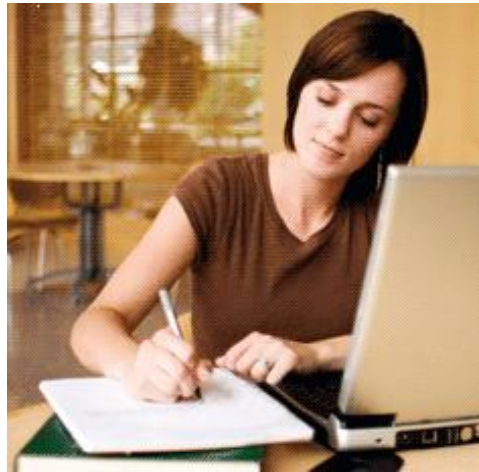# Teaching academic genres at different levels

Solstrand 7.-8. October 2011

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Different courses at different levels?

More important than level is

- whether the topic is given or self-invented

- whether the text is to be published as an article or a thesis/dissertation

- the discipline (literature, languages, education, political science, sociology, philosophy…)

Levels

- BA
- MA
- PhD
- Post doc
- University lecturers without PhD

Genres

Assignments on topics given by teacher

Assignments on self-selected topics

Dissertations

Academic articles

Applications for funding

In professional studies: Practice reports, journals, logs

Independent of level and genre…

I always teach genre characteristics in relation to concrete text examples

I always stress that norms for academic genres vary from discipline to discipline

and I *always* start by focusing on the participants' own writing habits

Two problems/challenges with explicit genre intstruction

1. It is difficult to give precise criteria
2. We do not know to what degree explicit teaching leads to good performance

The value of explicit genre instruction – a debate among writing researchers

Positions:

- Explicit instruction is neither possible nor useful (Aviva Freedman)

- Explicit instruction is only useful in combination with practical exercises (Hillocks' declarative and procedural knowledge)

- Explicit genre instruction is a base for all writing pedagogy (the genre school)

My position:

- I believe in explicit instruction in combination with writing sessions where focus is on students' own writing
- The study of models is okey if the models are transparent

What most academics can agree on

concentration

organisation

clarity

and

the obedience to ethical rules

(give credit to your sources)

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What do I focus on?

Basic aspects:

– Formulating a research question

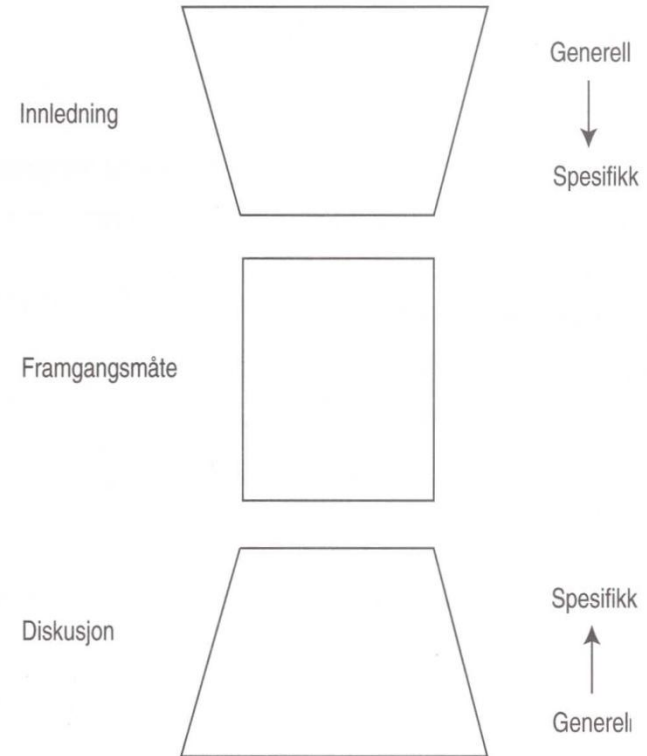– Overall text structure

– The handling of sources

Rhetorical aspects:

– Writing for an audience

– Building your ethos

– The opening paragraph (especially in articles)

Two useful models from Swales:

CARS: Creating a Reserach Space

1. Establishing a territory
2. Establishing a niche
3. Occupying the niche

Figur 6 «Trådsnella» (fra Swales 1990)

The controversial question of fixed text structures

Introduction

$\leftarrow$ **T**heory
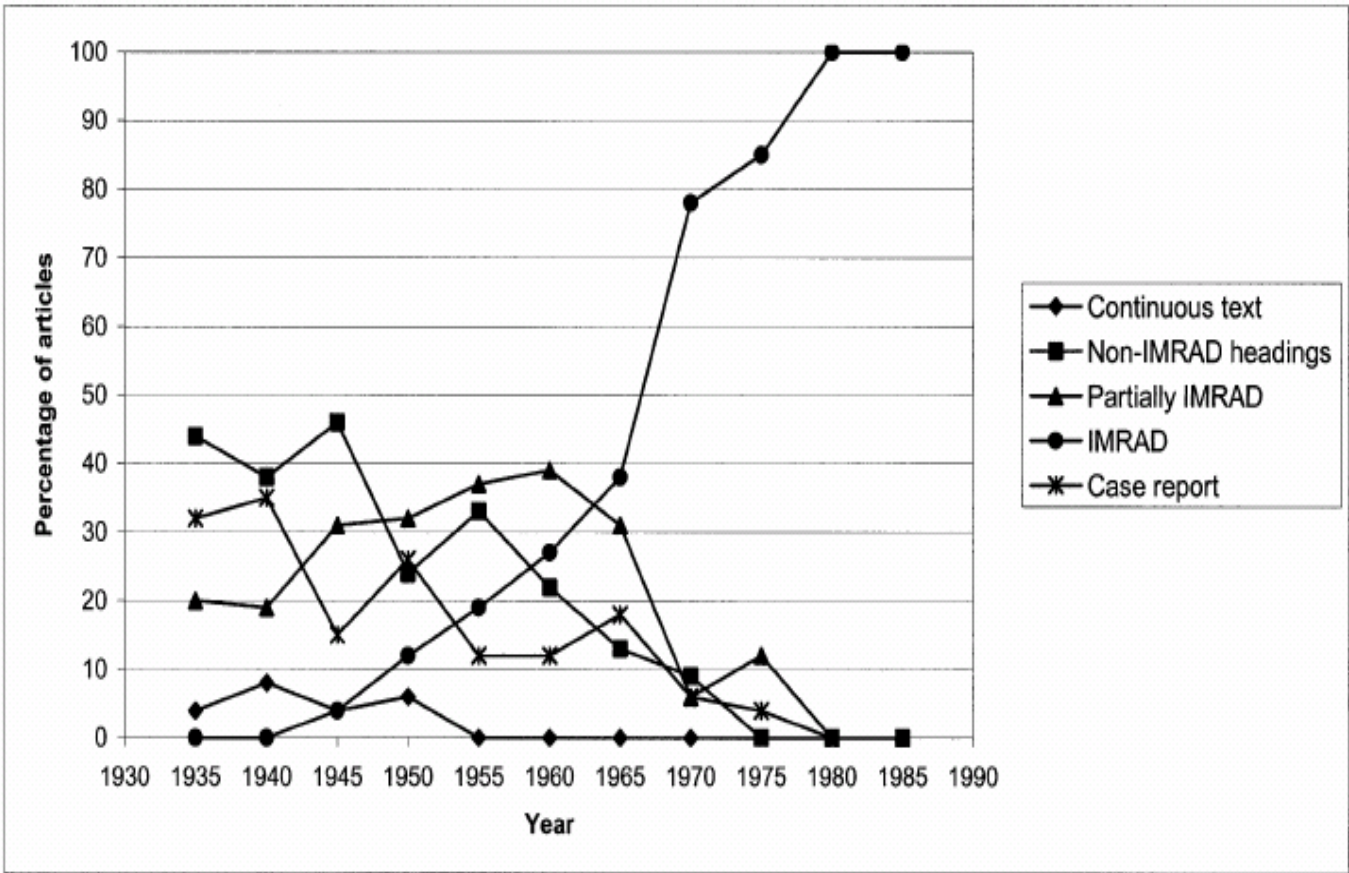
Method and material

Results

and

Discussion

The introduction, methods, results, and discussion (IMRAD) structure: a fifty-year survey

Figure 2

Text organization of published articles in the *British Medical Journal* from 1935 to 1985 (n = 341)

Luciana B. Sollaci, MS, *Library Director*
Mauricio G. Pereira, MD, DrPH, *Professor of Epidemiology*
J Med Libr Assoc. 2004 July; 92(3): 364–371.

Rhetorial perspectives

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Checklist for understanding you reader:

- Who is your community of readers?
- What do they expect you to do for them?
- How much do they know?
- Do they already understand your problem/question?
- How will they respond to your solution/answer?
- In what forum will they encounter your report?

(Booth, Colomb & Williams 1995: The Craft of Research)

Ethos

The two kinds of ethos (Aristotle): the inherent ethos, and the ethos that is constructed through the text itself.

Ethos building in the "hard science" tradition:

- thorough description of theory and method
- correct handling of quotations and references
- fixed text structure (e.g. IMRaD)
- impersonal style
- "hedging"

Ethos building in the ethnographic tradition:

Through descriptions and reflections aiming at

- authenticity: "I was there"

- plausibility: does it seem reasonable to a skilled reader?

- criticality: does it throw new light on the research field?

(Golden Biddle, K. and K. Locke 1993)

The opening paragraph: a rhetorical challenge

"Whether your article will be read by many people, few people, or virtually none at all … can be largely a function of the title and the abstract"

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Repertoire of openings:

- The indirect (typical of popular science and feature journalism)
- The direct ("This article will discuss…")
- Establishing a common platform with the reader (e.g. by stating something we can agree on)
- Starting with a question or a provocation
- Using oneself as a point of departure

etc etc

Experienced teacher learning within the context of reciprocal peer coaching

A major question in teacher change literature revolves around the issue on changes in knowledge, beliefs and attitudes preceding or following changes in teacher practice [...]. Today, it is widely assumed that when teachers change their knowledge, beliefs and attitudes on for example new instructional methods, their practice will improve and student outcomes will increase. According to Guskey (1986, 2002), however ...

(Zwart, Wubbels, Bergen & Bolhuis)

Summing up:

- There's hardly any aspect of academic writing that can "wait" until a higher level. All the important norms have to be taught from the beginning, and they have to be taught over and over again as the students proceed with their studies

- Monologic lectures on academic writing can be interesting and entertaining for the audience, but they have a very limited value as a means to better writing.

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