
Writing and Communicating Within and Beyond University

RICH OPPORTUNITIES, GREAT CHALLENGES?

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The University of Edinburgh



Writing and Communicating Within and Beyond University
Academic Writing from Bachelor to PhD Conference, Bergen/Solstrand, 7-8 October 2010

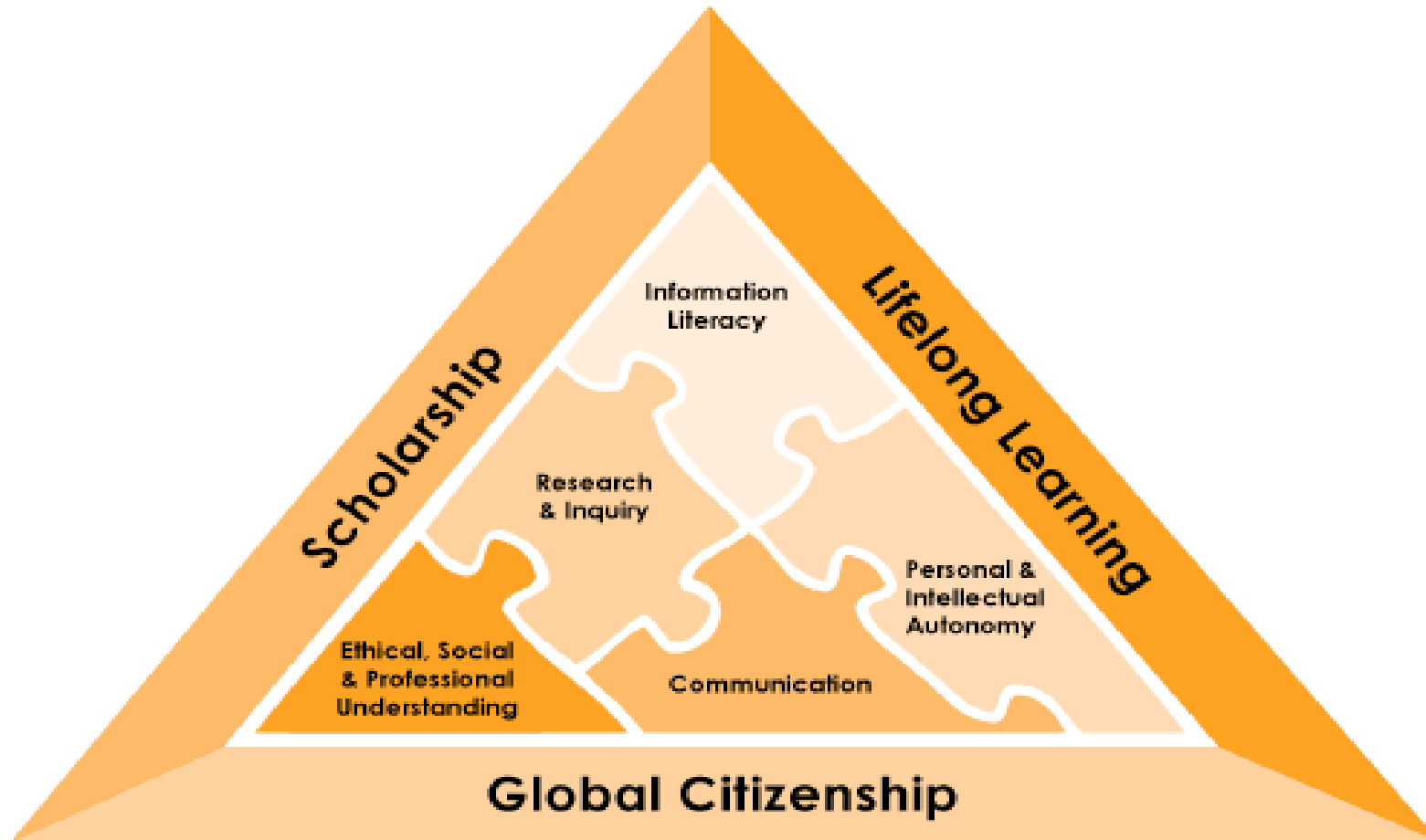


OVERVIEW

- ♣ Overview
- ♣ Writing and Communicating as a Graduate and Postgraduate Attribute
- ♣ Writing in the Workplace and the Academy
- ♣ The Academy as Workplace
 - for academics' writing
 - for undergraduate students' writing
- ♣ IT Opportunities, Challenges for Pedagogy and Assessment



GRADUATE ATTRIBUTES IN AUSTRALIAN UNIVERSITIES



Graduate Attributes Framework (Hughes and Barrie, 2010)



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COMMUNICATION AND GRADUATE ATTRIBUTES IN SCOTTISH UNIVERSITIES

Appears in over half of Scottish universities' emerging graduate attribute statements e.g. as :

- ♣ 'effective communicators'
- ♣ 'communication skills'
- ♣ 'an ability to communicate effectively for different purposes and in different contexts'
- ♣ 'effective use of oral, written and visual means to critique, negotiate, create and communicate understanding'

Would seem to have substantial 'face validity' to insiders?

But how great a match is there between university ideals and the realities of the graduate workplace ?



News article

Academic qualifications second to soft skills say graduate recruiters

Mike Barnard, 29 July 2008

Graduates need to highlight their key skills on their CV if they are to find work in the increasingly competitive jobs market.

A survey has revealed team working, good communication skills and the ability to appreciate others' perspectives come above academic qualifications when graduate recruiters choose their employees.

HR Look reports research showed more than half of organisations stated graduate recruitment was key to building a strong pool of candidates.

However, rather than choosing graduates based on their academic qualifications alone, recruiters want to see key skills in candidates too.

Nearly two thirds rated communication and the ability to work in teams as critical personal attributes, while emotional intelligence such as the ability to appreciate the perspective of others was important to two out of five.

When it comes to intellectual capability, recruiters rated transferable skills such as grasping complex information (68 percent) and seeing problems from different angles (50 percent) above academic ability, which only 27 percent valued as very important for graduates.

The study by GRADdirect also found 72 percent of recruiters wanted to see a candidate's motivation for personal development match their organisation's plans for the future.

News

- ▶ Graduate jobs
- ▶ New graduates
- ▶ Internships for graduates

▶ [See all news](#)

Internships

- Mountbatten** Live, Work and Learn
- Allen & Overy** Vacation Placement
- Ashurst LLP** Training Opportunity
- BAE System** Industrial Placement
- Bank of England** Penultimate Year Internship
- Barclays Capital** Barclays Capital Internship

▶ [See all internships](#)

Jobs
Work



The Skills and Knowledge of the Graduate Economist

Findings of a survey conducted on behalf of the Royal Economic Society and the Economics Network

June 2007

Richard O'Doherty
Deborah Street
Chris Webber

University of the West of England, Bristol
Frenchay Campus,
Coldharbour Lane,
Bristol
BS16 1QY

4. Interview Responses

The respondents tended to focus on the following areas:

4.1 Application of knowledge to problem-solving processes (framing)

There was a general consensus that Economics graduates are weak in the area of applied problem solving with questions raised about the teaching and learning methods applied at undergraduate level. It was suggested that more case-study work might be appropriate. Two questions were developed for the survey from this: whether Economics graduates can apply economics knowledge and whether they can apply economics knowledge to the real world.

4.2 Communication/presentation skills

It was generally acknowledged that graduates came with limited experience in communication styles from their undergraduate experiences. This related to both the quality/accuracy of their written work and to the variety of communication formats they understood; presentations, report writing, drafting styles and journalism.

4.3 Employability & Recruitment Process

Interviewees noted that the application process identified many Economics graduates who did not appear to have the ability to promote themselves in the job market. This was generally observed in substandard application form completion, inability to write an accurate and relevant covering letter, inadequate preparation for interview (such as failing to research into the company or job requirements) and poor interview skills. The employers specifically indicated that 2/3 of applicants are dismissed due to lack of attention to detail in the application process.

COMMUNICATION & GRADUATE ATTRIBUTES

from Hernandez-March et al. 2009

Table 1. Required and acquired level of graduates' skills and corresponding mismatches

Competencies (Scaled from 1 to 5 points)	Required level of graduates' skills(1)	Acquired level of graduates' skills(2)	Mismatch (3) = (2) – (1)
B.1 Knowledge-related			
Oral communication skills	4.15	3.49	-0.66
Written communication skills	4.1	3.47	-0.63
Computer skills	4	3.48	-0.52
English language skills	3.66	3.16	-0.5
Other foreign language skills	3.03	2.5	-0.53
<i>Average B.1</i>	<i>3.79</i>	<i>3.22</i>	<i>-0.57</i>

from a questionnaire survey of 872 Spanish companies



POSTGRADUATE ATTRIBUTES IN UK UNIVERSITIES

UK Research Councils' (RCUK) Joint Skills Statement

- **research skills and techniques; environment; management**
- **personal effectiveness**
- **communication skills**
(e.g. articulating ideas to a range of audiences)
- **networking and teamworking**
- **career management**



POSTGRADUATE ATTRIBUTES IN UK UNIVERSITIES

Economic and Social Research Council Guidelines

- **communication, networking and dissemination skills**
- **leadership, research management and relationship management skills**
- **personal career development**



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**Graduate Training Programme
(Skills development)**

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Related links

- [GTP on the Intranet \(password required\)](#)

Graduate Training Programme (Skills development)

Our Graduate Training Programme provides bespoke skills training and progression monitoring for each individual which complements the more specific research training that students receive from their supervisors. Click on our interactive timeline to view a movie of [graduate training programme highlights?](#)

Please note the interactive timeline is for illustrative purposes only.



APRIL: Communication Workshop

This introduces first year postgraduate students to all aspects of scientific communication, such as writing an abstract for a conference or paper, writing a continuation report or giving a scientific talk. The workshop also deals with communicating science to the public via the media, lay summary writing and the grey areas of scientific integrity. The content of the workshop is delivered through a series of lectures, interactive debates that use interactive voting pads to gauge opinion, group workshop activities and interactive video clips. The workshop also offers help and advice on forthcoming milestones such as the continuation report and tips for the viva.

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[< Return to timeline >](#)



WRITING IN THE WORKPLACE



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WRITING IN THE WORKPLACE

**'What do people need to know about writing in order to do their jobs'.
Davies and Birbili (2000) pp. 430**

'Writing is becoming ever more central and crucial to the world of work, with computers on every desk, email and the internet adding to the world's written words in almost epidemic proportions, and very little being done either in formal education or the world of work to adjust to these overwhelming demands'.



WRITING IN THE WORKPLACE

Davies and Birbili (2000) pp. 440-441

Davies and Birbili go on to argue that formal education should provide ***an initial baseline*** of both '**metacognitive knowledge** about the best ways of solving the problems of writing' and '**conceptual knowledge** about the nature of writing' ...

... on the assumption that subsequent writing experiences in work (which will generate localised demands and call for adherence to 'institutional and situational norms') 'will inevitably provide the circumstances for their development and consolidation'.



THE ACADEMY AS WORKPLACE



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WRITING IN THE ACADEMY AS WORKPLACE

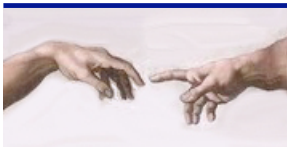
Writing and Communication in Universities...

<i>... by students</i>		<i>... by academics</i>
	AUTHORSHIP	
	PURPOSE [S]	
	AUDIENCE[S]	
	GENRE[S]	
	MEDIUM/A	
	RECURSION & REFINEMENT	
	REVIEW & EVALUATION	



WRITING IN THE ACADEMY AS WORKPLACE

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THE ACADEMY AS WORKPLACE

for Undergraduate Students' Writing

Potential for diversification of students' writing in and through assignments and assessments

- portfolios • patchwork texts • project reports • poster, oral and mixed-media presentations • proposals • plans, sketches and designs
- peer-feedback assignments • peer-generated criteria on a community project • peer-marked lab reports • problem-solutions & worked-answers • placement reports • playlets • poems • postings to an internet bulletin board • papers for conferences • professional case-reports • policy outlines • publicity leaflets • precepts & guiding principles

See for example Hounsell, D., Xu, R. and Tai, C.M. (2007)



The Academy as Workplace for Undergraduate Students' Writing

Genres in students' writing in and through assignments and assessments

- **"response genre"** (Sadler, 2010)
e.g. critique, explanation, solution, comparison, proof, demonstration, extrapolation, and scenario
- **essays as a "response genre"**



THE ACADEMY AS WORKPLACE

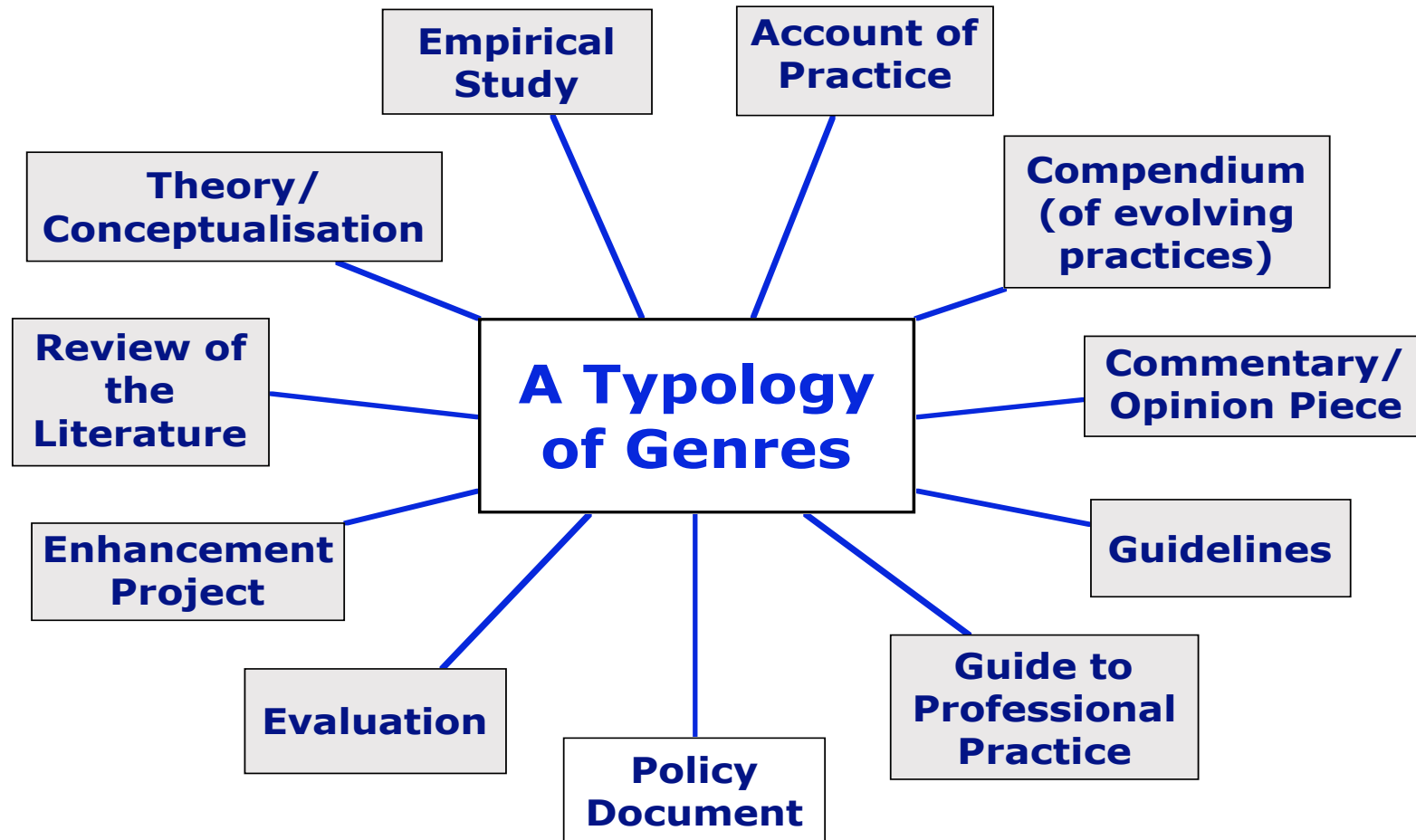
for Academics' Writing



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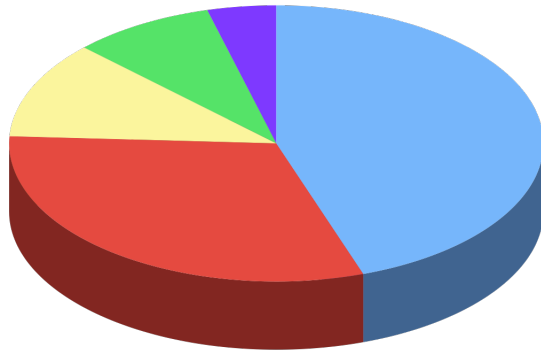
A TYPOLOGY OF GENRES IN THE ASSESSMENT LITERATURE *(Hounsell et al. 2007)*



A TYPOLOGY OF GENRES IN THE ASSESSMENT LITERATURE

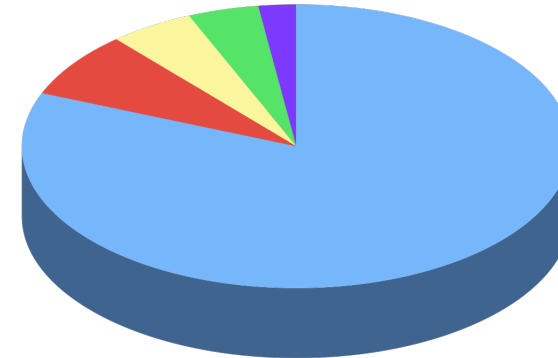
(Hounsell et al. 2007)

Research-oriented literature



- empirical studies
- theory/conceptualisation
- enhancement projects
- reviews of the literature
- evaluations

Practice-focused literature



- accounts of practice
- guidelines
- guides to professional practice
- compendia of evolving practices
- commentary/opinion pieces



The Academy as Workplace for Students' and Academics' Writing

[activity]



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WRITING IN THE ACADEMY AS WORKPLACE

Writing and Communication in Universities...

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	AUTHORSHIP	
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ONLINE OPPORTUNITIES, PEDAGOGY AND ASSESSMENT CHALLENGES

- 1. Collaborative Learning**
- 2. Exams and IT: the Word-Processing Challenge**
- 3. From Extrinsic Feedback to Intrinsic Feedforward**



ONLINE OPPORTUNITIES, PEDAGOGY AND ASSESSMENT CHALLENGES

I. Collaborative Learning Opportunities & Challenges



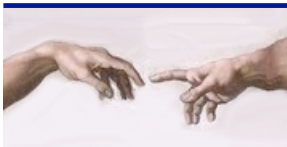
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COLLABORATIVE LEARNING: OPPORTUNITIES

IT-enabled opportunities for students to learn from and with one another e.g. by

- ♣ co-analysing, co-researching, co-debating, co-interpreting
- ♣ co-writing/co-scripting/co-designing/co-presenting
- ♣ co-reviewing and co-commenting
- ♣ co-revising and co-editing
- ♣ co-evaluating
- ♣ co-refashioning (for new audiences, purposes, genres, &c.)



COLLABORATIVE LEARNING: OPPORTUNITIES

IT-enabled opportunities for students to learn from and with one another *e.g. through*

- ♣ blogs
- ♣ discussion boards
- ♣ wikis
- ♣ team portfolios
- ♣ databases and compendia
- ♣ collaborative writing tools



COLLABORATIVE LEARNING: OPPORTUNITIES

teachers' and students' discomforts and uncertainties

- ♣ **optimal design of collaborative tasks**
- ♣ **assessing what, who and how**
- ♣ **the moral economies of collaborative assignments**



a. optimal design of collaborative tasks

- ♣ managing and countering :
 - 'social loafing'/freeriding/freeloading
 - the 'sucker effect',
 - 'diligent isolates'
- ♣ task designs: conjunctive, disjunctive additive and discretionary (Davies, 2009)
- ♣ additive, discretionary



COLLABORATIVE LEARNING CHALLENGES

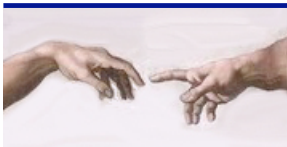
STUDENT AND TEACHER DISCOMFORT AND UNCERTAINTY

b. assessing what, who and how

- ♣ quantity/quality and inputs vs. outputs
- ♣ process vs. product
- ♣ who reviews/evaluates/grades?

c. the moral economy of collaborative assignments

- ♣ collaboration << >> collusion
- ♣ fairness
 - novice assessors
 - putting down friends



ONLINE OPPORTUNITIES, PEDAGOGY AND ASSESSMENT CHALLENGES

2. Exams and I.T. The Word Processing Challenge



EXAMS & I.T. – THE WORD-PROCESSING CHALLENGE

- **Growing disparity between word-processed coursework assignments and handwritten exams**
- **Hazards for students**
 - physiological
 - cognitive
- **Where the challenge hits hardest**
 - answers calling for extended written prose
 - disciplines where exams are predominant 'signature assessments' (c.f. Shulman)



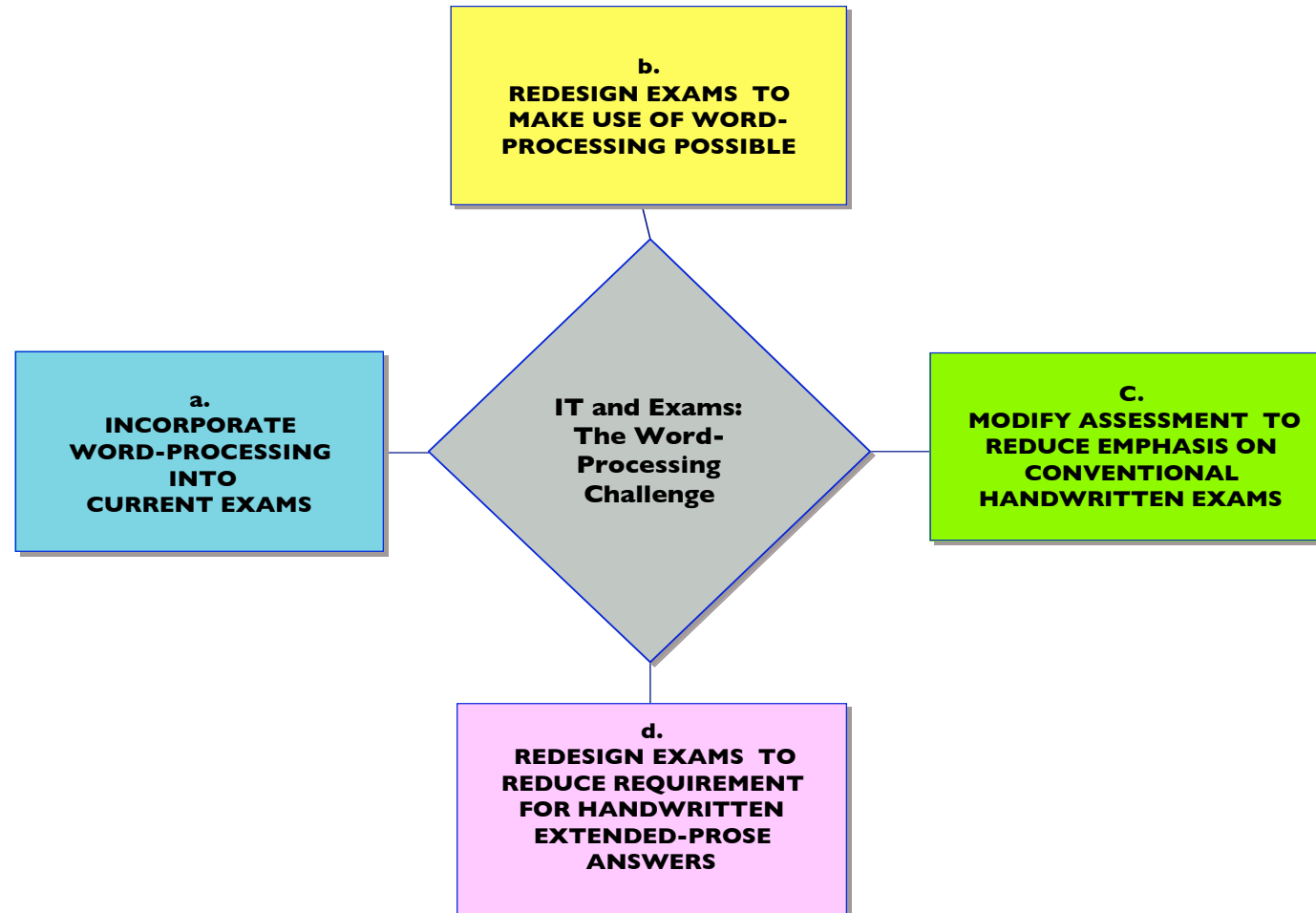
EXAMS & I.T. – THE WORD-PROCESSING CHALLENGE

Mindsets that work against change

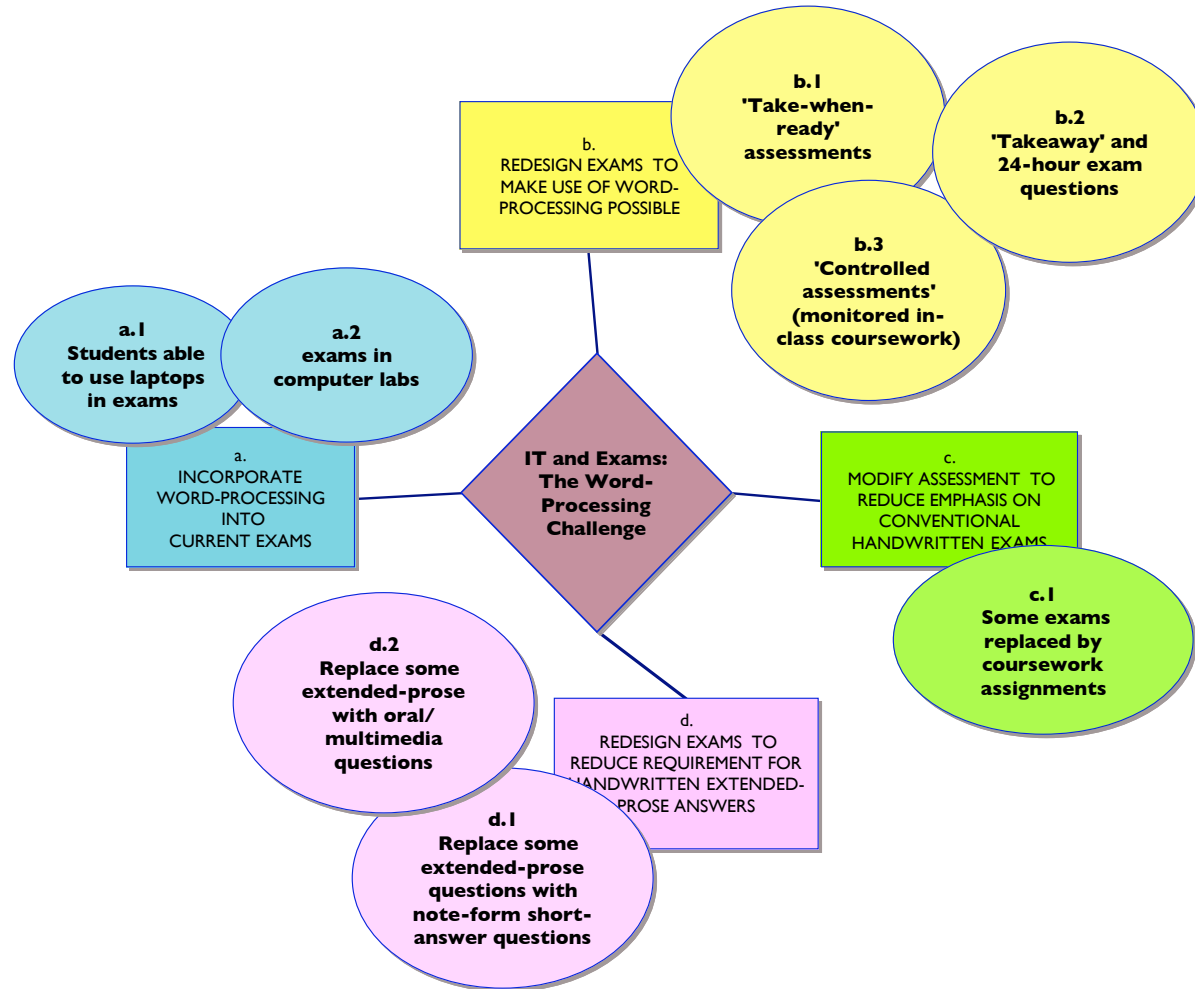
- ❖ exams as the 'gold-standard' of assessment practices
- ❖ concerns about plagiarism in a digital world
- ❖ long-established notion of 'unaided work'



EXAMS & I.T. – THE WORD-PROCESSING CHALLENGE



EXAMS & I.T. – THE WORD-PROCESSING CHALLENGE





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Norway tests laptop exam scheme

About 6,000 students in Norway are doing exams on their laptops in a trial that could soon be rolled out across the country.

Every 16-19 year-old in Nord-Trondelag county in Norway has been trying out the laptop-based system.

The secondary students are given a laptop by the government when they turn 16 to help them with schoolwork.

During exams the specially-tailored software springs into life to block and record any attempt at cheating.



The trial of the laptop system involved 6,000 pupils

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ONLINE OPPORTUNITIES, PEDAGOGY AND ASSESSMENT CHALLENGES

3. Feedback Opportunities and Challenges



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What is 'feedback'?

- **Feedback comprises information, processes, activities or experiences which aim to encapsulate, enable or boost students' learning**

- Feedback can focus on:

attainment

what a student knows, understands or can do at a given point in time

progress

where a student currently stands in relation to a specified goal, target or level

achievement

what a student has achieved as demonstrated in a completed assignment or task



FEEDBACK OPPORTUNITIES & CHALLENGES

IT-enabled opportunities for enhanced feedback

- **text as infinitely plastic** e.g. in :
 - ♣ drafting-commenting-editing
 - ♣ cumulative and recursive assignments
 - ♣ refashioning for new purposes/ audiences/ genres
- **from feedback to feedforward**
- **scope for collaborative and on-display learning**
as proxies for feedback



FEEDBACK OPPORTUNITIES & CHALLENGES

pedagogical and assessment challenges

- **'end-loaded' assessments**
- **feedback that is:**
 - ♣ ex post facto
 - ♣ summative/justificatory
 - ♣ extrinsic
- **writing as a solitary and private activity**



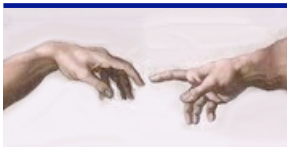
FEEDBACK OPPORTUNITIES & CHALLENGES

from 'end-loaded' to recursive & cumulative assessments

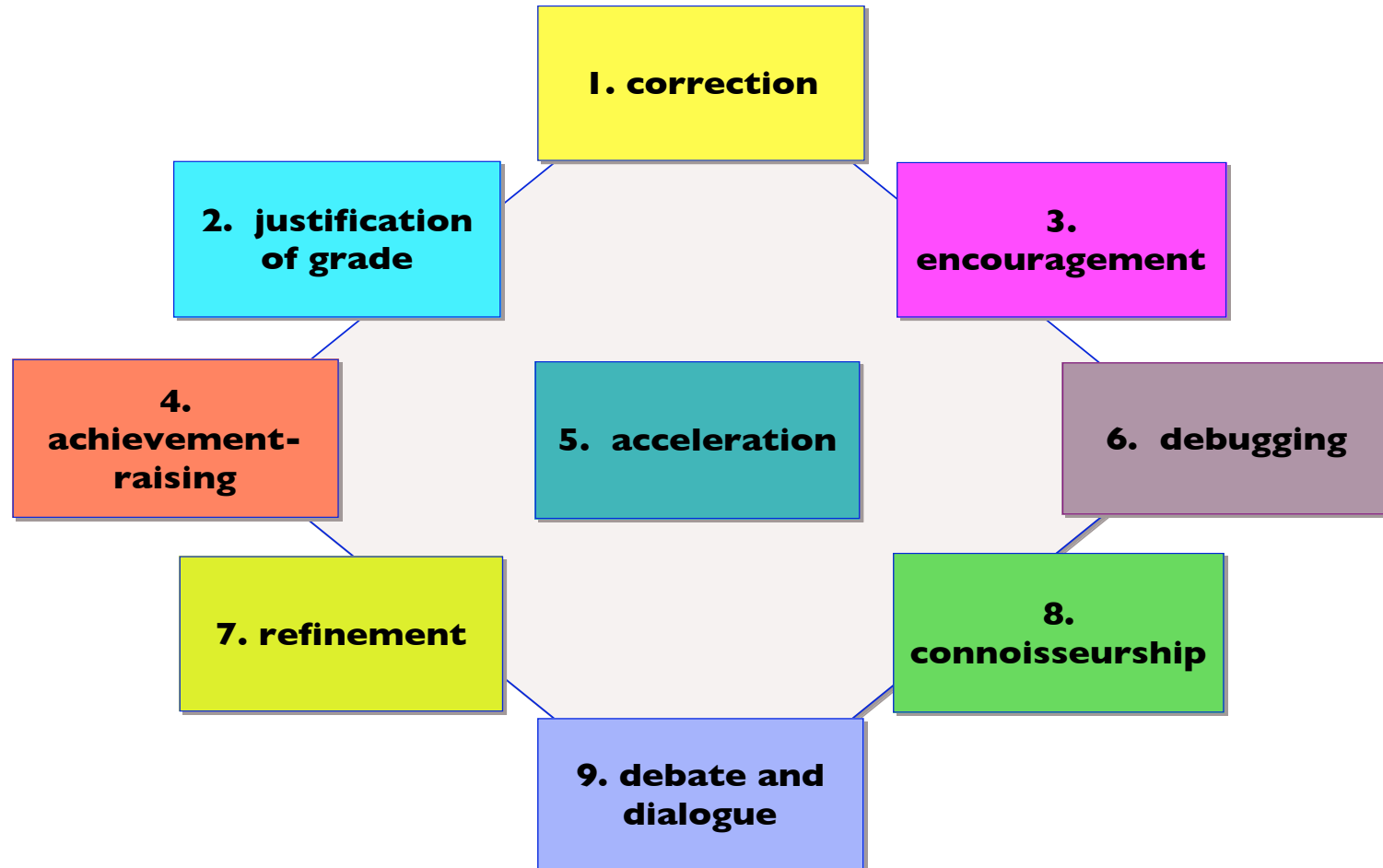
feedback that has shifted :

- ♣ from after-the-fact to before-the-fact and ongoing
- ♣ from summative to formative and dialogical
- ♣ from extrinsic to intrinsic

writing as a private *and* communal activity



Feedback Purposes





Enhancing Feedback



Home >

For Staff

- Time-friendly ways to boost feedback
- Ideas, strategies and case examples
- Feedback in your subject
- Feedback FAQs for staff



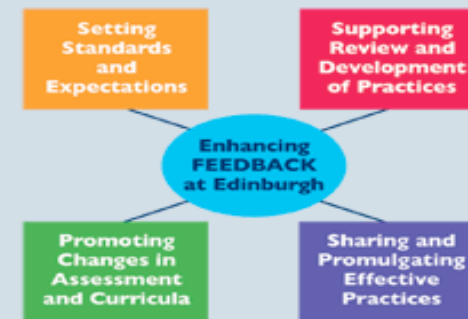
For Students

- Making feedback work for you
- Other resources for students
- Feedback FAQs for students



Feedback at Edinburgh

How the University is improving its feedback to students



www.tla.ed.ac.uk/feedback.htm



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