usually recommend not including this information since it, too, is available on a transcript.

8. List computer skills or expertise in using special equipment.

Yes, if these are relevant to one's field of study and the particular job being sought. In the past we mainly thought of computer and equipment skills as relevant to the sciences; however, with the development of technology the use of specialized programs is increasing in all disciplines. Consider, for example, concordancing programs in applied linguistics and software in multimedia rhetoric.

9. Put your name in much larger font at the top.

No, not necessarily. One's name does have to be at the top of the first page, and it does have to stand out somewhat. However, it is important to use good judgment with regard to the font size. The size of the name should be in proportion to the font size used for other information. One other important point on this is that it is wise to include some form of your name on each page and include page numbers starting with the second page. The reason for this is that pages of a CV could become separated and it is much easier to put everything in the proper order if this information is included.

10. Do not try to “translate” degrees that have no exact equivalent in the United States (*Diplom in Germany, D.E.A in France, M.Phil. in Britain*).

Yes. The original names should be maintained, but, if necessary, they can be clarified to show what the degree roughly corresponds to. For instance, it is possible to write *Diplom (equivalent to a B.A.)*.

Task Thirty-Six

Here is a typical CV written by an American citizen in 2010 for a U.S. audience. What do you like and dislike about it? What suggestions might you make to Robin Lee?

This CV looks okay, but it could be improved. Our students have suggested that Robin consider making improvements in these areas.

1. In the section on “Research experience,” she might want to specify what kind of responsibilities she had at the Southern State University Biological Station. Otherwise, the reader might not have an idea of how this experience moved her forward in her academic career.
2. When Robin mentions the courses or labs she taught, it might be beneficial to know the level of these courses—were they introductory survey courses? More advanced ones?
3. It might not be important to state whether she taught in the fall or the winter terms. It would be fine just to provide the years in which she taught.
4. When talking about the publication in press, Robin neglects to mention the name of the journal where the article is about to appear. This should be added.
5. Since she has only received two awards, it makes sense to list them both. In the future, however, when Robin would hopefully have more awards and fellowships to list, she might want to remove smaller awards, in this case the travel grant.

Task Thirty-Seven

Take this short text that focuses on teaching experience, and rewrite it so that it would be suitable for a CV. Be sure to make up a subheading, too.

One question that our students regularly ask is whether tutoring counts as teaching. The tutoring listed in the short text was clearly done in a university context and was a paid position. Thus, the student was deemed to have the qualifications necessary to perform this work. Private tutoring, however, is a different matter. While private tutoring is a form of teaching, it generally carries little, if any, weight in demonstrating teaching ability or experience.

Name

Address

Education:

2007–present PhD student, Department of Chemistry,
Central University

Projected degree completion: 2012

Teaching experience:

2007–2008 Tutor, Chemistry Tutorial Center, Central
University

Individual tutoring for student taking

Chem 100: Introduction to Chemistry

Chem 415: Senior Level Organic Chemistry

2008–2011 Teaching assistant. Department of Chemistry,
Central University

Courses taught:

Chem 125: General Chemistry

Chem 130: Inorganic Chemistry

Chem 210: Structure and Reactivity. Full
teaching responsibilities for my section of Chem
210 in 2010–2011.

Our students and workshop participants really like Task Thirty-Eight since it raises some interesting issues regarding CV content. Some of the situations are fairly common, such as guest lecturing and poster presentations, and many students want to include these on their CVs. Other situations are not so common (e.g., a *New York Times* article), but they do help students think a bit more creatively about what might be included on their CVs.

Task Thirty-Eight

How would you handle the following (if at all)? Work with a partner, if possible.

1. Your advisor asks you to give a talk based on your research to her graduate level class. She asks you to fill the full 50-minute period. If you decide to do so, how would you enter it on the CV?

We think that this can be considered a guest lecture and would recommend including it along with other presentations, but labeled as a guest lecture.

2. Your advisor asks you to give a 20-minute talk on your experiences as a new graduate student. How might this be entered on the CV, if at all?

We would suggest not including this. A 20-minute talk about personal experiences is not the same as a talk based on research.

3. The final session of an advanced class or seminar is a poster session where all students showcase their work. Friends, colleagues, and all members of the department are also invited to attend. Is this a publication? A presentation? How would you include this?

Our students disagree on this one. Some argue that this is a research-based poster and should be included; others say that class assignments do not belong on a CV. John, however, thinks that since there is an invited audience, the poster session would qualify as a presentation. Chris would disagree. She thinks that unless it represents something truly outstanding, coursework is best left off a CV.

4. Your university sponsors a biannual, informal poster session that provides an opportunity for doctoral students to present their dissertation ideas and research. Students must submit a poster proposal that is reviewed by

a university-wide committee. Should this be considered a publication or a presentation? How would you include this?

Since it was reviewed and chosen for the session the poster can be considered a presentation and included as such on a CV. We do not think it qualifies as a publication.

5. The 200-word abstract of your conference presentation appears in the glossy conference program. Is this a publication? And if so, how will you cite it?

No, it is not a publication. Only the conference presentation should be part of a CV.

6. A 500-word report of the research you presented at a conference appears in the *New York Times*. How will you deal with this, if at all?

This one is hard for us to judge, but we lean toward including it and so do our students since the *New York Times* is read nationally and often covers research of broad importance and public interest. The report perhaps could be added under a category entitled Special Recognition or maybe Miscellaneous. However, neither John nor Chris would include this on their own CVs, instead saving this and other similar interesting developments for conversation with friends and colleagues.

7. A student reporter from the university newspaper visits the lab where you work and discusses in some detail the work that you have been doing. Would you include this? If so, how?

We would not recommend including this since the newspaper is local and not all that important outside the university.

8. You translate one of your published papers into your own language for a journal in your home country. In so doing, you make a few small changes to make it more accessible for the local readership. Is this a separate publication? What advice would you offer here?

We do not consider this to be a separate publication since the content is nearly identical to the original. However, it makes sense to us to add a reference to the translation in parentheses next to the original version. For example, this parenthetical could look something like this: (Revised Japanese language version appeared in NAME of JOURNAL in YEAR of PUBLICATION).

External Job Applications

Any of the ten items on page 90 of the main volume could be included in an application for an assistant professor position. However, Item 3, the short, half-page cover letter, is not something we frequently see. Most of our students have cover letters that are closer to two pages. Of importance here is that the applicant read the job posting carefully and send everything that is requested.

Although our students find it very helpful to see how Sandra Pomona crafted the cover letter to accompany her job application, they do express some concern about the length, wondering whether there is too much detail. We see their point since much of the information in the letter would likely be available in other documents. Nevertheless, this is what Sandra wrote and it did result in a successful interview.

Task Thirty-Nine

If relevant, write an application letter for a position that you are or might later be interested in. If this is not relevant, give Sandra some advice about her use of the letter for other job applications.

Here is a response written by our assistant, Vera.

Hi Sandra,

I think your letter has lots of information that should be kept, but, of course, the focus now should be on your research. I would move the fourth paragraph to the front and expand it (or even turn it into several) in order to talk about your research in detail. I think you have to describe exactly your dissertation research and what other interests or research trends you are pursuing. Also, you mention in your letter that you started to publish your research—be more specific about that; tell them what publications you have in press (if you have any) and what has already been published. What might be very important with respect to research is to show how this postdoc position at the Institute would propel your further research—is there anything that you know about their resources or people who work there?

Also, if you want to keep information about your teaching, I would present it in a way that shows how your research interests are applicable to today's higher education and how your experience during this post-doc position would inform not only your research but also your future teaching.

I hope this helps. Let me know if I could be more helpful.

Vera

We think Vera has given some very good advice. The take-home message here is that it is likely that a new letter will need to be drafted for each application. As we can see from Vera's response, it is important to tailor the content of the letter to the position and the institution to demonstrate a good fit.

Task Forty

Read these short paragraph-length extracts from Statements of Teaching Philosophy, and then consider these two questions.

1. In which of the six categories would you place each extract?
2. If you were chair of the search committee in your current institution, would you rate each extract as (a) very impressive (just what you are looking for); (b) adequate, but not very attention-getting; or (c) really very ordinary?

Extract A seems to fit two categories. It falls within Number 1 because it describes the circumstances in which students would be most interested in the material. It also is consistent with Number 3 since it paints the ultimate learning goal for students—to be able to learn something applicable in their future professions.

We would rate the extract as *adequate* since it seems a little too general, given the focus on the beliefs of the author and the lack of any practical examples that would show that this instructor does implement his or her beliefs into teaching practice. Of course, as with the other extracts, this extract is presented without a context, which likely affects our reading.

Extract B seems to be a good candidate for Category Number 2 since it describes instructional strategies and methods that could facilitate

student learning. This kind of reflection is possible when one has some teaching experience.

We give this a rating of *very impressive*. We like how the author manages in one paragraph to talk about teaching as an active dialogue, the origins of this belief, namely, the author's teaching experience, and the enactment of this belief in teaching.

Extract C falls into Category 4. It is readable, but seems to go around in circles, the main point being research and teaching are connected. While this is a reasonable point to make, it should be supported with something more concrete.

We would rate this as *rather ordinary*. The main point does not necessarily seem to be based on teaching experience. On the contrary, it could have pulled from course readings or lectures. As such, it is not likely to make a strong positive impression on readers.

Extract D has elements of Categories 3 and 4. The author indicates that he or she has some teaching experience and gained some insight as a result and will implement some new teaching strategies in the future. Specifically, the author will try to be more focused on implementing teaching methods that address different kinds of learners.

The extract is *adequate*, but nothing all too memorable, with the exception of the bolted-down seats. This paragraph seems to develop an earlier point in the teaching philosophy, thus showing a logical connection between the parts of the text as well as movement forward. As already mentioned, the extract suggests that the author has teaching experience and has thought about teaching techniques. However, the writer does not come across as very creative in the final sentence.

Extract E nicely falls under Category 3. The excerpt creates a larger framework for teaching and learning as an activity. In doing so, it defines the ultimate goals of the teaching process.

We rate this extract as *very impressive*. The strong opening sentence sets the tone for the paragraph and sets up the repeated *as*-phrases. This paragraph shows that the author thought deeply about teaching and the connection between the teachers and the learner. The author considers not only the goals of the learning process, but also the practical side of being in the classroom and having tools to manage the participants in this learning process. Despite the lack of concrete examples, it very much

seems that the teaching philosophy has emerged from experience. As readers, we could also expect these views on teaching to be developed later in the text, perhaps through the use of examples.

To fully exploit the extracts, students can be given this additional task.

You are a member of a search committee looking for an assistant professor for a new interdisciplinary program. Which of the extracts would seem most attractive to a search committee at a major research university? Which would appeal most strongly to a university focused more on teaching rather than research?

Our Responses

Vera chose Extract C as the one that would appeal to a research university. Although we did rate it as *rather ordinary*, she thinks the strong connection between research and teaching may be consistent with the interests of a research university. Chris, on the other hand, thinks that Extract E may be the one that those at a research university would like since it suggests the author has experience, is strongly committed to teaching beliefs, and took a bit of a risk with the strong opening statement. There may be an interesting scholar behind the text.

For a teaching university, Vera leans toward A, since for smaller teaching universities, the real-world application of knowledge is an important issue. However, Extracts B and E reveal a good teacher who thinks a lot about teaching. John and Chris agree that Extracts B and E suggest a person who might be a good fit with a university that more strongly emphasizes teaching than research.