



"Value and Relevance to All":

A Review of *Academic Writing: Concepts and Connections*
by Teresa Thonney (Oxford University Press, 2016)

by Beth Counihan

Are printed guides to academic writing (i.e.: books) still essential to college first year writing courses when so much of the information students need is readily available online, in reference sites such as the excellent Purdue OWL (Online Writing Lab)? Why lug around a seven-pound textbook in your already-overloaded backpack when you can look it up on your smart phone? Yet, the book is worth the schlep when it is written by a professor with thirty years of experience in composition and rhetoric and writing across the curriculum/writing in the disciplines, one who is seeking to provide the answer to the perpetual problem for freshman composition instructors: "What can we teach that has value and relevance to all of our students, no matter their intended major?"

Academic Writing: Concepts and Connections represents the culmination of Teresa Thonney's knowledge of writing and writing instruction, from her years of teaching at Columbia Basin

College, a comprehensive college in Washington State, to her recent research analyzing the rhetorical structures of academic writing in the disciplines published in *Teaching English in the Two-Year College*. A combination guide and reader, *Academic Writing: Concepts and Connections* provides both a foundational generalist curriculum and pedagogical approach to first year composition in the disciplines that is more rigorous and in-depth than Graff's often-assigned *They Say/I Say: The Moves that Matter in Academic Writing*, which, in comparison, is stripped-down and prescriptive, containing academic language templates for students to fill in the details. *Academic Writing* is dense with paired readings by the same author in various disciplines (information literacy, business, and biology to name a few) but for different audiences: one a general readership and one for readers of peer-review journals—and writing exercises that guide students in extracting the academic writing features of their own texts. This is a challenging

guide, appropriate to assign to the most motivated and college-ready of first year community college student cohorts or in a 200-level writing in the disciplines course—or, perhaps by assigning this reader, a first year writing community college instructor sets the tone and the motivation to rise to the level of discourse analysis Thonney advocates.

Academic Writing is organized in a progression from reading to researching to writing research to revising. Thonney has a focus on reading skills throughout and students acquiring a deep understanding of the qualities and genres of academic writing across the disciplines. There are chapters on integrating visuals, developing one's academic voice, and collaborative writing. Thonney's voice is clear and lucid and examples are given to illustrate each point, some from student writing, but most from academic journals.

Chapters 4: "Writing Academic Arguments" and 6: "Writing with Authority" are the heart of the book, rising out of Thonney's recent academic discourse analysis research and present the most innovative approach with her observations of "clarity concepts" such as the "given-new pattern" in academic writing (writers reiterate already discussed information before introducing a new concept) and her explanation of Douglas Biber's term "lexical bundles," phrases like "in order to" or "according to" which make up 20% of all academic writing. Thonney includes concepts in practice writing exercises with special attention to the different genres of academic writing throughout and assignment suggestions like creating annotated bibliographies. The extended edition of *Academic Writing: Concepts and Connections* includes five categories of timely thematic readings that lend themselves to student paper topics: "Social Networks" and "Violence and Justice" among them.

However, two major areas are lacking: when I consider what would be the best of all possible freshman composition reference/rhetoric/readers for my students of varying levels of college readiness, even for the most prepared students, I would want a section on note-taking and more examples of student writing, written by students at various points in their undergraduate education. While Thonney details primary and secondary sources research techniques, there is no discussion or modelling of how to take notes from sources and synthesize/analyze those notes. In addition, samples of excerpts of student writing are used only to illustrate rhetorical techniques: it would be helpful to include a first year student paper in each discipline and a paper written for a course in the major in their entirety. Students benefit from seeing the work of their peers and the progression of expertise; this creates another layer of motivation for them.

That being said, *Academic Writing: Concepts and Connections*, is a major accomplishment and an important work in the field of WID/WAC. The "value and relevance" of *Academic Writing* is clear: Thonney presents a challenging and rich curriculum for first year writing students as well as for students in a focused writing in the disciplines course. Her work is also a useful resource and reference for all faculty seeking comprehensive and lucid academic writing skills support for their students at all levels.